

“Before I found affinity groups, I struggled to breathe. For 15 years, my tank was empty. I was exhausted beyond measure. Being the only African American educator and administrator in my predominately white institution had almost worn me down completely.”

- Trina Moore-Southall, Director of Equity and Inclusion at Brentwood School in Los Angeles.

Overview

What is a racial affinity group?

A racial affinity group is a group of people sharing a common race who gather with the intention of finding connection, support, and inspiration. Racial affinity groups can happen within any profession or organization, including education. These resources are specifically targeted to the development of racial affinity groups for educators of color where such groups can provide participants support to survive the racial isolation that exists in many schools and institutions. (By “educators,” we mean all staff people who work in a school, in any role.) These groups are retention tools which are specifically designed to provide support for educators of color and help them remain in the profession.

History and Rationale

Why are racial affinity groups necessary?

For decades, the U.S. has failed to provide an educator workforce that truly reflects the diversity of the country. Today, over half of the nation’s public school students are children of color, but educators of color, who represent about 20% of the educator workforce, are grossly under-represented in teaching and administrative roles. Much like segregated schools, a homogeneous educator workforce is detrimental to society and directly contributes to perpetuating racial bias, stereotypes, and inequitable systems.

Everyone [benefits from having a racially diverse educator workforce](#). Increased teacher diversity will lead to more [culturally relevant teaching techniques](#) and curriculum, [higher expectations of children of color](#), and the [reduction of the racial achievement gap](#). It will also encourage students of color to [enter the teaching profession](#).

Unfortunately, these aspirations will not be realized without combatting the challenges of recruiting and retaining a diverse educator workforce.

For more information about why this is necessary, check out the New England Secondary School Consortium Report, [Increasing the Racial, Ethnic, and Linguistic Diversity of the Educator Workforce](#).

How did we get here?

In 1954, *Brown v. Board of Education* dismantled legal segregation in public schools. The intent was to eliminate the historical racist practice of segregated schools built on the doctrine of “separate but equal,” which had been the law in the U.S. In the years that followed the ruling, Black schools across the country were closed and, according to the Brookings Institution, “[about 38,000 Black teachers lost their job](#) in the decades after *Brown*—an estimated one-third of the nation’s black teachers.” In the aftermath, white policy makers and white school leaders slowly eliminated one racist policy—legal school segregation—and replaced it with discriminatory hiring policies and practices which gave preference to white teachers and principals.

Resources for Learning About Systemic Racism

- [“The Groundwater Approach: Building a Practical Understanding of Structural Racism.”](#) Bayard Love and Deena Hayes-Greene, 2018.
- [“The Massive New Study on Race and Economic Mobility in America, Explained.”](#) Dylan Matthews, 2018.
- [Seven Ways We Know Systemic Racism is Real.](#) Ben & Jerry’s.
- [“Social Determinants of Health.”](#) Dr. Camara Jones.
- [65 Years After 'Brown v. Board,' Where Are All the Black Educators?](#) Madeline Will, 2019.

What are some of the challenges faced by educators of color who join mostly white faculties?

From our decades of experience as teachers, leaders, and coaches in schools across the country, Great Schools Partnership staff have witnessed through our own observations and through conversations with others that teachers of color are subject to the the following challenges in all kinds of schools:

- Feelings of loneliness and isolation
- Lack of support from colleagues, administrators, and parents or caregivers
- Being subject to school policies and practices that are clearly biased
- Being expected to teach and discipline all students of color
- Carrying the emotional weight of seeing how students of color are affected by racially biased school policies and practices.
- Fear of speaking up for students of color
- Being viewed as less competent than their peers
- Experiencing low expectations from others
- Being treated as invisible
- Being asked to be the voice for all students of color
- Frequently not seeing anyone like themselves in the school leadership or administration
- Working for administrators who show racial animus
- Racial animus from colleagues
- Tone policing, or having to moderate tone in order to not be perceived as angry or threatening
- Experiencing microaggressions of colleagues
- Experiencing hostile school environments

Members of many minority groups may experience some of the above while working in schools; however, such problems are exacerbated for people of color by the systemic racism that is woven into the fabric of U.S. institutions. Because of this systemic racism and its pervasiveness in society, we believe that U.S. public schools have an obligation to provide support to educators of color. This resource is intended to guide schools and districts in establishing racial affinity groups, which are one way to provide support and to address the specific challenges that educators of color face because of national systemic racism.

Resources for Learning About the Challenges Educators of Color Face

- [“Wanted: Latinx Teachers and Administrators.”](#) Letisha Marrero.
- [“The Burden of Being a Black Teacher.”](#) Emily Deruy, 2016.
- [“Here’s the Truth About Why There Are So Few Native American Teachers.”](#) Jennifer Jilot, 2016.
- [“Students of all Races Favor Teacher Diversity, and Here’s Why.”](#) Jacqueline Howard, 2016.
- [“When Educators of Color Are Asked to Be ‘Everything’ For Students of Color.”](#) James Paterson, 2019.
- [“Black Teachers Face Extra Scrutiny While White Teachers Often Get a Pass.”](#) Rann Miller, 2019.
- [“Teachers in the US are Even More Segregated than Students.”](#) Michael Hansen and Diana Quintero, 2018.
- [“Why People of Color Need Spaces Without White People.”](#) Kelsey Blackwell, 2018.

Introducing Racial Affinity Groups to a School or District

Before introducing racial affinity groups, all members of the school or district need a deeper understanding of educational equity and why this work is taking place. We would strongly suggest that you engage your full staff in conversations about educational equity and develop some level of a shared commitment to achieve this. Once a common commitment is established, the development and implementation of racial affinity groups has a logical place in your overall work and has a significantly higher chance of effectively helping participants and the entire organization. To start, use the suggested reading list above.

Question Staff Members May Ask

How do I know if the racial affinity group is the right fit for me?

As a member of a racial affinity group, you will engage in conversations on issues pertaining to race and racism. If you are unable to openly and honestly use the pronouns “I” or “we” within the group you join, chances are the group is not the right group for you.

Can I just go and listen in order to learn and be supportive?

The racial affinity group should decide, in advance, if they want to allow outside guests and in doing so they should decide what the purpose and guidelines are for each visit.

Will racial affinity groups promote segregation?

One of the most common misconceptions about racial affinity groups is that they promote racial segregation. This is not the case. Racial affinity groups provide a targeted and necessary kind of support to educators who experience unique challenges because of their race. White educators may find a lot of meaning in forming their own groups to discuss how to be effective allies or how to understand white privilege and systemic racism.

What if a person of color does not want to participate?

A racial affinity group is an optional form of support to faculty. Educators of color are not a monolithic group. Some educators of color may choose not to participate.

Setting up Racial Affinity Groups

What do leaders need in order to make racial affinity groups possible?

- **Clear purpose:** All staff should receive clear and consistent messages regarding the purpose of a racial affinity group.
- **Financial resources:** In order to support racial affinity groups and make them effective, leaders should budget for the printing of articles for discussion, funds for accessing movies, podcasts, or other materials, and possibly funds for an offsite location or refreshments.
- **Personnel resources:** The person who is picked to facilitate and coordinate the group must have access to the superintendent or principal, and must be in a position where they feel comfortable raising concerns that were aired in the group. Whoever is facilitating the group should be compensated with a stipend or the time should be allocated within their full-time equivalent (FTE).
- **Time:** Racial affinity groups should be considered a form of professional learning.
 - ◆ Consider providing contact hours.
 - ◆ If the racial affinity group takes place during the school day, competing priorities should be minimized so the educators of color are not forced to make difficult decisions (such as whether to attend their racial affinity group or professional development in their content area).
- **Location:** Racial affinity groups need a welcoming and private space in which to meet. Onsite locations may be more convenient, while offsite locations may offer a change of scenery and more privacy. The important thing is to choose the location thoughtfully in order to ensure that it is inviting. Once a group has been established, the members may choose to change the location or select rotating locations.

What are some important guidelines for school administrators?

- Engage in a discussion and professional development prior to forming a racial affinity group.
- Do not make the racial affinity group mandatory.
- Racial affinity groups are intended to be places where people can share openly, so supervisors or evaluators should not be in a group with people whom they supervise or evaluate. Racial affinity groups should be open to all school or district staff.
- Care for and nurture the success of the group by providing a public show of support to the entire school community. District and school leaders should demonstrate their commitment to both the recruitment and retention of a racially diverse workforce by explaining how racial affinity groups fit within the district's plan.

Resources for Racial Affinity Group Facilitators

- [Guidelines For Racial Affinity Group Facilitators](#)
- [Sample Agendas for Racial Affinity Groups](#)