

The Role of White Parents in the Pursuit of Racial Literacy and Equity

We need only talk to white young people to quickly discern that many white parents remain relatively silent on issues of race and talking about whiteness in particular. Though there is a pervasive myth that racism is a generational issue, we speak with and interview enough students around the country to know that this is not the case. We hear and see the racial stress that white students feel at the mere mention of race, especially whiteness. We hear the same anxieties of adults echoed in young people: “What if I say the wrong thing?” “I don’t want to sound ignorant or not well spoken on this subject.” White students remain ill-equipped to discuss race and racism and to navigate a multiracial society.

A recent study by Sesame Workshop and the University of Chicago (Turner, 2019) found that although parents say they are comfortable talking about issues of race, the majority of white parents are rarely, if ever, having conversations with their children about racial topics. Not surprisingly, Parents of Color are more likely to discuss race with their children. Yet, even when white parents do talk about racial identity, many wait until their children are 10 years old or older. So, if parents are not teaching their children about race in a thoughtful manner, our larger culture is more than ready to fill in the gaps in ways that are not helpful. As a result, children end up seeing difference as some kind of deficit and are left to make up their own explanation for what they see. More troubling, most parents talk about racial identity only

if their children have heard something negative about their own identity. This partly explains why more Parents of Color are having these conversations with their children. White parents can avoid racial topics because their children are far less likely to come under threat because of their race.

Unfortunately, it is not surprising that white parents are reluctant to speak with their kids about race. Aside from not recognizing the necessity for these discussions, many of us have been raised to believe that to notice race, let alone mention it, is racist, and for decades we have been told that children do not notice race unless someone points it out. We know this is simply untrue. There have been several studies that suggest that babies as young as three to six months old notice skin tone differences, as marked by the amount of time a baby's eyes linger on a person with a different skin tone than their primary caregivers (Kelly et al., 2005). This is not racial prejudice, but it is racial recognition. In a recent study of preschoolers, researchers asked white parents, who did not show any overt racial bias, how biased they believed their white children to be. Most believed their children did not harbor racial prejudice. Yet, many of the children said they would not want Black friends (Moyer, 2020). By five years old, children recognize that different groups are treated differently, and by age ten, children have internalized stereotypes (Steele, 2011). It is never too early to start talking about race.

So how do we prevent raising the next generation of white people who are uncomfortable and avoid talking about race? The only way that can happen is if white adults are able to withstand their own discomfort and intentionally talk about their own racial identity with white kids. A lack of racial awareness prevents us from being able to identify and analyze the many pervasive myths and stereotypes about race, from seeing the structures that give unearned advantage to white people and systematically create obstacles for People of Color. Systems that reinforce inequity are taken for granted, are deeply embedded in our institutions, and often are believed to operate as meritocracies. This is a delusional understanding of the world, and through inaction, we have passed on and modeled these beliefs for our children. In the absence of explicit and direct instruction about race and racism, white children

tend to develop a confused and negative view about racial matters. It is also true that if we don't start early with white children, we are setting them up for the overwhelming guilt we so often see in adults.

We know that many white parents want to do something different from the way they were raised. We continuously hear from white parents, often identifying as liberal, about their desire to "do better" and to be more open to conversations about race with their white children. Often in this discussion, however, a competing sentiment is also expressed: the fear that discussions about race will cause their child to feel shame about their race and feel blamed for racism. We suspect that this fear reflects how the parent feels about their own whiteness and privilege, and therefore, the fear of passing those feelings onto their children is absolutely warranted. Just as white teachers must know and understand their own racial identity in order to guide white students, so too must parents cultivate their racial awareness in order to shepherd their children toward racial literacy and antiracism.

We need to acknowledge and address these feelings of white guilt so that we can move on. Ultimately, white guilt is not a position we want to get stuck in because it is a self-focused viewpoint that does nothing to end racial injustice. Again, having a positive white racial identity means understanding the way whiteness shapes our position and experience. And once children understand that racism is not about good and bad people, but about systems and privilege, they can take responsibility, be on the lookout for it, and feel some agency to change it. Children can hold this complexity, and too often our attempts to shield them end up backfiring. Ironically, it is talking to our children about race that will enable them *not* to feel guilty. As one middle school student told us, "Adults think we can't handle the truth, but then how are we supposed to handle it when we find out?"

When white parents believe they *are* talking about race with their children, it is often in generalized terms. Research cited in Po Bronson and Ashley Merryman's *NurtureShock* (2009) reveals how hard it is for white families to talk about being white and what that means for both them and society. They surveyed children whose parents admitted that they did not talk about race. When those children were asked if their parents liked Black people, over 52% of the kids replied with "no" or

"I don't know." Even when not talking explicitly about race, we are still sending messages to our children. We are supporting the status quo and creating a vacuum that leaves our kids vulnerable and susceptible to false information.

Similarly, when parents encourage their kids to "respect everyone" and tell them, "We love all people," children are unable to connect the abstract notion of "respect everyone" to a clear sense of how to be authentic in racial interactions. Bronson and Merryman's research also suggests that general comments about "liking everyone" do not translate into children believing it is true. Even when given messages of equality, offered books with racially diverse characters, and given toys and dolls that represent different racial identities, unless white children saw People of Color in their homes, and saw their parents interact with People of Color, the children still assumed the racial superiority of white people. Children can spot the discrepancies: if everyone is equal, why don't we all live in the same neighborhood or all go to school together? The racial isolation that many white families live in belies any broad statements of a belief in racial equality.

As children get older, not only are they more likely to internalize stereotypes in the absence of discussion, but they can become targets for recruitment by white nationalist groups. In their blog *Inoculating Our Students Against White Nationalism*, Christine Saxman and Shelly Tochluk (2020) warn:

Over the past four years, white nationalism has been on the rise inside and outside of schools. White nationalists use the internet like a hunting ground to strategically target young white people. Using YouTube, Instagram, and other online platforms, white nationalists take advantage of algorithms to lure viewers deeper and deeper into their networks and ideology. (para. 1)

There have been numerous articles recounting the parent's shock upon discovering that their child had been successfully recruited, and the antidote in every case has been to stay in conversation with the child.

Understanding that we never truly arrive at some enlightened state and that it takes sustained effort to disrupt racism, we must also

accept that talking about race with our kids must be ongoing and continuous. No matter the age of the child, there are consequences for not discussing race with our children and huge gains when we do. We are all constantly being bombarded with racial myths, stereotypes, and straight up lies. As parents, we need to have enough racial awareness ourselves to make the racially implicit, explicit for our children. The more times we point out the false narratives with our children, the more habitual it becomes for our kids, giving them the tools they need to decode racial untruths they encounter when they are not with us. We can inoculate them, to some degree, from supporting and perpetuating racism.

One of the most powerful ways we can model a healthy racial identity is to tell our kids about the ways we were socialized as white. While they may not seem to be paying attention, they are absorbing our stories and comparing them to the ways they are seeing race operate. Some parents worry about sharing incidents that may be more negative or hurtful, but those can be important stories about resilience. This doesn't mean we need to have all the answers or to be right all the time. We are our child's first model for these kinds of conversations, and simply sharing what it was like for us to grow up can be a first step in countering white silence. Discussing stereotypes that we have acted upon, we can model the importance of interrogating our beliefs and biases and invite dialogue with our kids. Here is an example of a conversation a white mother had with her children when they were in the late elementary years, about 8 and 10 years old.

After watching a television show, she said: "It seems like there are only white girls in that dance class. There were only white people in my ballet class growing up, too, and I just thought it was normal. But later I discovered that some of my Black friends went to a different dance class. I thought, 'Of course! Not only white people like to dance.' So why weren't there any People of Color in my class?"

They went on to have discussions about how People of Color were not allowed in most ballet companies in the past and are often still excluded now. They discussed the myth that only certain bodies would be good at ballet. They discussed standards of beauty and poise and who created those beliefs. They did not have this conversation all at

once, but it was one they revisited over time. The conversation then splintered off into looking at racial dynamics within other art forms. Later they went to see Alvin Ailey, a Black-founded modern dance company that features mostly Black dancers, and other concerts and exhibits by Artists of Color. The conversations were not perfect, and she was not always able to answer all their questions, but they were part of an ongoing conversation and inquiry as a family.

Being a single parent and having little extra time, if I (Jenna) read the above scenario, it would have felt entirely aspirational and out of my grasp. However, I was able to bring up race and whiteness enough that my kids later took it upon themselves to understand the reality they saw every day at school. I remember my daughter coming home her freshman year, noting that the school's resource officers were only ever called to "handle" a Student of Color.

Here are a few strategies to consider when talking to your children about race:

- Keep the length of the conversation to the amount of time they are interested. Young people routinely request that racial conversations happen in small doses and with greater frequency rather than having "a big talk." When we follow the lead of children, they usually let us know when they have had enough and if we are talking beyond their developmental capacity.
- Name race, specifically whiteness. Avoid the default of "white, unless stated otherwise." We need not only to normalize conversations about race, but also to make sure "white" is understood as a racial identity. Offer different models of whiteness, including how our race intersects with other identities like gender identity, religion, ability, and social class.
- Make sure your kids understand People of Color are not a monolith. It is important to make explicit the humanity and dignity of all People of Color and to be especially aware to engage in ways that do not describe People of Color only as oppressed and as victims. We do not need children to feel pity nor support a belief in white superiority and the need for white saviors. Children can understand how People of Color have different ethnic

- backgrounds and have worked together across differences to challenge racism.
- Name difference as difference and not as deficit. Think of ways to normalize what is not common or known in your household. For example, "I know we all have straight hair in our family, but there are so many types of hair textures and colors." Our kids are always watching us and our reactions when we encounter something new. We can also draw attention to conversations we can avoid as a white family: "I don't have to worry about you getting your driver's license and having a dangerous traffic stop with the police. But if you are ever driving with a friend who is not white, be mindful that the police may not see them the same way they see you."
- Be explicit. If you want to deliver a message akin to "everyone is equal," think about what it is you want to communicate *specifically*. Being "kind or "nice" is not the same as being antiracist: you don't have to respect someone to be kind to them.
- Point out and challenge stereotypes and assumptions. There are plenty of opportunities to do this with books, TV, and other media. It can also be powerful to name assumptions we have or stereotypes that we catch ourselves falling back on. This models that it is common to absorb stereotypes and that there is a need to interrupt them.
- Affirm questions about race. Though it can sometimes feel embarrassing when a child asks a question in public, it is important to welcome curiosity. And it's a moment to think about where your embarrassment is coming from—why are you so uncomfortable? What are you afraid will happen? Modeling curiosity can be a great way to learn something new together.
- Practice activism and advocacy as a family. Giving children opportunities to have a sense of agency and engaging in activism decreases feelings of guilt and overwhelm. Again, it is important that this is not done out of a sense of saving anyone and should be done in solidarity with People of Color whenever possible.
- Finally, desegregate your life. That does not mean to go out and try to acquire Friends of Color, but be more intentional about

racial diversity in your own space. Put yourself in places you do not typically go like shopping in grocery stores and trying out restaurants in different neighborhoods.

It is important to know that you are not alone. In addition to being advocates of affinity groups for teachers and students, we are also champions of white antiracist affinity groups for parents. These groups can help shift school culture when they are supporting racial equity initiatives instead of calling them into question or derailing their efforts. Here are some comments made by parents about how an affinity group they attended, facilitated by our colleague Lori Cohen in the Mid-Atlantic area, impacted them and their families.

- I look at the world differently now. I was always aware of a level of privilege I enjoyed, but I have a clearer understanding of it now.
- I can see the roots and structure of systemic racism more clearly now, and I see how nothing will change unless there is structural and systemic change.
- I have been increasingly more comfortable initiating conversations about racism with the people within my sphere of influence and have felt better equipped to do so carefully and with listening ears, based on the readings and group discussions.
- With pretty much every school communication, I'm questioning the equity and thinking about possible ways to improve structures.
- Since starting this work together, I now cannot unsee systemic racism. It is everywhere and in seemingly every facet of American society. I may have understood this at some level before this work, but now it is the lens through which I view almost everything.
- Notions of privilege and white supremacy are common topics in my household since beginning this work.
- I valued the reflection prompts to examine how white supremacy benefits me and my family, which has led to conversations at home that notice and name white supremacy. We have used this to challenge our thinking, name our privilege, and establish a lifelong commitment to learning and supporting antiracist

values and behaviors in our family and community, including at school.

- We have committed, as a family, to participate in all school and district organized or recommended antiracism, Black Lives Matter, Black History Month and year-round school activities to grow our learning.

There are also plenty of amazing resources that can help you get ideas and inspiration to have these conversations with your white children. Here are a few that we use frequently:

Jennifer Harvey. (2017). *Raising white kids: Bringing up children in a racially unjust America*. Abingdon Press.

Ali Michael and Eleonora Bartoli. (2014). *What white children need to know about race*. Independent School.

Melinda Wenner Moyer. (2014, March 30). *Teaching tolerance: How white parents should talk to their young kids about race*. Slate. <https://slate.com/human-interest/2014/03/teaching-tolerance-how-white-parents-should-talk-to-their-kids-about-race.html>

Raising Race Conscious Children. (2016). 100 race conscious things you can say to your child to advance racial justice. *Raising Race Conscious Children*. <http://www.raceconscious.org/2016/06/100-race-conscious-things-to-say-to-your-child-to-advance-racial-justice/>

Dana Williams. (2010). *Beyond the golden rule: A parent's guide to preventing and responding to prejudice*. Teaching Tolerance.

White Parents Raising Children Who Identify as People of Color

Given the fact that multiracial children are the fastest growing racial group in the country's schools right now, we want to include the role of

racial identity development for white parents/caregivers raising children who identify as both white and People of Color. It's very important that these children embrace all parts of their racial backgrounds and not be forced to choose one identity over the other. They get to be their full selves and embrace the spectrum of their racialized cultures and experiences. This also means they have a *different* racial identity from their monoracial parents even if they share some aspects of whiteness. Many multiracial children have described to us how their awareness of their identity can change given which parent they are with as well as due to larger societal reactions to who they are perceived to be racially, often via the inappropriate question, "So, what are you?"

Therefore, white parents need to double their efforts to explore their own identity development. They need to be firmly rooted in their own understanding of their whiteness so they can support their child's development in healthy ways. Often, multiracial families take the color-averse approach we described in the first part of the book, pretending that "race doesn't matter" because we are multiracial. There can be the illusion that somehow these families have escaped or transcended racism, but white supremacy can still operate in multiracial households. Additionally, White parents must be careful not to isolate multiracial children from their Communities of Color. They must be sure that their family stays connected with all aspects of their child's ethnic identity.

Another pitfall is when white parents assume they can understand what it means to be a Person of Color just because they are raising a multiracial child. While we can observe, listen, empathize, and support their development, it is not ours. A multiracial experience is filled with nuance and complexity that we don't experience, and that's okay. There are millions of parents raising children who do not share some aspect of their identity. For example, if my child has a learning disability, I may watch the struggle and effort they put forth to navigate school and all the roadblocks thrown in their way. I may support and advocate, attending IEP meetings and teacher conferences. But that doesn't mean I know what it's like to move through the world with my child's particular experience. I am most effective when I think about what school was like for me and all the things I didn't have to

deal with, how the path was clear and straight for me. It is then that I can reflect and contextualize my child's experience as different, not comparable. Then I can listen with greater attention and work to make sure I know what they need to be successful, which is very different from what I needed. We encourage all white parents to take a deep dive into their identity and see it as a critical first step to being able to raise children who will have an authentic and developed sense of their own race and how it impacts how they experience and navigate their particular context.

The Impact of White Parents on Racial Equity in Schools

Every parent wants what is best for their child. But what if getting "the best" for your child means making things worse for someone else's? It may just seem like your individual request if you don't realize that hundreds of other white parents may be doing the exact same thing. We must consider the collective impact white parents have on education.

Using my hometown of Charlottesville, Virginia, as an example, I (Jenna) will show some of the ways that white parents have undermined racial equity initiatives within the public schools in the name of doing what is best for their child.

As I mentioned before, in 1958, when the city of Charlottesville was required to desegregate the schools, the governor ordered the city to shut them down rather than integrate. Many white families opted for private schools, and they were able to secure public funding through vouchers, which created a resource vacuum for the public schools when they were forced to reopen a year later (Museum of History and Culture, 2021).

Twenty years later, in response to the demands of white families, the district created a gifted and talented program called Quest, which unsurprisingly, enrolled almost exclusively white children. (Baars, 2019). My sister was chosen to be part of Quest, but I was one of the only white kids who was not in the program. Students selected to be part of Quest were pulled out of regular classrooms and given academic enrichment, such as supplemental arts education, with a separate

teacher in a separate room. I remember asking my first-grade teacher who decides which kids are gifted and talented and being quickly shushed and reminded that I had been kept in at recess the previous day for not turning in my homework.

The school district reinforced segregation in various ways for the next several decades, fueled by the desire to keep white families in the public schools. The district implemented testing requirements solely for Black students who wanted to enroll in predominantly white schools, where the majority of resources were being funneled. Even Black students who lived in the areas whose schools served predominantly white students were required to travel to Black schools.

In 1986, the district pooled all students into two middle schools in an effort to support greater racial and economic equity, and the result was that the number of white students declined by twenty percent over the next ten years. As white enrollment decreased, the Quest program tripled in size. In a 2018 article entitled “You Are Still Black’: Charlottesville’s Racial Divide Hinders Students,” the *New York Times* reported on the state of Virginia’s two different types of high school diplomas: “standard” and “advanced.” The article noted that Virginia was then one of at least 14 states with this sort of tiered-diploma approach. It is not difficult to guess the racial makeup of the recipients of those diplomas, which obviously determine how competitive a student will be in college admissions or if they even attend college at all (Green & Waldman, 2018).

What undergirds all of this systemic inequality is the belief that districts, schools, and classrooms can only be “good” if there are white students and families in them. This is how white supremacy remains the foundation of education. It is easy to believe that we parents are only acting in the best interest of our child. However, we must also recognize that when we apply “what is best” to an individual—to our child—as opposed to “what is best” for the whole community, we are ultimately endorsing a system that creates winners and losers. We parents would like to believe that pushing for the best for our child does not mean that less is left for those with the least power and resources. But that is exactly what happens. There needs to be a “less than” for some children to be designated “better than.”

The first question that undoubtedly arises is, “Isn’t this really about socioeconomic more than race?” State exams show that among low-income families, white students achieve higher scores than Black students in all subject areas, and this same pattern is seen among affluent families. Immigrant students of color who are learning English as a second language also score higher than Black students. It is not about socioeconomic. Perhaps it is easy to brush off the story of Charlottesville because it’s located in the Jim Crow South. However, researchers at the Center for Education Policy Analysis (CEPA) out of Stanford, found that one third of the 25 districts with the widest racial achievement disparities are in college towns (Reardon et al., 2019).

Though I was slightly surprised to read this statistic, it aligned with my experience. My children attended the public high school in Cambridge, Massachusetts, and the campus sits between Harvard and MIT, among others. Many parents, including myself, chose to send their kids to the high school in Cambridge for the diversity of students and, specifically, the racial diversity—almost two thirds of the students are Students of Color. The well-regarded honors, advanced placement, and international baccalaureate programs keep white families enrolled, and yet there are very few Kids of Color in those classes. In fact, the lowest level classes, called “college prep” and known by most as CP, have been dubbed by students “Colored People.” Just as with Charlottesville’s gifted and talented program, tracking in any school is just a different form of racial segregation.

It is white people, specifically liberal and highly educated parents, who insist on tracking despite the vast research that it benefits no one. William Mathis, the managing director for the National Education Policy Center, concludes that, “Tracking has, over decades of extensive research, been repeatedly found to be harmful to those enrolled in lower tracks and to provide no significant advantages for higher-tracked students.” Though the proponents of tracking cite the ability to funnel greater resources and support to those who need it most, in practice, this is rarely done. Mathis writes that lower track classes, “tend to have watered down curriculum, less-experienced teachers, lowered expectations, more discipline problems and less-engaging lessons.” But Mathis urges that it doesn’t have to be this way: “When high-quality, enriched

curriculum is provided to all students, the effect is to benefit both high achieving and low-achieving students” (Mathis, 2013).

As we described in Chapter 6, there is a direct correlation between teacher expectation and student achievement. Undergirding the support for tracking is the belief that there is such a thing as innate intelligence. Just underneath the belief in a “trackable” cognitive ability is the belief in a superior intelligence. White dominant culture has been allowed to define intelligence and how to measure it. IQ tests were an extension of the eugenics movement, which was created to legitimize and rationalize inhumane practices by white Europeans, such as slavery and colonialism (Benjamin, 2009). Just as the benefits of tracking have been debunked, the existence of a biological intelligence has long since been disproven. Yet innate intellectual ability remains the implicit philosophy at the foundation of tracking. So why are white parents so invested in upholding something that is proven to be untrue?

In the book *Despite the Best Intentions: How Racial Inequality Thrives in Good Schools*, authors Amanda Lewis and John Diamond (2015) lay out with exquisite clarity the disparity between what white liberal parents say they want, such as racial diversity, and their behavior, such as ensuring tracking continues. I remember a white father whose kids went to the same high school as mine telling me of his frustration, “We wanted our kids to go here because of the diversity, but my daughter doesn’t have a single Black friend. It is probably because she is in all honors classes, but there must be other places kids get to know each other.” This parent brushed past the lack of racial diversity in honors classes and started to look for other solutions for his daughter to have racially diverse friends, as if the fact of racial segregation in tracking was inescapable.

White parents, whether consciously or unconsciously, are aware that this is not the case, or else they would not fight so vehemently to keep their children in higher level classes. As an educator in *Despite the Best Intentions* put it,

Trying to do something about the achievement gap will be “met with opposition from white parents because folks who are benefitting from the gap really don’t want the attention to be put on the gap because

they want their kid to have the perfect education. These parents start planning and optimizing for kids in second grade, like it’s a war, preparing for battle.” (Lewis & Diamond, 2019, p. 135)

It is easy to think, as I did at one time, that I did not really know that this was happening, yet at some level I knew. White people are not simply the lucky beneficiaries of an unjust system. This deliberately inequitable system comes at the cost of Families of Color. Students who are tracked in lower classes are seen as less competitive in college admissions. Parents of Color who fiercely advocate for their children are often labeled as difficult, unreasonable, or even unstable. Worst of all, as a teacher commented in the article *Getting on the Right Track*, by Michelle Higgins, when students discover they are being placed in a lower level class than one of their classmates, “a little bit of light went out of their eyes” (Higgins, 2019).

Most recently, there has been a wave of white parents demanding that curricula aimed at raising racial awareness, and naming whiteness explicitly, be removed from their child’s school. As one parent wrote in a highly publicized letter that condemned his daughter’s school and its racial equity efforts, “If the administration was genuinely serious about ‘diversity,’ it would not insist on the indoctrination of its students, and their families, to a single mindset, most reminiscent of the Chinese Cultural Revolution” (Kennedy, 2021).

But more often, white parents undermine school efforts in more subtle ways. We often hear of white parents asking to have their child moved to a different class because they doubt the expertise and knowledge of Teachers of Color. We know of white parents dedicated to ensuring that weighted grades for GPA remain, awarding higher points to higher level classes because “it’s only fair; they are working harder.” We have heard of parents successfully rerouting bus routes to avoid Communities of Color under the guise that the route was making their child late to school. We have even heard about a school that had two PTAs because white parents felt they needed a place to talk about their children’s needs openly, without fear of being called racist. In her podcast series *Nice White Parents*, Chana Joffe-Walt (2020) poses a haunting question: “How can we have equitable schools if our public

institutions only respond to these demands if they happen to align with the interests of white parents?”

In his book *Faces at the Bottom of the Well*, Derrick Bell describes functionalism, which is when an inequitable system remains because it serves those who are most powerful. It seems that we, white parents, are the most powerful. Bell argues that there must be a convergence of interests between white people and People of Color for change to happen. He cites the unanimous ruling in *Brown v. Board of Education* as only happening because of the government's interest in selling democracy abroad (Bell, 1992). Segregation was bad press in the fight against communism and contradictory to America's espoused beliefs.

An equitable educational system *is* that convergence of interests; white parents just need to recognize it. The argument for racial integration should not focus on the benefits to white children. But there is also a myth that it will require a sacrifice on the part of white families when, in fact, all children would benefit. Educational segregation has always been a vicious caste system in this country that intentionally creates barriers for People of Color by distributing resources and opportunities inequitably by race. This is not okay.

The research on the benefits of racially integrated schools is deep and vast. In racially integrated schools, there is a documented reduction in prejudice and belief in stereotypes, and an increase in comfort with people from different backgrounds. But there is also an increase in academic engagement (described as losing track of time when focused on academic work), civic participation (practicing activism), and sense of belonging. Though this latter result, of belonging, may seem counter intuitive, researchers have found that in schools where there was a less pronounced “norm,” everyone felt more able to be authentically themselves and, therefore, felt a greater sense of belonging. Additionally, because of student belonging and greater comfort with people from diverse backgrounds, students' sense of physical safety also increased in integrated schools (Piazza, 2021). Positive perception in these three areas of well-being—mental, physical, and social—set the stage for white children to support a racially diverse and equitable society as they grow into adulthood.

We white parents are failing our kids when we keep them in racial

isolation. Children see the gap between what we say and what we do, and they are learning to do the same. They see the lack of action as a tacit endorsement of the status quo. White children who remain racially isolated are ill-equipped to navigate an increasingly racially diverse world. They lack skills in holding multiple perspectives, negotiating conflict, tolerating uncertainty, and managing adaptability. What's more, our white children are angry and feel betrayed when they learn that they have not been given the full picture. When confronted with truths about gross racial inequalities, white children often say, “Why didn't anyone ever tell me this?” As Heather McGhee explains in her book *The Sum of Us*, “As with all aspects of racism, the targeted communities bear the brunt—but you don't have to look far to find the collateral damage to the rest of society” (McGhee, 2021).

White parents of school-aged children have an opportunity to make change, and we also have the power to do it. There are loud parent voices opposing accurate history and critical analysis of how race operates in this country. We need louder parent voices demanding it. We can choose to raise the next generation of white people to think and do differently. We can choose to *not* replicate white supremacy culture and racism in our children's schools. When we don't make these choices, we uphold and collude with racism.

There are some organizations that have been created specifically for parents to get involved in antiracist efforts. Integrated Schools is one such organization, whose mission says: “Through outreach, advocacy, and community building, Integrated Schools mobilizes families—particularly those who are white and/or privileged—to practice antiracist school integration” (Integrated Schools, 2021). There are other organizations and models of successful integration efforts, but we need to care enough to change.

We need to step up and follow the leadership from Families of Color who have been the most impacted and organized. We must fund existing efforts and stay engaged when momentum wanes. We need to continue to learn and to challenge the status quo. We need to not feed into the lies that say racial hierarchy benefits someone in the long term. Ultimately, we need to stand in our own integrity as parents and live our values.

CASE STUDIES FOR PARENTS

1. You are on the Parent School Committee. Members of that committee have been preparing a new video they made to show at the annual fundraiser. The video is focused on the extracurricular programming that the school will be able to provide using the money they raise at the event. They want to preview the video with the full committee before the fundraiser. The video ends with a close-up of a young Black girl smiling. One parent says that they will pause on that frame and leave it up during the event because, "her face will help pull on heartstrings." As you hear this, it feels clear that the video is exploiting this girl.
 - How can you bring up this concern?
 - What assumptions and root issues are at the core of your concern?
 - What would you say?

2. Your friend, who has a daughter in the same grade as your daughter, calls to tell you that the classroom assignments have just been released. She is lamenting that while your daughter was assigned to the veteran white teacher, who is adored by all of her students, *her* daughter was put in the class with a new teacher, who she notes is Filipina American. Your friend is clearly distraught and is strategizing about what to do to make sure her daughter has the best possible fourth grade experience. After questioning the new teacher's ability to even teach English, since it is "obviously not her first language," she mentions that she is planning to contact the principal and call in a favor. "After all, we served on the block party committee together last year. I am pretty sure he wants me as a happy parent at the school."
 - What is worrisome about what your friend shared?
 - What assumptions and root issues are at the core of your concern?
 - What would you say?