

Civil Rights Project

Proyecto Derechos Civiles

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New UCLA Civil Rights Project Report Urges Schools To Do More to Address Racism

As conservative governors and legislatures across the nation seek to limit learning and discussion in schools about race and racial history, new research published by the UCLA Civil Rights Project/ Proyecto Derechos Civiles, calls on schools, educators and policymakers to do just the opposite – challenging them to positively address racism and its impact on learning and opportunity.

“At a time when schools and educators in conservative states are being forbidden to teach about racial history, and staff positions devoted to equity in schools and colleges are being shut down as part of a politics of fear of racial change, this important paper takes a very different stance,” says Gary Orfield, UCLA professor and co-director of the Civil Rights Project. “This report draws on decades of research to make the case for effective collaboration, educational practices and strategies to counter racial division. The report’s authors call for more work on race not less, arguing that racial divisions and inequality at the classroom level can and must be addressed if we are to further learning, equality and opportunity.”

The report, “[The Racial Reckoning and the Role of Schooling: Exploring the Potential of Integrated Classrooms and Liberatory Pedagogies](#),” written by scholars who also have deep experience as teachers, summarizes the long history of segregation in American schools, underscoring its pervasive and increasing impact. Looking beyond the segregation of schools and school districts, the research addresses informal and formal structures that isolate students

of color within schools and even classrooms, and how limited curriculum and ill-informed and ineffective teaching practices limit opportunities and reinforce segregation and inequality. It argues that solving problems rooted in race requires applying the best research on solutions.

“Pedagogies and curricula that are welcoming for white students and exclusionary for students of color can reproduce the experience of segregation even when students are in the same classroom,” says co-author **Suneal Kolluri**, assistant professor in the Educational Policy and Leadership Department in the UC Riverside School of Education. “White students will be able to engage intellectually with classroom content, and other students will not, furthering racial divisions.”

While acknowledging the persistent and pervasive presence of racism in the United States, the authors offer the research paper as a framework for the educational pursuit of an honest reckoning on racial inequality, arguing that schools need to play a stronger role in confronting racism, and advancing research-based suggestions for lessening segregation and furthering equality, opportunity and justice.

“This paper suggests an approach to school integration that advances the critical consciousness of students and educators by grappling with the realities of race and racism, and fosters engaging learning environments for reimagining schools as liberatory spaces that can help achieve the racial reckoning needed to realize opportunities for justice in the United States,” says co-author Liane I. Hypolite, assistant professor of Educational Leadership at Cal Poly Pomona.

In doing so, the researchers focus on school integration and policies and practices that might produce the conditions most conducive to racial reconciliation.

The research makes clear that schools remain segregated, but the paper underscores research indicating integration is possible, citing public support for government action to address school

segregation and anti-segregation measures, and suggesting that bilingual and magnet schools may offer avenues for desegregation. School desegregation alone however is not sufficient, and the research report suggests strategies and practices for improving curriculum and pedagogy that can increase racial literacy and reconciliation. One example is the use of Ethnic Studies courses necessitating that students of all racial backgrounds consider race in school. Recent research has found significant gains in academic achievement among students participating in such courses.

“The expansion of Ethnic Studies courses to more students across the country is a promising development that will encourage more students to consider systemic racism and the cultural strengths and historical contributions of marginalized communities,” says co-author Kimberly Young, a teacher and co-chair of the Social Science Department at Culver City High School.

The paper’s authors also contend that schools can play a pivotal role in elevating important conversations about race, noting that schools can connect neighborhoods and communities, and bridge social divides through racially integrated learning opportunities, bringing us closer together to addressing racism in the United States. They also note that classroom conversations about race may also benefit young children. The authors of the report conclude that a racial reckoning in the United States may depend on our ability to design schools that meaningfully advance racial equality.

“We are living in a time when schools and educators are being banned from addressing issues of oppression and injustice,” says **Alexis Patterson Williams**, a co-author of the report and associate professor of Teacher Education at the University of California, Davis. “This paper encourages teachers to pursue racial justice anyhow, and provides research-based approaches to do so.”

[“The Racial Reckoning and the Role of Schooling: Exploring the Potential of Integrated Classrooms and Liberatory Pedagogies,”](#) is co-authored by **Suneal Kolluri**, assistant professor in

the Educational Policy and Leadership Department at the UC Riverside School of Education, **Liane I. Hypolite**, assistant professor of Educational Leadership at Cal Poly Pomona, **Alexis Patterson Williams**, associate professor and incoming chair of Teacher Education at the University of California, Davis, and, **Kimberly Young**, a teacher and Social Science Department co-chair at Culver City High School.

This commissioned work is the 4th in a [series](#) of research papers, published by the UCLA Civil Rights Project/Proyecto Derechos Civiles, exploring [a civil rights agenda](#) for the next quarter century. The series explores the potential for social change and equity policies in the nation. The full paper is available online [here](#).

About the UCLA Civil Rights Project/Proyecto Derechos Civiles:

The Civil Rights Project/Proyecto Derechos Civiles is co-directed by UCLA Research Professors Gary Orfield and Patricia Gándara. Founded in 1996 at Harvard University, CRP's mission is to create a new generation of research in social science and law on the critical issues of civil rights and equal opportunity for racial and ethnic groups in the U.S. CRP is a trusted source of segregation statistics, has commissioned more than [400 studies](#), published more than 25 books and issued numerous reports monitoring the success of American schools in equalizing opportunity. The U.S. Supreme Court, in its 2003 [Grutter v. Bollinger](#) decision upholding affirmative action, and in Justice Breyer's dissent (joined by three other Justices) to its 2007 [Parents Involved](#) decision, cited the Civil Rights Project's research.

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