



Sacred Conversation on Race
The journey **continues**

O God, we pray for your presence and wisdom, as we begin to look carefully at the realities of RACE and Public Education. Amen.

School institutions privilege some racial groups of students over others

Here are a few examples of how school institutions privilege some racial groups of students over others.

School institutions

According to the Department of Education, Advanced Placement courses, which are equivalent college courses, serve 59% of White students, but only 10% of Black students and 19% of Hispanic students.

School suspension rates demonstrate racial impact: they are 20% among Black males, 12% among American Indian males, and 9% among Hispanic males, compared to 7% of White males, 3% of Asian and Pacific Islander males.



English language learners represent a large, growing, and critically underserved segment of the public school population. Many

Hispanic, Asian American and some Pacific Islander youth learn English as a second language.



Too few schools have teachers who are trained in teaching English as a second language and knowledgeable about such communities. Up to 31% of language minority students fail to complete high school, compared to 10% of students who speak English at home.

These realities are what many call “the hidden curriculum” – lessons woven into the learning experience of all the children but that nobody explicitly teaches.

Such institutional disparities create very different life outcomes for children in marginalized groups and for children in the dominant culture, as found in school tracking policies.

Social structures

The 1974 Supreme Court decision in *Milliken v Bradley* prevented busing across city-suburban lines. Geographic, communal and financial ties that might have bound urban and suburban communities were broken.

“Whereas living in the most impoverished neighborhoods is a temporary state for [W]hite families, most [B]lack families who lived in the poorest neighborhoods in the 1970s continue to live in such neighborhoods today [2010],” writes Harvard sociologist William Julius Wilson in *More Than Just Race*.

In short, public schools have become resegregated.

“[S]tudents face double segregation by race/ethnicity and by poverty,” according to a 2007 report of the Civil Rights Project UCLA titled *Historic Reversals, Accelerating Resegregation*.

Public schools have become resegregated

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Public education inequity is overlaid on the many injustices in housing, the economy, labor, transportation and social welfare, as well as inequity in the criminal justice system.

Schools where several kinds of inequities converge often struggle to

raise test scores. These systems work together to deny educational opportunity for particular racial groups of students.

Some parents cannot wait for remedies and are pursuing other options for their children. Yet clearly the goal among people of

faith is to make public schools a place where all have opportunities to thrive.



Prayerful reflection

But when Jesus saw this, he was indignant and said to [the disciples], "Let the little children come to me; do not stop them; for it is to such as these that the kingdom of God belongs."
- Mark 10:14

You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the greatest and first commandment. And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself.
- Matthew 22:38-39

Jesus' teachings on children belonging to God's kingdom and the Great Commandment help us to ground our faith reflection for our students and public education.

While the disciples restricted access, Jesus emphasized that the vulnerable with lower social status e.g. children, deserve the realm of God.

The Great Commandment teaches the love of God and the love of neighbors, as ourselves, are intertwined. Therefore, that

love extends to caring for our neighbors' children as our own.

Public schools are institutions by which we can care for all children. When they restrict access and reproduce the social inequities, we are called to transform them into instruments of justice and well-being for our diverse lives together.

Show us, O God, the wisdom to guide, nurture, and educate each child and all children.

Questions for discussion

- How do the realities of race and public education connect with what you are seeing in your community, for your kids and/or grandkids?
- Share what signs of hope for public education that you have heard about, or are participating in, or hope to see emerge in your community.
- What can a local church contribute to the discussion and practice of quality public education?
- What messages might you share with community and state leaders as faithful citizens?
- What is realistic and faithful for resource sharing, justice and our public schools? What is compelling for your congregation?

