



STATE EDUCATION RESOURCE CENTER

EQUITY | EXCELLENCE | EDUCATION



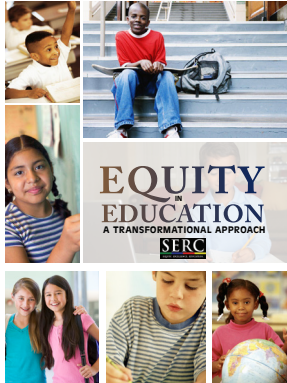
EQUITY IN EDUCATION SERIES

A TRANSFORMATIONAL APPROACH TO

TEACHING

AND

LEARNING



In the State Education Resource Center's (SERC) document *Equity in Education: A Transformational Approach* (2011)¹, we outlined five critical elements for systemic educational reform to ensure an equitable education for all Connecticut children. Those elements are: Leadership, Professional Capacity, School Climate, School-Family-Community Partnerships, and Teaching and Learning.

As part of the *Equity in Education: A Transformational Approach* series, this document is focused on Teaching and Learning. The approach and vision of this document is in the creation of an educational environment that is culturally responsive, relevant, and respectful. When teachers are highly aware of their own beliefs, attitudes, and **biases**² and how these influence what and how they teach in their classrooms, the learning environments that they create empower students to succeed using their own cultural experiences and perspectives. Educators who create and teach from a curriculum that engages and affirms both teachers' and students' identities are supporting a culturally and racially relevant approach that allows them to relate to their students. In turn, this allows their students to connect with the curriculum by demonstrating their knowledge in meaningful ways.

SERC believes that the classroom is the most fundamental place where **equity** in education does or does not happen. It is in the classroom where teaching practices play a critical role in meeting the needs of a diverse student population. In an equitable classroom, learning is student-centered, and the curriculum has a scope and sequence with subject matter and pacing that is aligned across grade levels. In an equitable classroom, teachers have high expectations of students and use research-based instructional strategies, materials, and tools. When all of this is coupled with a culturally responsive approach, the classroom becomes a thriving environment with successful outcomes for all students.

“Educators within our school systems ask repeatedly for specific strategies that will help them break the racial academic code. However, breaking the code is not rooted within specific strategies.... Breaking the code entails a deep understanding of the role that the educators’ racial identity plays in their interactions with students of color and their expectations of success.”

— Ingrid M. Canady, *Executive Director of SERC*

¹Find this and our other equity materials on SERC's website at www.ctserc.org/equity.

²Terms in bold are defined in the Glossary.



INTRODUCTION

What do we mean by equity? The word has such broad meaning that it means different things to different people. Any singular definition of equity reflects an individual's perspective based on their experiences. While this document suggests the collective perspective and experiences of its writers and staff of SERC, we have built this position from a theoretical framework—incorporating decades of scholarship from leaders in the field of education and social science—in addition to an experiential one.

Under the philosophical and structural system of education, we see equity as highlighting one crucial fact: Many of our students are not functioning at their full potential due to historical constraints placed on them by society. In this context, equity would be the active and intentional provision of access to all opportunities within a society for all its members.

Educators are encouraged to think holistically about equity as an instrument for inclusion that can provide access for students to high-quality and meaningful education and opportunities.

We define equity in education as the fair and equal treatment of all members of our society, who are entitled to participate in and enjoy the benefits of an education. All students and adults have the opportunity to participate fully and to experience success and human dignity while developing the skills, knowledge, and attitude necessary to contribute meaningfully to society (State Education Resource Center, 2011).





FROM THEORY TO PRACTICE: A Culturally Responsive Approach to Teaching and Learning in Our Classrooms

The schooling process in America has always played a role in instilling the dominant culture within our youth. The forefathers of the education system as we know it today established a structure that was seen as the mainstay of the nation's sustainability. Education was used to delineate individuals who would lead this nation and those who would be led. In order to fulfill that role, teaching and learning functioned to identify the best and most fit leaders.

Teaching and learning has served, and in many ways still operates, as a means of justifying the nation's social strata. Through a complex set of philosophies, policies, practices, and structures, classrooms became the hub for placing people in certain social positions according to perceptions and appraisals of, among other things, intelligence and appropriate behavior. Re-examination of this sorting practice is necessary to challenge perceptions that can perpetuate patterns of inequity.

Within the context of teaching and learning, equity should be the governing principle. Achieving educational equity means development of **pedagogy** that "concentrates on how to effectively teach diverse students as well as what to teach

them" (Gay, 2004). To decide what to teach and how to teach it, the teacher must use a culturally responsive approach and go beyond what is familiar and comfortable. This challenges a teacher to identify and confront barriers that prevent him/her from viewing and understanding teaching materials from different vantage points so they can help students understand and apply what they learn through their own lens.

A critical first step in addressing equity in classrooms, and one that is often overlooked, is for educators to identify their personal biases and cultural beliefs and how those beliefs impact their perceptions of their students. Once educators acknowledge their cultural identity, they are better able to understand how their curriculum and instruction impact each individual student. This cultural identity serves as the individual's cultural frame of reference. It is the frame through which curriculum is developed and implemented.

SERC believes it is only after self-exploration that educators can better understand their cultural perspective, and, therefore, provide meaningful instruction to all students. The responsibility of educators to make



culturally responsive connections can seem overwhelming, but these connections are crucial to successful facilitation of teaching and learning in the classroom.

Culturally relevant teaching and learning function under the premise that all students and families have unique cultural values and beliefs that create strong cultural connections, providing a foundation for students to develop a sense of who they are academically through positive classroom experiences. Culturally relevant teaching is essential because it creates a learning

community that embodies passionate teachers who focus on relationships, are racially conscious and use culturally relevant instructional practices. They understand that equity is not about leveling the field or treating all students the same, but about meeting the distinctive needs of the students.

Educators need to approach teaching and learning with open eyes and minds in order to effect true change that will impact children in the classrooms not only today, but for generations to come.

| The Essence of Culturally Relevant Teaching | | |
|---|--|--|
| Relationships | Racial Consciousness | Instructional Practices |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • care about their students’ engagement with what they are learning; • foster healthy relationships with students; • bring student and family voice into the development of communication systems; • welcome and create home learning connections to engage all of the families within their communities (**also Racial Consciousness) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • understand the personal, racial/ethnic, and cultural identities of their students; • ensure that each student feels a sense of belonging in the classroom by helping students affirm their own racial, cultural, and personal identity (**also Relationships); • are willing to address their own biases and stereotypes about the students they support | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • develop culturally relevant ways to foster reasoning and problem-solving skills in students so the students can better understand the content; • recognize what the student knows, and how the student thinks, and help students construct meaningful and authentic experiences as they learn (**also Relationships); • seek feedback from their students regarding the new knowledge learned; • examine their classroom practice to incorporate their students’ funds of knowledge—sources of knowledge that students gain, such as from their family and cultural backgrounds—to create interactions that stress collectivity (**also Racial Consciousness); • recognize student difference and do not use a color-blind approach |



WHAT CAN I DO?

How can educators be more aware of unconscious assumptions about certain student populations? How can they avoid perpetuating the achievement gaps through biased teaching practices? In order to provide equitable opportunities for student achievement in the classroom, *educators must consider the difference between race and racism.*

Race as it is defined by the Census Bureau reflects self-identification by people according to the race or races with which they most closely identify. These categories are socio-political constructs and should not be interpreted as being scientific or anthropological in nature. **Racism** is a belief that race is the primary determinant of human traits and capacities and that racial differences produce an inherent superiority of a particular race (State Education Resource Center, 2011).

The dialogue around equity in education must focus not only on the race of our students, but also on educators' personal self-identification of race. It is only after we increase our own awareness of race, how race impacts education, and how educators play a role in shaping how

race is addressed in their classrooms that we can truly change teaching practice. Educators are better able to provide culturally conscious education to all students once they are aware of their own racial lens and the lenses of their students. It is through exploring educators' **racial consciousness** that educational disparities must be addressed.

Discussing the topic of race often turns into an emotionally charged, sometimes defensive conversation that leads to walls being erected and voices being drowned. Conversations around race may elicit strong emotions and historical images of racism.

SERC emphasizes that race and racism are not one and the same. However, when



“ONLY WHEN WE BECOME AWARE OF OUR BIASES DO WE HOLD THE POWER TO CHANGE PRACTICE AND EFFECTIVELY REACH ALL STUDENTS IN THE CLASSROOM.”

they are inappropriately linked in concept or in conversations, it becomes difficult to reach a mutual understanding of race and why it needs to be discussed.

Discussions around race are intended not to make personal accusations of racism, but rather to increase racial consciousness so we may live our lives beyond our own personal lens. Why do educators need to have understanding about the impact of race in their classroom practices? More than 90% of educators in Connecticut are White, and many have lived in racially segregated communities. They do not know “enough about how race and culture impact everyone’s lives” (Singleton, 2015). To have racially conscious educators, we need to have hard and courageous conversations. With greater consciousness of race, we are more effective in everything we do in a racially diverse world.

Unmasking biases allows educators to pay more attention to how they plan. They become more cognizant of the barriers in the instructional environment, present intentionally or not, and how fixed

generalizations lead to an unrealized bias toward a particular group of students.

We all carry biases, formed by personal experiences and beliefs. While personal bias can be held unconsciously, educators do have power over their awareness of such biases and how they impact teaching and learning practices. By bringing forward biases into consciousness, educators can make more informed, well-rounded decisions about how to educate and evaluate students.

An example of a commonly believed bias is the often unnoticed and internalized belief that certain children are born with inferior intellectual abilities relative to others. The data collected thus far on infant development between black and white children indicate that they have the same abilities. There is no “achievement gap” at birth (Delpit, 2012).

Delpit suggests that we should not compare black versus white student achievement but rather look at black students’ performance and potential.



Educators must see that all children are equally capable of achieving success. Otherwise, educators risk carrying over biases into practice through lowering expectations and then “teaching down” to certain groups of students. If an educator operates with the assumption that all low-income children or all children from a certain racial background are inherently incapable of achieving the same academic success as their white or higher-income peers, that educator may unconsciously “teach down” to those students. Racial awareness is essential to mediating these assumptions to provide meaningful, culturally appropriate education in the classroom for all children.

Educators steeped in **culturally relevant practices** recognize that “race” is not synonymous with “minority.” They know that White is a race and that “**whiteness**” brings with it inherent **privilege**, which is distributed differently by race. They understand how students of color may be left behind, particularly when an educational system does not allow everyone the same access. Culturally responsive educators recognize that differences in social norms exist across cultural groups and how their own cultural background impacts their perception of society and others.



“

The entanglements I experience in the classroom are often no more or less than the convolutions of my inner life. Viewed from this angle, teaching holds a mirror to the soul. If I am willing to look in that mirror, and not run from what I see, I have a chance to gain self-knowledge—and knowing myself is as crucial to good teaching as knowing my students and my subject.

The Courage to Teach
Parker Palmer, 1998

”



REACHING FOR THE FUTURE

When SERC calls for equitable teaching and learning, what do we envision? The following concepts build a framework for what schools and classrooms should look, sound, and feel like.

- Students deserve qualified, skilled, competent teachers who love them and “embrace them in all their splendid variety.” They “deserve teachers who understand, value, and affirm their colorful African American, Latino, Indigenous, Asian, and other cultures” (Singleton, 2015).
- Educators need “to see students as complete, deserving, brilliant human beings” and believe in the potential of all children and “recognize differences without negatively stereotyping” (Delpit, 2012).
- Instruction should be of the highest quality, both rigorous and challenging. Academics should be “designed to discover the strengths and accommodate the needs of each child” (Delpit, 2012).
- Educators need to use research-based practices and instructional strategies that work in the classroom for students of color and indigenous students.
- Educators need to have the will, skill, knowledge, and capacity to affirm racial diversity (Hilliard, 1995).
- Children need to “see and connect to teachers who like them, who know their communities and their lives, and who know how to say their names” (Delpit, 2012).

Clearly, *Teaching and Learning*, one of SERC’s five critical elements for equitable education, overlaps with the other elements of Professional Capacity and School Climate. SERC will explore each of the other elements, including Leadership and School-Family-Community Partnerships, in more depth in future documents as part of the *Equity in Education: A Transformational Approach* series.

A LOOK AT CONNECTICUT'S DATA

Any discussion of teaching and learning should refer to data on the achievement level of students of color. Connecticut data clearly show persistent gaps in opportunities for many of the state's Black and Brown students. In the six years since SERC's first equity publication, the tests and some of the metrics have changed, but the patterns of performance continue.

Academic Proficiency

Our Black and Brown students continue to underperform relative to the overall student body in English Language Arts (ELA), Mathematics, and Science (See Figures 1, 2, and 3). The data in each of the three figures indicate that students of color must have greater access to curriculum and instruction that are rigorous, culturally relevant, and meet them where they are while providing a path to success.

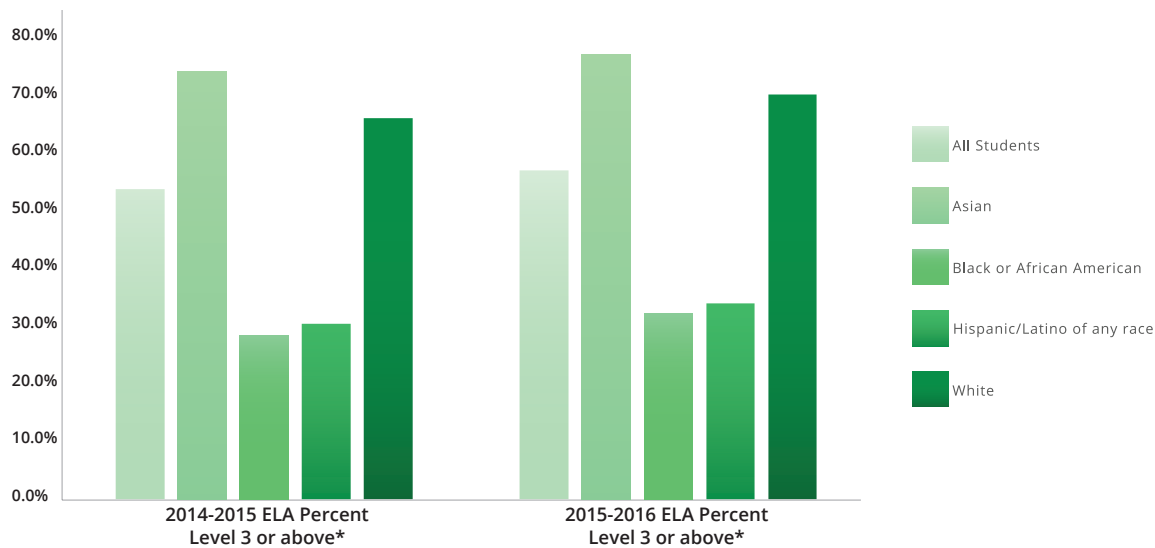


Figure 1: Academic Proficiency in ELA as seen in the 2015-16 Connecticut Smarter Balanced Assessment Preliminary Results for All Grades 3 through 8 Combined

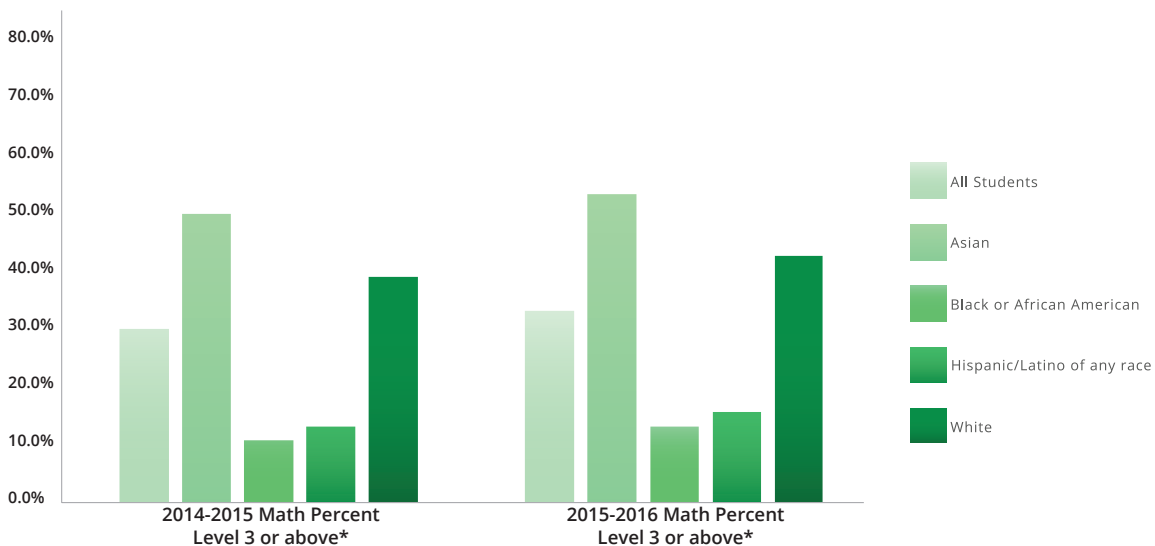


Figure 2: Academic Proficiency in Math as seen in the Connecticut Smarter Balanced Assessment Preliminary Results for All Grades 3 through 8 Combined

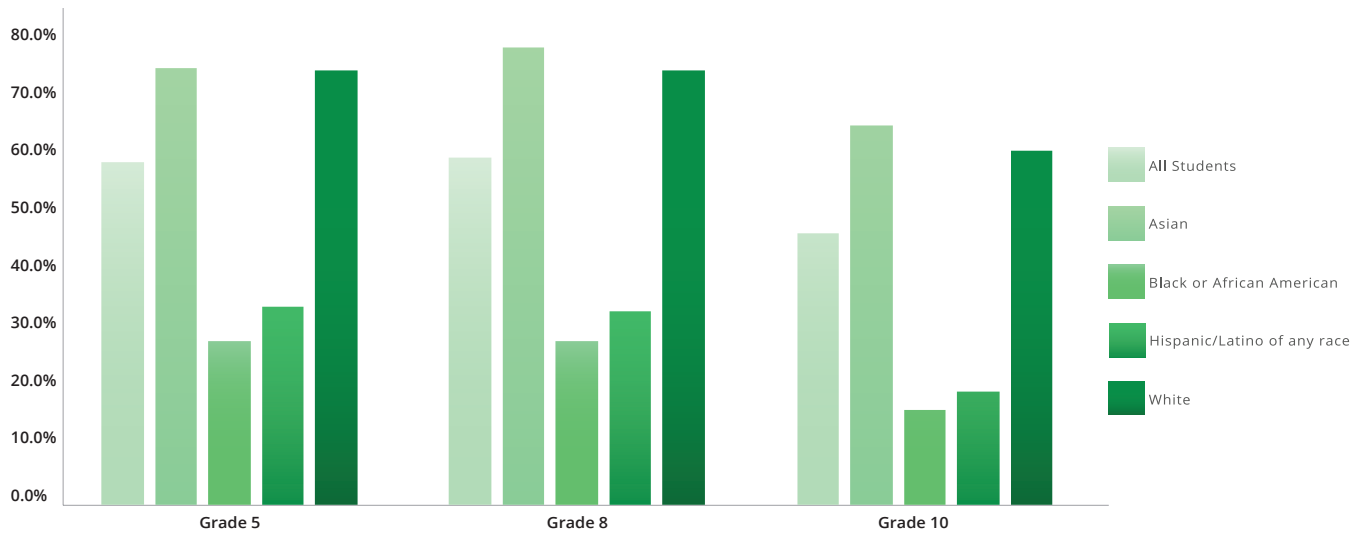


Figure 3: Academic Proficiency as seen in the preliminary results of the 2015 CMT and CAPT Science for Grades 5, 8 and 10

Chronic Absenteeism

The Connecticut State Department of Education (2017) defines chronic absenteeism as missing “10 percent or greater of the total enrolled days for any reason.” These reasons may include excused and non-excused absences as well as suspensions lasting more than half a day (in-school or out-of-school) and expulsions. Chronic absenteeism directly relates to missed educational opportunities by significantly limiting children’s access to instruction and impacting teaching and learning for all students. Black and Brown students show higher rates of disengagement from school with regard to school discipline and school attendance (see Figure 4).

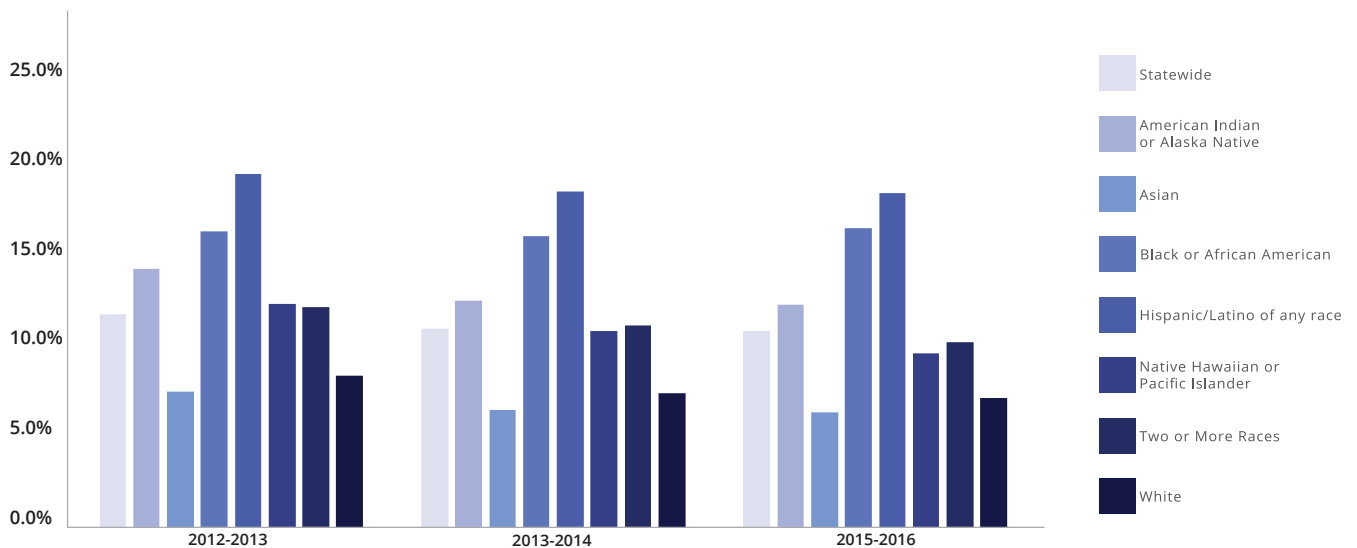


Figure 4: Chronic Absenteeism Trend Data from 2011-12 to 2015-16



Four-Year Graduation Rates

Connecticut continues to make great progress toward graduating more of our high school students every year. However, it takes students of color longer to graduate from school, and a disproportionate number do not graduate at all. This is illustrated in Figure 5.

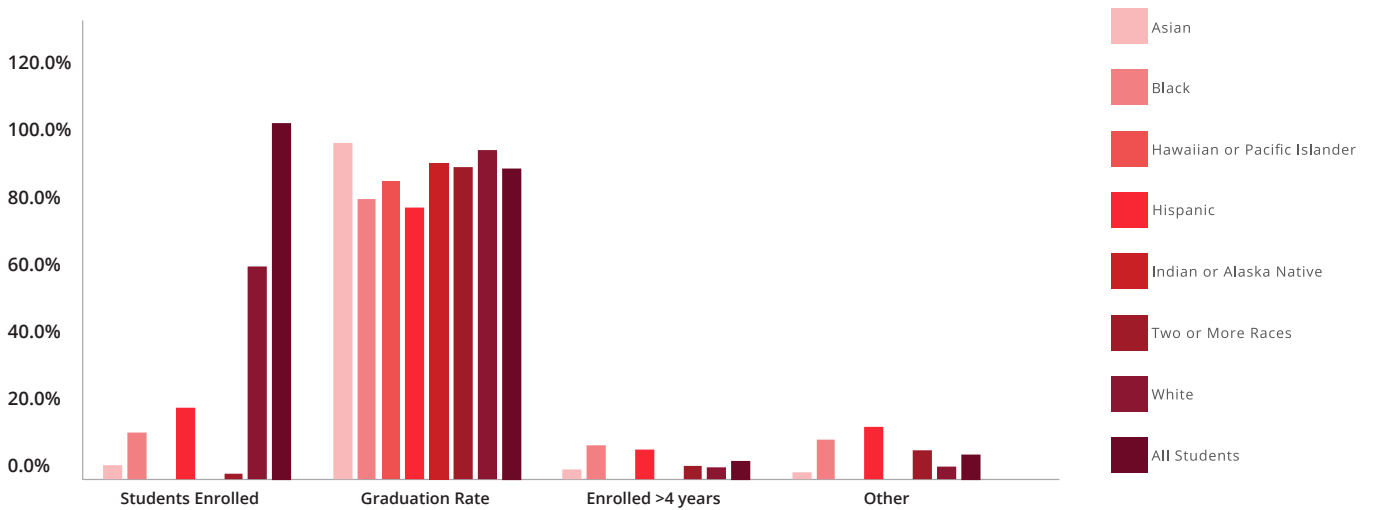


Figure 5: 2015-16 Connecticut Four-Year Cohort Graduation Rates*

Diversity of the Educator Workforce

SERC's 2014 technical report on minority teachers outlines the benefits of a racially diverse educator workforce, not only for students of color but for all students to succeed in an increasingly global economy. The report cites research findings that students of color are usually more successful when their teachers reflect the racial or ethnic group to which they identify (State Education Resource Center, 2014).

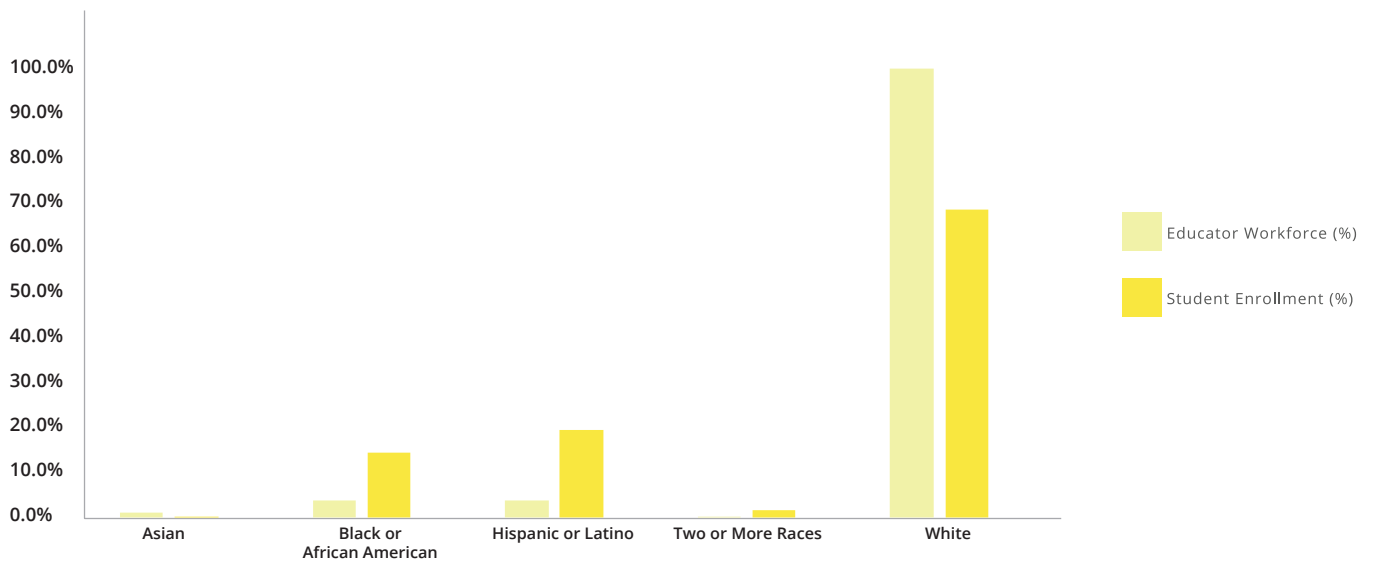


Figure 6: Comparison of CT Educator Workforce to Student Enrollment*

*Please note that data for Native Americans, Alaska Natives and Pacific Islanders from both the student and educator rates were less than 1%, and therefore are not displayed in the graphs.

The Connecticut State Board of Education (2016) has identified the recruitment of teachers of color as one of the actions and goals for developing great teachers and leaders in Connecticut through its Five-Year Comprehensive Plan (see page 16 for more on the plan). Yet as Figure 6 reveals, it will take a great deal of will, skill and effort before all of Connecticut's students benefit from a diverse educator workforce that proportionately reflects all of the state's students and families.

Questions for Personal Reflection

Student data should be disaggregated by the subgroups most salient for your context. Suggested questions for analyzing and reflecting on student data:

What are the data trends for the students you serve who have traditionally been marginalized?

How would you rate or assess your capacity to provide those students greater access to curriculum and instruction that provides a path to success?

What priorities (systems, policies, and practices) do the data suggest are needed to address any racial inequities in student outcomes? How would you know they are working?

Identifying Inequity

SERC no longer uses the term “achievement gap.” In the first equity document, we suggested that “opportunity gap” is a more appropriate concept as it reflects the “larger, systemic disparities facing families and students of color” rather than a failure of certain students to achieve assuming an even playing field.

The recent report by the Connecticut Association for Human Services (2017) in collaboration with Connecticut Kids Count masterfully illustrates the impact of racial inequities across our state. This report puts much of the data cited here into the context of the “Five Connecticuts,” which is how the report disaggregates the data by location.

A common argument is that disparities in student data reflect poverty and not race. While there are no inherent racial differences in ability between students of color and their White counterparts, there is clearly a difference in their experiences both inside and outside of the classroom. The inequities in student outcomes are ultimately disparities in opportunity and access, and many of these persistent disparities are more the result of race/ethnicity than location or even family income.

We must put the impact of systemic racism in the context of Connecticut's realities that cannot be accounted for without the disaggregation of race from socioeconomic data. SERC encourages a further exploration of the role of intersectionality—among race, socioeconomic status, and other factors—in deepening our understanding of the day-to-day lives of our children and families of color.





SERC'S JOURNEY – A REFLECTION

How SERC is Addressing Inequity in Connecticut

As part of the journey, SERC must acknowledge that a commitment to being leaders for transformational change is difficult, particularly in the area of racial equity. Over the years, we have run into barriers to maintaining our momentum in this work, both internally and externally, such as staff turnover, changes in our relationships with partners, and reductions in funding.

In 2016, in an effort to re-energize our equity work and as a recommitment to being anti-racist leaders, SERC and the SERC Foundation held the first “Dismantling Systemic Racism: 2016 Conference on Race, Education & Success.” Approximately 300 educators, community and business leaders, families, and others throughout the state gathered in New Haven to hear from Glenn Singleton, president of Pacific Educational Group (PEG), and more than 25 other speakers across 18 breakout sessions. The event, co-sponsored by the William Caspar Graustein Memorial Fund, the Greater New Haven Community Foundation, the Anti-Defamation League, and CT Parent Power, addressed the multifaceted ways

in which race and systemic racism hinder our students’ opportunities for success in academics, social development, health, and family engagement. Participants were able to learn about the work of individuals committed to supporting students of color and engage in activities on transforming systems to support an excellent and equitable education for all.

Following the first conference, SERC has been asked to partner with various stakeholders and lead several professional learning opportunities related to educational equity. These include partnerships with school districts and community organizations, a partnership with the Graustein Memorial Fund to lead sessions for parent trainers under the Parent Trust Fund, and planning and collaboration on the 24th Annual Together We Will Conference entitled: “Together We Will Address Racial Equity in Early Childhood.”

In the 2016-17 program year, nine members (47%) of SERC’s program staff, who provide in-district and community training, were trained to



become affiliate members of PEG. This allows affiliates to use some of the PEG tools when leading conversations about race with school teams. SERC's 2017-18 goals call for 90-100% of the program staff to be trained in the PEG protocol by the end of the program year.

The second Dismantling Systemic Racism conference in May 2017 featured Calvin Terrell, founder and lead facilitator of Social Centric in Phoenix, AZ, as the keynote presenter, and Aaron Jafferis, playwright, teacher and founder of The Word youth program in New Haven, CT, as the lunch keynote speaker. Among the more than 350 participants, high school students were invited to participate in a set of breakout sessions designed for them. Three students who created poems in Jafferis's breakout session delivered their written work to the entire conference. The third conference was planned for May 2018.

SERC is working to create a space for collective voice and leadership regarding racial identity, racial discovery, and social justice. Through this collective sharing, SERC, together with its partners, creates a natural bridge to ensure that equity, excellence, and education are at the forefront of decisions made on behalf of ALL children.

In 2010, SERC adopted the tagline "Equity. Excellence. Education," and released our first "Equity in Education" document in 2011. It is this powerful collective transformation and commitment to equity and social justice that makes SERC a unique entity to support Connecticut's efforts to close its opportunity gaps.

Since the publication of our original document, SERC has continued to work towards being an agent of transformational change. One vehicle for that change has been the provision of professional learning opportunities for educators to increase their knowledge and skills and address culturally relevant pedagogy with "a focus on content knowledge; opportunities for active learning; and coherence with other learning opportunities" (Nieto, 2013). In response to the academic disparities that are still faced by students of color, SERC works to unmask the hidden realities of **institutionalized racism** and to examine its impact on students and their families. SERC has engaged local public school districts in courageous discourse about the importance of exploring educational practices through a keen racial and cultural lens. The agency's engagement, commitment, and constant learning and reflection have served as a blueprint for examining hidden biases



and the resulting learning barriers that they perpetuate.

In 2016, the Connecticut State Board of Education (CSBOE) published its Five-Year Comprehensive Plan, called “Ensuring Equity and Excellence for All Connecticut Students.” Identified in the document are three strategic priorities: high expectations, great schools, and great teachers and leaders (Connecticut State Board of Education, 2016).

SERC staff reviewed their projects and initiatives and found considerable alignment with the three areas outlined in the state plan. For a list of SERC projects/initiatives aligned to the CSBOE’s Five-Year Plan, see Appendix A.

Some examples:

High Expectations for Every Student – SERC has designed many professional learning opportunities for educators in and out of the classroom to continuously improve their practices to promote student learning in the areas of: Special Education Programs, Executive Functioning, Equity & Diversity, Student Success Plans, Youth Voice and Youth Leadership. The SERC Library has a collection of Instructional Materials and also can provide topical online research LibGuides.

Great Teachers and Leaders – These are promoted through SERC’s efforts to support Minority Teacher Recruitment and Retention (MTRR); practices that are differentiated, universally designed and culturally responsive; as well as structures of systems such as Co-Teaching and Multi-tiered Systems of Support [e.g., Positive Behavioral

Interventions and Supports (PBIS) and Connecticut’s Scientific Research-Based Interventions (SRBI) framework].

Great Schools – SERC has coordinated grants for Connecticut State Department of Education such as the State Personnel Development Grant (SPDG) and the School Climate Transformation Grant (SCTG). These involve working with districts on systems of supports for students. The participating schools review their student data disaggregated by disability, race, and English learner status and create action plans for addressing policy, program, practice, and structures.

SERC has learned from the experiences of the past 14 years and has tools and experiences to share with others who are embarking on their journey to promote racial equity and social justice to benefit students and their families. Next steps include additional training, technical assistance, and resources on Teaching and Learning and each of the four other critical elements for culturally responsive reform: Leadership; Professional Capacity; School Climate; and School-Family-Community Partnerships. SERC’s transformational journey continues to evolve.





SERC has included the following two vignettes for reflection and conversation by educators as they raise their level of racial consciousness.

RACIALLY CONSCIOUS DECISIONS IN MY CLASSROOM: A Teacher's Reflection

I was a young, inexperienced student teacher standing in front of a classroom of high school students. The high school, a beautiful building with state-of-the-art laboratory facilities, offered all the resources I could need. The school was located in an affluent town in Connecticut. The student population was over 90% white.

One of my most unsettling dissonant experiences began when I sat with my cooperating teacher. As part of my student teaching experience, he was required to review my grade book and discuss my grading processes. When he saw my grades, which were mostly B's and C's, he said that most of my grades should be A's. It became evident that it was the expectation of the administration, the central office, and the community that

a majority of the grades would be in the A range. As a result, I needed to problem solve the issue and make sure it was rectified before the grades were sent to the main office. It would take me many more years of teaching experience to truly understand what this meant.

“ CHILDREN IN CONNECTICUT HAVE VERY DIFFERENT EXPERIENCES BASED PRIMARILY ON THE COLOR OF THEIR SKIN. ”

A few years later, I began teaching in a large inner-city school district in Connecticut where over 80% of my students were students of color. Having received professional development on many topics, including differentiated instruction, Scientific Research-Based Interventions (SRBI), inquiry-based learning,

and multiple instructional practices, I was confident in how to provide instruction to my students. But unlike my student teaching experience, my new teaching assignment



did not have any laboratory facilities, my resources were scarce, and I had more than 35 students in my room and only 32 desks. Even though I was faced with what seemed to be many challenges, I was there to help my students learn.

I worked hard, and my students worked harder to master the various concepts. I differentiated my instruction and they engaged in the learning process. We had a positive rapport, and I did what I could to meet the individual needs of each one of them. This instructional approach translated

into a classroom in which the majority of my students were getting A's. My administration and team teachers said I was doing something wrong and there was no way this grading pattern should continue. I was told that most of my students should be getting a C, and that my grades were inflated.

I was shocked. These students worked hard. I worked hard. Why did I have to change my grades? Why were my grades considered inflated? It wasn't until years later that I fully grasped that I had witnessed institutionalized oppression in our schools.

This story exemplifies the unconscious effects of the permanence of racism (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017) in the education system. The idea that certain children are expected to “earn” A’s while others aren’t infers that racial identity entitles certain children to the expectation that they are high achievers. It was assumed the children in the first district would get high marks with no question of how and why they received them. Conversely, the expectation was that the children in the low-income, racially diverse school would not perform well.

Institutional oppression is evidenced by the customs and practices regarding grading that are systematically reflecting and producing inequities based on race.





WHY RACE IN THE CLASSROOM?

A Teacher's Reflection

I stand in my classroom this morning and look keenly at all the faces. I am a white teacher teaching a class full of white students. Why would race matter here? Yet I feel a disturbing level of discontent.

I understand there are issues with racism in our country and schools. I see alarming examples in the media all the time. I have even brought the subject into my classroom in an effort to educate my students to understand the terrible effects of racism. So is that why I need to think about race?

I realize that what does not sit well with me is the question that I had been asked the previous day. During professional development, we were talking about the need to bring race into the classroom. I proceeded to cite examples of racism, when the presenter ever-so-gently said to me, "So those are elements of racism. What about race?"

I was so caught off-guard I cannot recall anything else discussed after that. Why race? How is race different from racism?

What does it all mean for my school? We are a mostly white school. What does race have to do with anything here?

I was up most of the night trying to search for answers to my questions. Now, standing in front of the class, still feeling restless, I begin my lesson. Slowly I open my text and ask my students to do the same. I initiate the usual pre-reading strategies with my students, while only half-paying attention to my own words of instruction. Then I notice the pictures in the text. Are all these people in this text white? I had never noticed that before and I had used this text a thousand times. Does this matter to my students?

Later on that day, we gather around the Smart Board to discuss how to locate research information on the Internet. I had mostly forgotten my angst from the previous day. We are having fun as a class zooming through the Internet search engines, when one of my students announces proudly, "Yesterday I was on the Internet, and I was talking to a friend of my father's in China."



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POLICY MAKERS AND SCHOOL LEADERS MUST CONSIDER ANY EDUCATIONAL ISSUES - FROM GRADUATION RATES TO ACHIEVEMENT TEST SCORES - IN THE CONTEXT OF RACE AND CULTURE.

”

**“Equity in Education: A Transformational Approach”
(State Education Resource Center, 2011)**

Typically, I would just redirect an off-task statement, but today his statement strikes me. Of course, his future world will be so different than this classroom. Is this why we ask, why race? It makes sense that in the 21st century, students would need to learn about other cultures and race. Suddenly, the lesson becomes more engaging as we now began to talk about how the resources available on the Internet come from all over the world.

I stagger off to recess duty after that lesson. It is a cold day and I have my hood up to shelter me from the cutting wind. A ball is kicked in my direction, and as I hand it back to a young girl, I notice a familiar face in a

new way. Her beautiful brown face smiles at me as if she knows what I am thinking. With my hood perfectly framing her face, I no longer notice anything else. Of course she has race, right? In this sea of white faces, how might race be here for her?

Sitting at lunch, I can hardly keep any of this to myself. I finally turn to my colleague and broach the subject. “Oh, please,” she says. “I am color-blind. I treat all students the same.” “Well,” I respond. “Today I see color and I am not so sure what to do with this new thinking.” This conversation left me even more unsettled. What does “color-blind” really mean? Suddenly that notion feels duplicitous.

This second story shows the initial frustration inherent in personal growth, in the form of burgeoning racial consciousness. It is also a stark look into the courage needed to sustain personal and ultimately systemic transformation. The heart of this narrative is the moment that personal acknowledgement turns into inquiry and will eventually become action.



GLOSSARY

| | |
|---------------------------------------|---|
| Biases | Prejudice in favor of or against one thing, person, or group compared with another, usually in a way considered to be unfair. |
| Culturally Relevant Practices | Also known as Culturally Relevant Pedagogy, it “allows for a fluid understanding of culture, and a teaching practice that explicitly engages questions of equity and justice” (Ladson-Billings, 2014). |
| Culturally Responsive Teaching | Can be defined as using the cultural knowledge, prior experiences, frames of reference, and performance styles of ethnically diverse students to make learning encounters more relevant to and effective for them. “It teaches to and through the strengths of these students. It is culturally validating and affirming” (Gay, 2010). |
| Equity | We define equity in education as the fair and equal treatment of all members of our society, who are entitled to participate in and enjoy the benefits of an education. All students and adults have the opportunity to participate fully and to experience success and human dignity while developing the skills, knowledge, and attitude necessary to contribute meaningfully to society (State Education Resource Center, 2011). |
| Funds of Knowledge | The sources of knowledge that students gain, such as from their family and cultural backgrounds (Moll et al., 1992). |



| | |
|--|---|
| <p>Institutional Oppression</p> | <p>“The systematic mistreatment of people within a social identity group, supported and enforced by the society and its institutions, solely based on the person’s membership in the social identity group. Institutional oppression creates a system of invisible barriers limiting people based on their membership in unfavored social identity groups. The barriers are only invisible to those ‘seemingly’ unaffected by it.” Institutional oppression “is based on the belief in inherent superiority or inferiority [and] is a matter of result regardless of intent” (Cheney et al., 2006).</p> |
| <p>Institutionalized Racism</p> | <p>The differential access to the goods, services, and opportunities of society by race. “Institutionalized racism is normative, sometimes legalized, and often manifests as inherited disadvantage” (Jones, 2000).</p> |
| <p>Pedagogy</p> | <p>How one teaches (the art and science of teaching) (Kagan & Kauerz, 2006).</p> |
| <p>Privilege</p> | <p>A social theory that special rights or advantages are available only to a particular person or group of people (Twine & Gardener, 2013).</p> |
| <p>Racial Consciousness</p> | <p>Racial consciousness or racial awareness is the understanding of the uniqueness of one’s race compared to other races. In particular, a racially conscious person is aware of the physical characteristics, history, culture, traditions, and mores of his own race and how those things differ from other races.</p> |
| <p>Racism</p> | <p>A belief that race is the primary determinant of human traits and capacities and that racial differences produce an inherent superiority of a particular race (Merriam-Webster definition).</p> |
| <p>Whiteness</p> | <p>Culture and consciousness of the dominant racial group; ways of doing things that maintain whites as the dominant racial group.</p> |



APPENDIX A

| PROGRAM CONTENT | SERC's Comprehensive Approach to Programs & Services <i>(Special Education Resource Center/Connecticut School Reform Center/Library)</i> | The SBOE Five Year Comprehensive Plan 2016-21 | | |
|--|---|---|--------------------------|---------------|
| | | High Expectations for Every Student | Great Teachers & Leaders | Great Schools |
| | Special Education Resource Center - Supporting All Abilities | | | |
| | Assessing and Diagnostics | ● | ● | |
| | Dyslexia/Learning Disabilities | ● | | |
| | Accessibility: Least Restrictive Environment, Inclusive Systems | ● | | ● |
| | Speech & Language Development | ● | | |
| | Transition from Birth to Adulthood | ● | | |
| | Assistive Technology | ● | | |
| | Paraeducators | ● | ● | |
| Individualized Education Program Development - Planning & Facilitation | ● | | | |
| Person-Centered Planning | ● | | | |
| Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) & 504 (Addressing Procedural Compliance) | ● | | | |
| Student Support Planning/Planning and Placement Team Process | ● | | ● | |
| Connecticut School Reform Resource Center/Special Education Resource Center - Multi-Tiered Systems of Support | | | | |
| Scientific Research-Based Interventions/State Personnel Development Grant | ● | | | |
| Early Intervention Programs | ● | | | |
| Positive Behavioral Interventions & Supports | ● | | | |
| Comprehensive Behavior & Mental Health | ● | | | |
| Restorative Practices | ● | | | |
| Connecticut School Reform Resource Center - Curriculum & Instruction | | | | |
| Co-Teaching | | ● | | |
| Assessment | | ● | | |
| Connecticut Standards (e.g., CCSC, CTELDs) | ● | | ● | |
| Differentiated Instruction | ● | ● | | |
| Technology/Universal Design | | ● | | |
| Literacy/Reading | | ● | | |



| | SERC's Comprehensive Approach to Programs & Services <i>(Special Education Resource Center/Connecticut School Reform Center/Library)</i> | The SBOE Five Year Comprehensive Plan 2016-21 | | |
|--|---|---|--------------------------|---------------|
| | | High Expectations for Every Student | Great Teachers & Leaders | Great Schools |
| PROGRAM CONTENT CONTINUED... | Math & Science Literacy | | ● | |
| | Data Team Process | ● | ● | ● |
| | Connecticut School Reform Resource Center - Equity and Excellence in our Schools | | | |
| | Culturally Responsive Practice | ● | ● | ● |
| | Support for Minority Teacher Recruitment & Retention | ● | ● | ● |
| | Early Childhood | ● | ● | ● |
| | Youth Equity for Leadership | ● | | ● |
| | Professional Learning Communities for Equity | ● | ● | ● |
| | School Climate | ● | | |
| | School-Family Partnerships | ● | | ● |
| | School Governance Councils | ● | ● | ● |
| | Welcoming Walkthroughs | ● | | ● |
| | English as a Second Language | ● | ● | |
| | Student Voice | ● | | ● |
| PROGRAM SERVICES | Library Services | ● | | ● |
| | HR Services, Recruiting & Executive Searches | ● | ● | ● |
| | Facilitation | ● | ● | ● |
| | Strategic Planning | ● | ● | ● |
| | School Planning, Enrollment and Redistricting Services | ● | | ● |
| | Policy and Practice Development | ● | | ● |
| | Mentoring and Coaching for Administrators | ● | ● | ● |
| | Organizational Support Services | ● | | ● |
| | Event Planning & Conference Services | ● | ● | ● |
| | Grant Management and Coordination | ● | ● | ● |
| | Media, Recording and Taping | ● | ● | ● |
| Writing and Editing for Publication, Media & Web | ● | | ● | |



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