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Conceptual

Supporting All Students: Multitiered Systems of Support from an Antiracist and Critical Race Theory Lens

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Abstract

Recent racial injustice has prompted school counselors to reexamine how their practices contribute to injustice. Many school counselors seek to engage in antiracism and advocacy. Multitiered systems of support (MTSS) strategies include data utilization, systemic collaboration, and multilevel practices within a school building. This article illustrates how school counselors who use MTSS can operate with an antiracist lens to dismantle policies and practices upholding white supremacy. School counselors utilizing MTSS are well positioned to adapt antiracist strategies.

Keywords
antiracism, school counseling, multitiered systems of support

In the summer of 2020, the highly publicized murder of George Floyd reignited the charge for racial and social justice across the globe. Crowds of activists and advocates poured into the streets in protest, calling for an end to systemic oppression, not only within policing but within all systems, including education. The counseling profession has responded to this call by reexamining how counseling-specific practices such as supervision (Cartwright et al., 2021), counselor training (Mason et al., 2021), and school counseling (Hernandez et al., 2021) contribute to the perpetuation of white supremacy. Existing literature suggests that, like policing, counseling practices have inadvertently contributed to the systemic inequities and merit the urgent adaptation of antiracist practices that will disrupt systemic oppression (Galán et al., 2021; Ladson-Billings, 2021). As a socializing institution originally designed to transmit and perpetuate societal norms, values, and (inevitably) social hierarchies, schools have often been perceived as a microcosm of society (Garibaldi & Josias, 2015; Williams & Graham, 2019). As a result, the social ills within the broader societal context are also apparent within the education system (Garibaldi & Josias, 2015). Considering the myriad societal and school-based inequities facing students who identify as Black, Indigenous, or people of color (BIPOC), school counselors have a unique and crucial role in interrupting the systems that perpetuate the continued oppression and mistreatment of BIPOC (American School Counselor Association [ASCA], 2019; Goodman-Scott et al., 2020; Mayes, 2021). Multitiered systems of support (MTSS), a K–12 framework for prevention and intervention, is widely implemented throughout the United States to support the success of every student (Goodman-Scott et al., 2020). Given the continued discriminatory practices, procedures, and disparities in K–12 schools, school counselors must ensure their MTSS implementation addresses these systemic barriers. Although MTSS historically has lacked cultural relevancy and has even perpetuated racist practices in education (Bal, 2018), in more recent years, scholars have prioritized how MTSS influences school culture and can be culturally responsive and culturally sustaining (e.g., Bal, 2018; Goodman-Scott et al., 2020; Leverson et al., 2021). Despite efforts toward incorporating culture into MTSS, only limited discussion has addressed MTSS from an antiracist lens. To serve all students in schools, we use critical race theory and antiracism as frameworks for deconstructing how school counselors contribute to white supremacy and how they can employ MTSS to engage in antiracism that advances equitable educational and mental health outcomes for marginalized BIPOC students.

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Critical Race Theory

Critical race theory (CRT) is a fundamental framework for deconstructing how white supremacy is embedded within existing laws, policies, and practices in ways that advantage White people while simultaneously perpetuating institutional oppression for people who are not White (Crenshaw et al., 1995). Thus, it offers theoretical tools to explore how race and racism influence societal structures (Yosso, 2005). Scholars in the legal field created CRT to describe how constitutional law consistently produced inequitable outcomes for BIPOC, despite its purported objectivity (Tarver et al., 2022). In its original formulation within the legal field, CRT tenets included the embedded nature of race within U.S. social systems, the need to emphasize experiential accounts of people of color, attacking liberalism, and arguing against the law producing systemic equity to describe the insidious ways that laws protected interests of White people (Crenshaw, et al., 1995; Lynn & Parker, 2006; McCoy, 2013). Since its inception, CRT has been expanded to interrogate other social systems such as education, (Ladson-Billings, 2006), social work (Razack & Jeffrey, 2002), and counseling (Trahan & Lemberger, 2014). Collectively, the focus of CRT and the articulation of the tenets vary based on the focus of systemic interrogation. Thus, the seminal work of Crenshaw and colleagues (1995) is the most ideal for understanding the origins of CRT that have been adapted across various disciplines to identify strategies that dismantle race and racism within various systems in ways that serve the broader goal of eliminating all forms of subordination such as class, gender, and ability (Solorzano & Yosso, 2001).

Using CRT to Deconstruct Educational Contexts and School Counseling

The utilization of CRT can offer educational leaders pedagogical and methodological tools for examining schools' structures and policies through the eyes and voices of BIPOC students (Solorzano & Yosso, 2001). By integrating CRT tenets, such as the permanence of racism and counter-storytelling, school counselors will acknowledge the role white supremacy has had in the American education system and how professional practices have contributed to the maintenance or dismantling of systemic inequity. White supremacy is "the belief that the White race is inherently superior to other races and that White people should have control over the social, economic, and political systems that collectively enable White people to maintain power" (Merriam-Webster, n.d.). This belief gave way to educational norms that centered the experiences of White people, such as instructional techniques, illustrations of excellence, and curricular content that exclusively highlights White people in favorable ways. The permanence of racism is the postulation that racism has been embedded within U.S. social systems (Crenshaw et al., 1995). This tenet acknowledges that white supremacy, via the standard of whiteness, was historically embedded within the foundations of the educational system (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 2016) and the counseling profession (Moss & Singh, 2015). From the CRT lens of the permanence of racism, the insidious ways that white supremacy operates within the school counseling profession become salient. Within CRT, counter-storytelling is both a theoretical tenet and methodological tool for centering BIPOC's experiential accounts of racism that are institutionally silenced by White supremacist narratives of White normativity (Bell, 1995; Crenshaw et al., 1995). Through counter-storytelling, BIPOC students are provided opportunities to disclose how they experience racism within the context of schools (DeCuir & Dixson, 2004). To fully understand the impact and operationalization of white supremacy, centering the experiences of BIPOC students is essential. Collectively, the tenets described above offer tools for critically investigating how school counseling practices inadvertently contribute to existing racist policies within schools (Bell, 1980).

Analysis of White Supremacy Within Education

The embedded permanence of racism is perpetuated within U.S. education in several ways. One such manifestation is through maintenance of systemic racial hierarchy that subjects BIPOC students to restricted access to resources, barriers to opportunities, and educational exclusion. Within this hierarchy, the established educational policies and procedures are traditionally designed to meet the educational needs of White students, although centralizing the needs and priorities of White students excludes entire student populations. Even when BIPOC students have access to educational resources, they are often low quality in comparison to the resources of their White peers and reflect racial segregation and restricted access to advanced placement opportunities (Logan et al., 2012; Rowley & Wright, 2011). Inequitable outcomes are evident through data that unveil racial segregation within the classrooms of K–12 schools, including the exclusion of BIPOC students in advanced-level courses. Academically, Black and Latinx students comprise only 7.4% and 18.3% of students enrolled in gifted and talented programs, and 10.2% and 24% of students enrolled in at least one Advanced Placement course (U.S. Department of Education [DOE], 2018). From the CRT lens of permanence of race, it becomes salient that explanations of such disparities are often rooted in deficit interpretations of BIPOC students, such as assumptions of lower academic aptitude for achievement as opposed to interpretations of institutional practices that privilege White students for whom such resources were designed, while simultaneously oppressing BIPOC students.

White supremacy within education is also evident through the overrepresentation of BIPOC students within disciplinary outcomes. National school discipline data outlines racial disparities in suspensions and expulsions. Such data consistently reveal that BIPOC students are punished more harshly than their White peers for subjective infractions, including disrespect, defiance, or the volume of their voices (Betters-Bubon et al., 2016). These outcomes reflect the institutionalized standard of White normativity that is a distinct characteristic of White supremacy, and serves to penalize BIPOC students for engaging in behavior that diverges from institutional standards of whiteness. Consequently, an overrepresentation of Black and Latinx K–12 students receive out-of-school suspensions and expulsions compared to their White peers who are more likely to receive less punitive methods of discipline (Betters-Bubon et al., 2016; Rudd, 2014). Within the institutional context of white supremacy, the institutional narrative of BIPOC students is replete with troubling statistics that overlook the privilege that White students experience within educational contexts designed to ensure their educational success. For example, during the 2015–2016 school year, Black students accounted for 15.4% of all students enrolled in K–12 schools in the United States, yet comprised 46% of the total number of students receiving more than one out-of-school suspension (U.S. Department of Education, 2018). Black students also accounted for 32.7% of all students who received one or more in-school suspensions (U.S. Department of Education, 2018). Thus, outcomes of repeated office discipline referrals that often cause BIPOC students to become disengaged, fail classes, or drop out of school, subsequently affecting future income potential and life sustainability, can also be understood as coping strategies in response to institutionalized white supremacy (Bryan et al., 2012). Although alternative explanations for these trends have been offered, racially disaggregated data consistently reflects racial inequities irrespective of economic levels. From a CRT analysis, it is apparent that these trends reflect institutionalized white supremacy that continues to relegate BIPOC students to marginalized status within educational systems.

Amidst the myriad societal and school-based inequities facing BIPOC students, school counselors have a unique and essential role in interrupting the systems that perpetuate continued white supremacist oppression and mistreatment of BIPOC students (ASCA, 2019; Goodman-Scott et al., 2020; Mayes, 2021). The continued discriminatory practices, procedures, and disproportionalities in K–12 schools emphasize the need for school counselors to ensure that their engagement in MTSS implementation addresses systemic barriers. Engaging in antiracism is critical for dismantling white supremacy and mitigating oppressive educational contexts for BIPOC students.

Antiracism

While CRT provides the language and analysis of racism embedded within systems, antiracism is an action-oriented commitment to dismantling and interrupting the systems of racism prevalent in society (Kendi, 2019; Mayes, 2021). Seminal scholars of antiracism have found no one clear definition of antiracism (Paradies, 2015). Rather like racism, antiracism is multifaceted and frequently changes how it is manifested institutionally (Gillborn, 2007; Paradies, 2016). Despite variations in empirically defining antiracism, there is a shared understanding of what antiracism is not. For example, Kendi (2019) asserted:

> There is no neutrality in the racism struggle. The opposite of "racist" isn't "not racist." It is antiracist. What's the difference? One either endorses the idea of a racial hierarchy as a racist, or racial equality as an antiracist. One either believes problems are rooted in groups of people, as a racist, or locates the roots of problems in power and politics, as an antiracist. One either allows racial inequities to persevere, as a racist, or confronts racial inequities, as an antiracist. There is no in-between safe space of "not racist." The claim of "not racist" neutrality is a mask for racism. (p. 9)

However, despite the renewed attention to antiracism in response to recent social injustice, antiracism is not new to the counseling profession.

Antiracism within Professional Counseling

Overall, antiracist work has emphasized the need to move beyond the opposite of racism, to view antiracist as an action-oriented pursuit to eradicate the subordination of individuals based on their race and, in turn, other various identities (Kendi, 2019; Paradies, 2015). In counseling, scholars have strategized ways to incorporate antiracism into counseling training. Some of the seminal literature has centered on White counselors better understanding race and racism (Corvin & Wiggins, 1989). However, more recent literature has emphasized incorporating antiracism training into counselor education for all counselors, differentiating the needs of White students, who may need to understand the nature of racism, and students of color, who may need to reflect on how racism will impact their professional life (Pieterse, 2009; Pieterse et al., 2016). Although there have been calls in counseling training to incorporate antiracism into curricula, less has been discussed on how this translates into practice, including in schools.

Most recently, Holcomb-McCoy (2021) clarified antiracism in education as the act of interrogating and dismantling systems and policies ascribed in education that uphold racist outlooks that disproportionately impact Black and brown communities, such as White and Euro-centered curriculum, standardized testing, and discipline policies. She further explained that antiracist school counselors reflect on their own critical consciousness and their identities and how they might impact counselors' work with Black and brown communities. Antiracist school counselors must actively reflect on the racism embedded into policies and practices in their schools to avoid perpetuating racist structures (Holcomb-McCoy, 2021). In her keynote presentation at the Evidence-Based School Counseling Conference, Mayes (2021) introduced a process for school counselors to implement antiracist practices and deconstruct oppressive systems while loving and protecting BIPOC lives and voices. She called on school counselors to reflect and continuously learn about how systems oppress BIPOC to ensure they do not recreate those same inequitable and racist environments (Mayes, 2021). Utilizing their reflections to be social advocates for their students is also vital for school counselors, as is using their voices to disrupt structures that uphold white supremacy. MTSS framework can be the vehicle for disrupting white supremacy, shifting the focus from what is wrong with the student to the implementation of supports to better engage the student in the school environment (Hernandez et al., 2021).

Multitiered Systems of Support

MTSS is a framework for K–12 school-based prevention and intervention being increasingly implemented in the United States, to include all states and nearly 30,000 schools (Center on PBIS, 2021). MTSS is often used as an overarching term for Response to Intervention (RTI) and Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS); we use the terms interchangeably in this article. The U.S. Department of Education federally funds MTSS (PBIS in particular) as an "evidence-based three-tiered framework for improving and integrating all of the data, systems, and practices affecting student outcomes every day. It is a way to support everyone. . . to create schools where all students are successful" (Center on PBIS, 2021, para 1). Thus, as seen in Figure 1, the MTSS framework is driven by the overlapping and integrated concepts of (a) data, (b) systems, and (c) practices.

Specifically, schools collect and analyze many types of *data* to determine student and school needs, measure progress toward goals, and evaluate effectiveness. Next, through MTSS, schools are viewed through a bioecological or *systems* lens, that all aspects of the school are related or interconnected. Last, *practices* are also crucial for MTSS: evidence-based prevention and intervention strategies organized by tiers. Tier 1 supports are preventative and implemented for all students, such as school-wide social/emotional learning initiatives. Next, Tier 2 supports target small groups of students who need further support in a particular area(s). At the Tier 3 level, supports are individualized to students who need intensive supports in one or more areas, including long-term counseling for self-regulation. Thus, the concepts of data, systems, and practices are connected: data determine and evaluate tiered supports needed in schools; data are analyzed, and practices are implemented throughout the system to improve the system to better support students.

MTSS is implemented by a team, of which school counselors are often members assisting with designing, implementing, and evaluating their school's MTSS. Generally speaking, school counselors meet students' academic, career, and social/emotional needs through a comprehensive school counseling program, as described by the ASCA National Model (ASCA, 2019). Relatedly, scholars recommend that school counselors align their program with MTSS implementation (Goodman-Scott et al., 2018 Ockerman et al., 2012; Ziomek-Daigle et al., 2016). School counselors provide direct and indirect supports across the three tiers (e.g., classroom lessons, group counseling, family consultation, and staff training) and also strive for

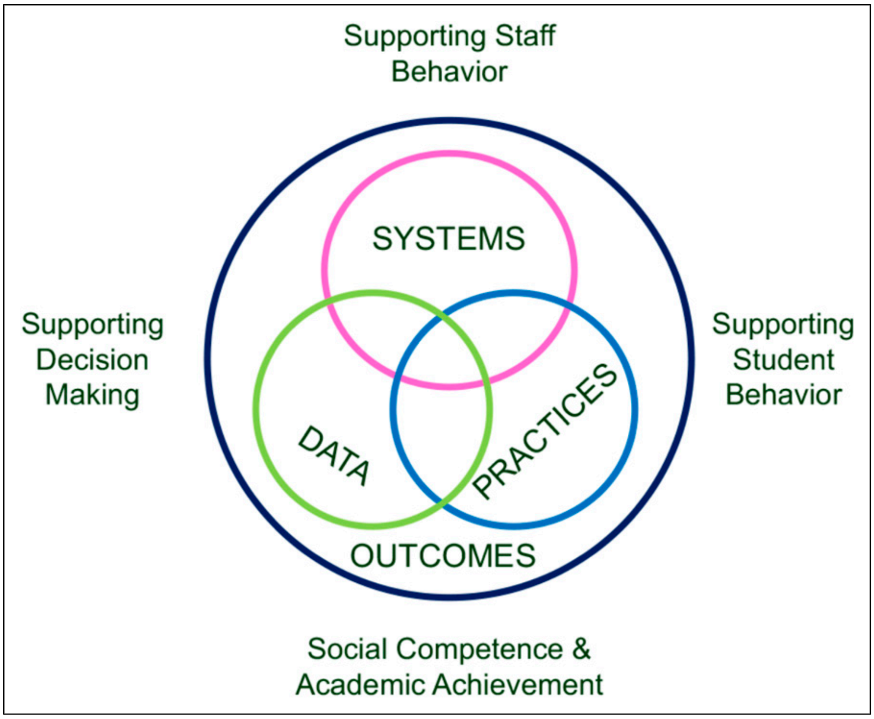
Supporting Staff Behavior
Supporting Decision Making
Supporting Student Behavior
SYSTEMS
DATA
PRACTICES
OUTCOMES
Social Competence & Academic Achievement

Figure 1. Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS). *Note.* Figure obtained from Center on PBIS (2021).

advocacy, systemic change, collaboration, and leadership through the use of data and evidence-based practices (for a more detailed description of the school counselors' role in MTSS, please see Goodman-Scott et al., 2019, 2020).

Criticisms of MTSS

Although the purpose of MTSS is to serve all students using data, systems, and practices, critics have pointed out biases and discrepancies that have been historically inherent in MTSS implementation. To start, MTSS was implemented through *culturally neutral* means: without regard for each school or community's unique culture (Bal, 2018). Culturally neutral MTSS is problematic because the implementation can be curated to prioritize and comply with the dominant culture through data, systems, and practices (e.g., through classroom expectations, discipline procedures, family communication, and involvement; Goodman-Scott et al., 2020). Thus, these biases and privileges can be infused throughout school practices unless utilized with great awareness and care.

Relatedly, supporting traditionally privileged students and families through MTSS also communicates that differing cultures are incorrect and are thus disadvantaged in the system. This pattern is not unique to MTSS but has occurred in K–12 education broadly: Schools tend to focus on deficits rather than reform, leading to programs and supports prioritizing historically privileged individuals rather than populations who have been historically oppressed (Paris, 2012). As these efforts fail, educators tend to blame historically oppressed families and students for their circumstances rather than incorporating cultural differences into educational reforms (García & Guerra, 2004). Because MTSS focuses on differentiating interventions based on a shared understanding of behaviors that support school success (e.g., classroom expectations), and these expectations are often created for those with historical privileges, MTSS can widen gaps in success between White and BIPOC students (Robbins & Kovalchuk, 2012).

Combining Antiracism and MTSS

In acknowledging the criticisms of MTSS, experts in MTSS have evolved in recent years to place a greater emphasis on the necessity of MTSS being *culturally responsive* and *culturally sustaining* (e.g., Bal, 2018; Goodman-Scott et al., 2020; Leverson et al., 2021). Specifically, dimensions of culturally responsive MTSS include (a) practitioners' awareness of their own culture and practices and those of students, families, and communities; (b) hearing, incorporating, and prioritizing the voices, participation, and decision-making of students, families, and community members within the school; and (c) and using data to increase equity, opportunities, access, and outcomes (Bal, 2018; Leverson et al., 2021). Culturally responsive MTSS necessitates going beyond surface-level, first-order changes (e.g., reviewing discipline referrals or disproportionality in race/ethnicity) to focus on analyzing and making changes to systems and culture, thereby making deeper changes and more significant outcomes.

Beyond cultural responsiveness, Goodman-Scott and colleagues (2020) recently described the need for MTSS to go one step further to be culturally sustaining. Using the definition of culturally sustaining from Paris (2012), schools, including in MTSS efforts, must maintain and incorporate the cultures of their school community into the school, rather than leaving them at the schoolhouse door in favor of dominant, privileged cultures (e.g., White, European descent, middle class, heterosexual, and Christian). In sum, there has been increasing emphasis on culture as a crucial and central aspect of MTSS, a shift from earlier iterations of this framework (Bal, 2018; Leverson et al., 2021).

Acknowledging the Challenges for Educators and Antiracism

Actively engaging stakeholders in dismantling practices that negatively impact BIPOC students is a critical step for school counselors. However, as of January 2021, 41 states in the United States have proposed bills attacking CRT or limiting the way educators are allowed to discuss racism, sexism, gender identity, and/or sexuality (Schwartz, 2021). Although only 14 states have banned or restricted topics related to CRT, we acknowledge the negative attention and politicization occurring in opposition to CRT. Thus, school counselors committed to achieving institutional equity by engaging in antiracist practices informed by CRT must be prepared for the resistance they are highly likely to face. The following case scenario details an ideal situation in a school where leadership is committed to addressing systemic issues that impact the disparities of success among the various demographics of students in a school community. This fictional case study highlights steps that could be taken to begin transitioning to an antiracist MTSS framework. Notably, many educators dedicated to antiracist work may face considerable pushback from their stakeholders, hindering changes to the structures that create barriers to educational opportunities for students, especially those who identify as BIPOC or from historically oppressed groups.

Suggestions for School Counselors Facing Resistance

Before reading the case scenario, we suggest that school counselors assess the areas in their school in which they believe they have the most influence and support. First, in considering areas where they can begin to conduct antiracist work, school counselors should develop their own critical consciousness related to racism's impact on their values, beliefs, and biases. Activities for interrogating school counselors' own professional identity are detailed by Betters-Bubon and colleagues (2022). School counselors also may hold many different spaces related to antiracist work. Lakey (2016) described four roles for social justice change: the advocate, helper, organizer, and rebel. School counselors will not be able to change the MTSS framework in their schools alone; however, they can envision how they see their role in dismantling racist structures by situating their role within one (or more) of the roles described in Lakey's writings. From there, school counselors can assess who in their building may serve within one of the other roles described to support their antiracist work.

Another tool for addressing resistance was articulated by Oehrtman and Dollarhide (2021), who described the concept of micropolitics and how it can support advocacy for a comprehensive school counseling program. School counselors can review strategies outlined in that article to assess ways to influence their MTSS team to dismantle racist policies and practices in the school. Notably, Oehrtman and Dollarhide described how micropolitical literacy can help school counselors understand the political landscape within their school—who holds influence and how this may support efforts to advocate for students. We encourage school counselors to assess the distribution of power in their settings to develop a plan to overcome resistance as it relates to antiracist work. Although the articulation of the use of micropolitics in assessing power structures in schools is beyond the scope of this article, it is an ideal tool for school counselors to determine how to navigate the inevitable resistance that emerges when working to advance institutional equity.

Other tools that support educational equity are political savvy and consciousness raising. Singh et al. (2010) presented these as two strategies described by participants as how they frame all of their social justice advocacy work in schools. Political savvy, knowing when and how to act regarding social injustice, can be garnered through micropolitical literacy. Consciousness raising, or the strategy of educating stakeholders on the contexts of injustices, can help school counselors gain influence to address systemic inequities. These two skills can help school counselors garner support to dismantling racist structures. As school counselors begin to support students' and stakeholders' awareness of racist structures, they may be able to partner with stakeholders to support their antiracist work. Although this case scenario is aspirational, we expect school counselors to review this framework as a blueprint for interrogating their school's MTSS data, systems, and practices. While we do not expect school counselors to implement all suggestions at once, we hope the case example provides school counselors with access points they can use to support their schools in moving toward liberated and antiracist structures.

Case Study

Thomson Middle School (TMS) is a suburban school located about 20 miles east of a city center. The school has a diverse community, with 30% of students identifying as Black, 30% as Latinx/Hispanic, 25% as White, 5% as Asian, and 5% identifying as mixed race. The school has an active MTSS team implementing with moderate to high fidelity for more than 5 years, with 80% or more stakeholder buy-in, including the school counseling department. The TMS school counseling team comprises three full-time school counselors, one of whom is a member of the school's MTSS team.

With the increased emphasis on antiracism in the United States, including in K–12 education, the TMS school counseling team approached their building administrators, suggesting the need to evaluate their school through an antiracist lens and explicitly acknowledging that: (a) the education system may primarily benefit students identifying with historically privileged populations (i.e., White, Christian, cisgender male, heterosexual, and able-bodied; Mayes, 2021), (b) antiracist work is ongoing, and (c) such work begins by critically examining one's own values, identities, and biases (Betters-Bubon et al., 2022). The TMS administrators were supportive and asked the school counselors and the MTSS team to work together due to their overlapping focus on school-wide data, systems, and practices (Goodman-Scott et al., 2020).

Self-Reflection and Awareness

As a first step, the school counseling team led an activity in which administrators, school counselors, and the MTSS team reflected on their views on racism and how they may impact students' perspectives (Betters-Bubon et al., 2022). For instance, this team (school counselors, administrators, and MTSS team) discussed: (a) how racism impacts the greater society, (b) the impact of White privilege on the K–12 education system, and (c) their feelings around racism (Pieterse, 2009). The group also considered the intersecting identities held by group members and how these identities impact the conversation, individuals' experiences, and the balance of power.

Interrogating Data Collection and Review

The use of data is critical to the MTSS process because data typically drive decisions within practices and systemic work. The team discussed data from two different aspects of the process. First, they examined the processes used to determine what data should be collected and how it should be reviewed. Next, the team reviewed the data collected to illuminate needs. Overall, the goal of this data interrogation was to explore how the school showed that students mattered within their community (Love, 2020). Mattering is a term used to simply describe the act of showing students, especially those of color, that they are represented in the fabric of school, are seen and heard, and know they belong in a school (Love, 2020). The team had to question how their use of data valued the voices of their students and helped alleviate barriers to their success.

A Critical Look at Data Collection and Review Processes. One of the team's challenges was a lack of student and stakeholder voice in feedback on the data review team. Traditionally, TMS teachers and administrators reviewed data during their teacher team meetings. Although the school asked for volunteers from the school community to participate on a data review team, families lacked understanding of the purpose and trust that their voice would result in lasting systemic change. Moreover, the data being reviewed—standardized tests, online surveys, attendance, and discipline referrals—did not paint the complete picture of what was happening at the school. The team realized they could not truly be inclusive of student voices without expanding their understanding of data collection to include a broader range of data.

A Critical Examination of the Current Data. In examining data, stakeholders noticed that several BIPOC students, particularly Latinx males, were failing their language arts standardized test. Black and Latinx males were also disproportionately suspended in comparison to their school enrollment. Previously, the team reviewed this data to determine interventions targeted toward fixing the Black and Latinx males to perform and behave better. However, the team expressed concern with focus solely on changing the student and not exploring the practices and structures creating these disparities.

Action Steps Related to Data. To address the concerns related to the processes used to examine data, the team suggested several action items. First, the team expanded their data review team using the following strategies: (a) assembling a representative panel of students, families, and community members, (b) holding data team meetings outside of school hours when families were available, (c) providing school staff information on the purpose and how feedback would be used, (d) sending personal invitations to families participate in these meetings, and (e) soliciting stakeholder feedback throughout the process. To dig deeper into what was causing disparities, the team discussed the importance of using a range of types of data beyond outcome data (e.g., perception data; qualitative feedback from students, teachers, and families), and examining root cause (e.g., root cause analysis [RCA], a data analysis procedure used to determine the context behind the data in a school; Taylor & Burgess, 2019). RCA focuses on identifying the root cause of a problem to provide intervention that relieves the root causes as opposed to interventions that address the symptoms. For a more detailed description of RCA, see Taylor and Burgess's chapter in *The School Counselor's Guide to Multi-Tiered Systems of Support* (Goodman-Scott et al., 2019). The review team suggested a more personalized approach to gathering data that included phone calls and flexible scheduling and location for meetings to ensure they were more accessible to the larger school community (Betters-Bubon & Schultz, 2017). In utilizing RCA, school leaders identify a concern, collect multiple types of data, review potential causes/roots for the concern, and then provide recommended solutions (Taylor & Burgess, 2019). Using RCA, the team gleaned a better understanding of developing student supports that directly targeted the root cause of concerns and supported advocacy efforts to dismantle policies and procedures that may negatively impact students who identify with historically oppressed student groups (Goodman-Scott et al., 2020).

After establishing the data review team and locating points to expand data collection, the TMS team shared the current data points regarding Latinx and Black males with the review team for insight. The data review team noted three concerns. First, the majority of TMS school staff are White females, which may result in a lack of awareness for the other cultures in the school and lead to a higher number of discipline referrals for Black and Latinx males. Thus, the stakeholders suggested that school staff participate in activities related to understanding their biases and how they might impact their perception of students. They also suggested efforts to recruit and retain more Black and Latinx educators to the school. Second, the stakeholders noted the biases inherent in standardized tests, which may not effectively demonstrate students' knowledge, particularly students from minoritized populations (Kim & Zabelina, 2015). Stakeholders emphasized that this concern could be exacerbated by the lack of culturally representative curriculum inherent in K–12 schools (Dee & Penner, 2017). The stakeholders suggested that teachers utilize various inclusive strategies to assess students' content mastery, including projects, oral exams, and class discussions. Finally, stakeholders also communicated the harm in focusing on standardized testing data without thinking about their students' social/emotional wellness (Love, 2020). As such, the TMS team decided to pilot the Elevate platform from the Project for Education Research That Scales (PERTS, n.d.). Within the Elevate platform, designed to collect student voices regarding their connection to content, psychological safety in the classroom, and meaningful relationships in the school (i.e., mattering), teachers were able to measure the quality and equity of their learning environment. This assessment reviews the learning conditions in the school based on multiple factors of mattering (i.e., affirming cultural identity, classroom belonging, feedback for growth, meaningful work, student voice, and teacher caring; PERTS, n.d.).

Interrogating Systems

In committing to antiracist work, the team prioritized interrogating the school's policies and procedures to consider how they currently may uphold white supremacy; this work was done alongside and intertwined with examining school data. In this interrogation process, the MTSS team first acknowledged that the school policies and procedures were likely influenced by their biases and dominant cultural identities, which affected the school's culture and practices. Thus, the team began interrogating the system by reflecting on their identities, biases, and self-awareness regarding student success, desired behaviors, and academic achievement. Then, in tandem with their work detailed in the data section, the team reached out to stakeholders for input on policies and procedures. The first step was to elicit feedback on the mission and vision statement and how they included diversity, equity, and inclusion.

A Critical Look at Policies and Procedures. After revising the mission and vision, the team listed all TMS policies and procedures and systematically began reviewing them with stakeholders. Sample policies included behavioral expectations, student promotion and retention, dress code, and criteria for participating in advanced courses and extracurricular activities. School procedures often relate to maintaining a safe, organized, consistent, and welcoming community for all students, staff, families, and community members. Examples of procedures include: distributing positive acknowledgments, discipline referral criteria, communicating absences, registering for classes and events, conducting fire drills, student drop-off and pick-up, etc. In interrogating policies and procedures, the TMS team and stakeholders considered context and culture and asked: (a) How does this policy/procedure support and hinder students? (b) Which students are impacted positively by this policy/procedure, and which are affected negatively? (c) How does the dominant culture influence these policies/procedures? (d) Are there any policies/procedures that are keeping families from feeling safe or welcome?

School Counseling Support as a System. Beyond considering school/MTSS policies and procedures, the team also reviewed the school counseling department as its own system because it provides services embedded in, but unique from, many school policies and procedures. This level of interrogation was also conducted with feedback from student, family, and community stakeholders. First, the team examined the school counseling department's vision and mission statements, aligning the language related to equity and ensuring a student advisory council and stakeholder group representative from various grade levels and demographic backgrounds across the school.

Next, the team examined the school counseling policies and procedures used to identify and provide services, ranging from (a) topics for classroom lessons, (b) membership in small group counseling, (c) family consultation and collaboration, and (d) other school counseling direct and indirect services. Specifically, the team conducted an RCA using data from multiple sources (i.e., outcome data, stakeholders' feedback, teacher, and administrator referrals), showing that, typically, the students who knew or participated in school counseling services were (a) those whose parents/families regularly called the office and were active participants in school activities, (b) students who were failing one or more classes, or (c) students in crisis. Thus, it appeared the school counseling department was disproportionately serving some students more than others based on access to resources and communication (family and staff referral and engagement). Hence, there was a need for a more equitable student referral process. The school counselors also realized they were working from a deficit structure, focusing on their implicit biases around saving or providing services to students with perceived high needs, rather than advocating to change the system or structures (e.g., policies and procedures) in the school that cause barriers to students.

Action Steps Related to Systems. Overall, the TMS team determined that a schedule for evaluating and revising the policies and procedures school-wide and within the school counseling department with stakeholder groups would be necessary. They discussed presenting to and soliciting feedback from various stakeholder groups regarding changes to policies and procedures in different locations across the TMS neighborhood, providing access to families in the community. The team also revised policies that negatively targeted one group more than other groups. For example, dress code policies were removed, so students were not inappropriately punished and kept them from class. The policies also focused less on culturally laden behaviors, such as disrespect, and more on maintaining safe spaces for all students, such as eradicating behaviors that cause emotional or physical harm to other students. Procedures were also scrutinized in this process. Procedures that caused undue barriers to opportunities, such as advanced placement courses or extracurricular activities, were removed, providing all students with the chance to participate regardless of a teacher or school counselor recommendation. The TMS team also reviewed their procedures in partnership with caregivers. They ensured that school pick-up procedures included families who might not have access to a driver's license (e.g., undocumented individuals in some states or, for legal reasons, a license might be revoked) and that information was accessible in languages caregivers could understand.

The school counseling department also aligned its data collection and analysis with the school's practices, including concepts of mattering (Love, 2020). For instance, they decided to target interventions related to the PERTS (n.d.) Elevate assessment in addition to the academic and behavior data. Regardless of the data and test scores, the school counselors communicated to students that they mattered (i.e., for students to feel valued, regardless of their journey aligning with the criteria for success as defined by teachers, administrators, and families). They did this by offering opportunities for students to participate in youth-led research on issues impacting them in the school. These youth-led participatory action research (YPAR) groups were facilitated by the school counselors. In YPAR, students research a problem impacting them in the school and determine actionable steps stakeholders can take to incorporate youth's needs into policies, procedures, and practices in the school. The process helped students reflect on the impact of the problem on them personally while also showing them that the school staff valued their voice. More on YPAR can be found in Edirmanasinghe (2020) and Edirmanasinghe et al. (2022). Last, the team reviewed their procedures for students, families, and community stakeholders to access the school counseling program. School counselors agreed to provide staggered times for lunch breaks. They also held conferences and training during out-of-school hours and in various locations throughout the community.

Interrogating Practices

In addition to interrogating the school data and systems, the team also reviewed the TMS practices (e.g., interventions) used to support students. Like the work with the data and systems sections, the team first reflected on how their beliefs and practices may perpetuate racism and inequities. For instance, the TMS MTSS school-wide expectations demonstrate character traits (e.g., respect and kindness). At the same time, critics of character education argue that promoting desired or good characteristics can be subjective and promote the beliefs of the dominant culture, thus viewing the culture, character, and beliefs of those in minoritized populations as incorrect or from a deficit lens, while also ignoring the environmental and contextual factors impact students' behaviors (Winton, 2008).

In interrogating practices, the team also noticed that the school's focus on cultural deficits was impeding their ability to dismantle structures that created barriers to success opportunities with students who identified as BIPOC. Cultural capital refers to the cultural knowledge, skills, and abilities held or learned by historically privileged populations that help them maintain power in society. The original works on cultural capital assume that individuals have cultural capital based on their alignment with the dominant culture (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977). Therefore, students would only gain capital by being members of the dominant culture or learning it through formal schools (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977). At TMS, the team found that their practices aligned with this cultural capital philosophy, viewing some students through a strengths-based lens and others through a deficit lens.

Action Steps Related to Practices. After reviewing the criticism of character education and how this relates to MTSS (see the criticisms section of the literature review), the team implemented Tier 1 supports that focused on cultivating caring relationships with school staff and students. Thus, the staff ensured that every student had a connection with at least one staff member in the school, thereby modeling healthy relationships. To reduce the bias perpetuated from cultural capital, the team focused on practices that promoted community cultural wealth (Yosso, 2005). Unlike Bourdieu and Passeron's cultural capital model, which centered White, middle-class values as the standard, Yosso's community cultural wealth model highlighted the knowledge, abilities, skills, and contacts that communities of color utilize to resist and thrive in various forms of oppression. Specifically, community cultural wealth includes multiple other viewpoints of capital, including aspirational (maintaining hopes and dreams in the face of barriers), linguistic (skills attained by speaking more than one language/style of language), familial (cultural knowledge that develops a sense of community history, memory, and cultural intuition), social (networks of people and community resources), resistant (skills and knowledge developed to navigate opposition and/or subordination), and navigational (skills to maneuver social institutions) capital. The team decided to consult with stakeholders to develop a community cultural asset map to determine what resources the local neighborhoods, families, and students bring that would help bolster supportive practice across all three tiers (Grothaus et al., 2020). A community asset map consists of four steps to map resources and supports in the community to serve as a resource guide for stakeholders (e.g., families, teachers, students, and school counselors). The steps suggested by Griffin and Farris (2010) include (a) developing a multidisciplinary team; (b) examining current resource, service, and program lists and adding any new ones; (c) contacting individual and community resources; and (d) developing a guide and mapping the assets the resources bring to the school. The TMS team agreed to review the overarching concepts/viewpoints that influence practices across all three tiers, examining how they encompass concepts of community cultural wealth specifically.

Conclusion

Through the portrayal of TMS, a fictitious case study, we demonstrated the purposeful infusion of antiracism into a school's MTSS data, systems, and practices, initiated by a team of school counselors. In examining the case study, several key points emerged. First, a crucial part of antiracist MTSS implementation is the self-awareness of those who play a role in planning and implementing the framework. The educators supporting MTSS implementation need to acknowledge how their biases, assumptions, and cultural knowledge impact their work in schools and how they assess and implement their school's data, systems, and practices. Stakeholder input throughout MTSS and school counseling program implementation also is crucial to the process. Stakeholders representing the diverse family, student, and community makeup of the school should be involved in all decision-making processes.

Educators should consider multiple data points to get a broader perspective of student learning and behaviors when reviewing data. Further, before planning interventions for students, educators should complete an RCA to drill down to particular needs that could be addressed. This analysis could result in practices more focused on systems change versus student skills. Last, supporting students includes removing barriers to opportunities. As mentioned previously, educators may need to look beyond the standard practices of changing behaviors by implementing traditional skill-building supports focused on fixing the student.

In sum, through the implementation of MTSS, school counselors recognize inequities and advocate for the needs of every student, particularly for students from historically oppressed communities (ASCA, 2019; Goodman-Scott et al., 2020). Although this is important work, school counselors can move their efforts one step beyond typical MTSS implementation to focus on systems change and utilize an antiracist lens in their systemic change. Thus, school counselors take on additional perspective and commitment through antiracism, learning to interrupt and dismantle oppressive systems in K–12 education to create and build more equitable and antiracist environments where all students have a more significant opportunity to grow and thrive (Mayes, 2021).

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