



Statement in Support of Anti-Racist Education

September 24, 2020

The hallmark of a democratic society is support and encouragement of free speech. With that freedom as foundational—protecting generally welcome and unwelcome speech of the times—we can ever improve our imperfect, but laudable union. So important is this value that, in the United States, free speech is codified in the Constitution as the very First Amendment. A directly related hallmark of the academy is academic freedom, which has been recognized by courts as within the implied interests of the First Amendment.¹ Both notions, free speech and academic freedom, are deeply ingrained in free societies. Even when the ideas that emerge are unpopular, there is no more precious right than free speech. It is through respect for evidence-based discourse on difficult subjects that we advance as a society.

Our associations are proud of our enduring commitment to open, trustworthy inquiry and the hard work we have done in our scholarly field to examine issues of equity, diversity, inclusion, and anti-racism in education *writ large* as well as in education policy, administration, and practice contexts. This commitment extends to examining the history, unintended biases and exclusionary practices in all sectors, including research, as part of promoting integrity, honesty, and inclusivity and ultimately excellence in every part of society.

Just as a democratic society needs to support the production of scientific and scholarly knowledge free of political manipulation or intrusion, we need educational systems that are not politicized and censored, but rather seek the truth by exploring even the most difficult truths. We need to teach students to engage on difficult topics with intellectual integrity and respectful discourse. We are troubled by actions that appear to reject these principles, and especially on topics as salient to U.S. society as equality and justice for all. We must also respect the rule of law in our educational systems, including Congressional prohibitions of federal government prescriptions and prohibitions of curriculum content in our schools.²

In our interest in serving the public good, we specifically call attention to three current administration efforts (1) to ban use of the 1619 Project by those teaching about race in U.S. schools ; (2) the Office of Management and Budget's September 4 directive to Executive Departments and Agencies to dictate what training about race, diversity, or equality can include

¹ See *Sweezy v. New Hampshire*, 354 U.S. 234 (1957). The holding of this is a late McCarthy era case, where an academic refused to answer the government's questions about what he was teaching, addresses due process—but its discussion is renowned for recognizing the importance of academic freedom in American society and democracy.

² See, 20 USC 1232a (Prohibition against Federal control of education) ("No provision of any applicable program shall be construed to authorize any department, agency, officer, or employee of the United States to exercise any direction, supervision, or control over the curriculum, program of instruction, administration, or personnel of any educational institution, school, or school system, or over the selection of library resources, textbooks, or other printed or published instructional materials by any educational institution or school system...."); 20 USC 3403(b) (similar language); 20 USC 8526A.

(explicitly mandating the exclusion of a theoretical perspective that has led to important scientific research on systemic racism); and (3) the U.S. Department of Education launching an investigation of Princeton University based on the contention that the university's intention to reconsider its own potential biases or patterns of systemic racism means that prior assurances of non-bias constituted false statements, implicitly threatening the university's federal funding.

Our statement is intended to bring to the attention of diverse publics—whatever one's political party or views— that these actions both undermine our democracy and fly in the face of what scientific inquiry has affirmed on many issues and in many contexts. Evidence in studies of early childhood development through professional development and training demonstrates that exposure to a diversity of ideas and open inquiry about them leads all persons to better learning, more consensual decision-making, and a deeper appreciation of oneself and others. And, evidence also tells us that we have much more work to do to elevate understanding of racism in U.S. society, which is critical to its eradication. (See relevant scientific studies attached.)

We need in essence more and better education about race and racism without the imposition of a federal government view about what it can and cannot include. Despite the progress that the nation has made toward racial equality, we recognize that we still have a long way to go. This past spring and summer have shown us that far too many persons in the U.S. cannot pursue life, liberty, and happiness with assurance they will receive equal treatment under the law. The ways that education researchers and other scientists attempt to remedy social problems is through research, teaching, and professional learning. Thus, we stand against any directives that do not allow professionals to talk openly and honestly about race and racism even when these discussions are uncomfortable.

The evidence suggests that addressing issues of race and racism requires a level of candor not often experienced in workplaces and education settings. In the 1970s, educators stood against Holocaust deniers to ensure that students would learn the truth of Nazism and Anti-Semitism. Today, we must stand against the notion that systemic racism does not exist. Institutions examining their practices, researchers interrogating these issues, or educational programming confronting the topic should be applauded for tackling the most difficult of problems. As our research attests, all of us, regardless of what we do or what we believe, will be better for it.

American Educational Research Association
National Academy of Education

In collaboration with the following endorser scientific societies

American Academy of Social Work and Social Welfare
American Anthropological Association
American Association for Anatomy
American Association for Dental Research
American Society for Gravitational and Space Research
American Society of Tropical Medicine & Hygiene
American Sociological Association
American Thoracic Society

Consortium of Social Science Associations (COSSA)
Council on Undergraduate Research
Entomological Society of America
Federation of American Scientists
The Gerontological Society of America
National Communication Association
OSA-The Optical Society
Society for the Psychological Study of Social Issues (SPSSI)

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