

Diverse City, White Curriculum

The Exclusion of People of Color from English Language Arts in NYC Schools

Every day, hundreds of thousands of students in NYC public schools experience the ongoing, wearing injustice of reading book after book, and learning curriculum after curriculum that does not reflect them, their families or their communities.

The lack of representation in curriculum presents a developmental challenge for students striving to establish their identity and sense of self; it also presents an academic challenge, as research shows that students engage more deeply and achieve at higher levels when their curriculum connects to their identities and experiences. As scholar Rudine Sims Bishop stated, “When children cannot find themselves reflected in the books they read, or when the images they see are distorted, negative, or laughable, they learn a powerful lesson about how they are devalued in the society of which they are a part” (Bishop, 1990). Research demonstrates that for students of color and white students, culturally responsive education decreases dropout rates and suspensions, and increases grade point averages, student participation, self-image, critical thinking skills and graduation rates (Browman, 2011; Butler-Barnes, 2018; Carter, 2008; Laird, 2005; Morell, 2013).

Over the past three years, parents with the NYC Coalition for Educational Justice (CEJ) have pushed the NYC Department of Education (DOE) to embrace culturally responsive-sustaining education (CRSE) as a key strategy for an equitable education system with high levels of engagement and achievement for all students. For this report, we analyzed 1,200 books across 15 commonly-used curricula and booklists from 3-K through 8th grade,

examining the racial/ethnic demographics of the book authors and the cover characters (as a proxy for main characters) and comparing that to the demographic composition of NYC public schools.

The least diverse of all the grades we analyzed was early childhood education. In Mayor de Blasio’s signature 3-K and Pre-K programs, 93% of the authors and more than half the cover characters are white:

	Pre-K 4 All Curriculum	3-K Explorations Curriculum	Scholastic Pre-K Booklist
TOTAL # OF TEXTS	42	120	38
Native American	0	1	0
Middle Eastern	0	N/A	N/A
Asian	1	7	0
Latinx	1	1	0
Black	0	3	0
White	40	109	36

DIVERSITY IN NYC CURRICULA, 3-K TO 8TH GRADE

We analyzed more than 1,200 books across 15 commonly-used curricula and booklists from 3-K and Pre-K through 8th grade, examining the racial/ethnic demographics of the book authors and the cover characters (as a proxy for main characters) and comparing that to the demographic composition of NYC public schools. Across all eleven grades, white authors and characters are massively over-represented.

 NYC STUDENT POPULATION

 AUTHORS OF BOOKS

 HUMAN COVER CHARACTERS

1,205 BOOKS ANALYZED

MIDDLE EASTERN

N/A

 0.2% 3 OF 1,205 AUTHORS

 1% 6 OF 783 BOOKS

NATIVE AMERICAN

N/A

 1% 15 OF 1,205 AUTHORS

 3% 25 OF 783 BOOKS

LATINX

 16%

 4% 47 OF 1,205 AUTHORS

 8% 62 OF 783 BOOKS

ASIAN

 16%

 5% 55 OF 1,205 AUTHORS

 10% 80 OF 783 BOOKS

BLACK

 26%

 7% 82 OF 1,205 AUTHORS

 27% 211 OF 783 BOOKS

WHITE

 15%





TO READ THE FULL REPORT, VISIT:
bit.ly/NewCEJReport

It is important to note that when it comes to Native American representation in the curricula, proportionality is not the correct measure. The number of Native American students in NYC public schools is low due to colonization and genocide, but it is still crucial that all students learn the past and present of Native American cultures and communities on whose land we reside.

 41%

BOOKS

Of the 1,205 books we analyzed, 1,003 books were by white authors yet white students represent **only 15%** of NYC's student population.

This nearly five times more books than by *all authors of color combined.*

 51%

399 OF 783 BOOKS



83%
1,003 OF 1,205
AUTHORS

About Culturally Responsive-Sustaining Education (CRSE)

Culturally Responsive-Sustaining Education (CRSE) centers and values students' cultures and identities through:

1. Implementing rigorous and relevant curriculum, and anti-oppressive teaching practices.
2. Building strong and liberatory relationships between students, families, and school staff.
3. Supporting students to develop the knowledge, skills, and vision to transform the world toward justice.

CRSE cultivates critical thinking instead of just test-taking skills, relates academic study to contemporary issues and students' experiences; fosters positive academic, racial and cultural identities; develops students' ability to connect across cultures; empowers students as agents of social change and inspires students to fall in love with learning.

To see the NYC Department of Education's definition of Culturally Responsive-Sustaining Education, go to: www.schools.nyc.gov/about-us/vision-and-mission/culturally-responsive-sustaining-education

CEJ calls on the NYC doe to act immediately to meet the following demands:

1. **The NYC Department of Education must invest funds to create or purchase a culturally responsive English Language Arts curriculum for all students, from 3-K through 8th grade.**

The DOE must develop or acquire instructional and teachers materials that are engaging, asset-based, and culturally responsive, and reach students in every class, every grade, every day. This can be done through dedicating funds in Mayor de Blasio's fiscal year 2021 budget and issuing a Request for Proposals for the creation of new curriculum, aligned to the state's Next Generation learning standards.

Because many teachers are not accustomed to teaching curriculum by and about the diverse cultures of their students, the DOE will need to provide extensive professional development in the new curriculum and culturally responsive pedagogy. There are many experienced educators and leaders in NYC who have deep expertise in culturally responsive curriculum and pedagogy and could be tapped for this effort.

2. **The NYC Department of Education must cut ties with all curriculum/book vendors whose materials are not reflective of NYC student demographics in their content and authorship, and consistent with CRE principles.**

Companies that promote curriculum and booklists with virtually no representation of Black, Latinx, Asian, Native American and Middle Eastern communities have no place in New York City schools and should not be receiving tax dollars from our diverse residents. As the largest school district in the nation, New York City has the opportunity to lead in this area, and influence how children's curriculum vendors operate nationally. By refusing to purchase from vendors who sell white-dominated curriculum and increasing the demand for books by authors of color, New York City can push curriculum vendors to diversify their materials and increase the availability of culturally responsive curriculum for school districts across the country.

About the Coalition for Educational Justice

Led by parents, the NYC Coalition for Educational Justice is organizing a movement to end the inequities in the city's public school system. We are a collaborative of community-based organizations whose members include culturally and racially diverse parents, family members and community residents. We are motivated by the urgent need to obtain a quality, well-rounded and culturally responsive education for all students. We mobilize the power of parents and the community to affect policy change and create a more equitable educational system.

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