



Developing a Common Vocabulary

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Without a common vocabulary, discussions about race and equity can move in circles. People will talk past each other and fail even to understand where they disagree. By achieving some mutual understanding about the terms you're using, school staff, district leaders, and parents will put themselves in a better position to have meaningful, effective conversations about race and equity.

This document offers a selection of resources organized around specific words that are important for discussing race and equity today. Each of the words included here represents a concept.

These aren't all the important words or concepts relating to race and schools today. However, these terms should provide a strong foundation for a conversation about building integrated, equitable schools.

For a glossary of other important words that can help you discuss race in your community, as well as a comprehensive guide to having effective conversations about race, we suggest see the [*Talking About Race Toolkit*](#) developed by the Center for Social Inclusion.

Five Important Terms for Discussing Race and Equity

- 1. Ally.** The importance of being an ally is a major topic of discussion among those fighting for social justice. But what exactly does it mean to be an ally? How does it relate to privilege? And what happens when you make a mistake as an ally?
 - In [this guide](#) created by *Teaching Tolerance*, the author discusses what it means to be an ally and an educator.
 - In [this video](#), Franchesca Ramsey of MTV's *Decoded* offers a quick look at what it means to be a good ally for social justice.
 - Like the concept of an ally, anti-racism captures the view that you need to do more than just stand on the sidelines in the fight for social justice. [This video](#) by Marlon James outlines the difference between "non-racism" and "anti-racism."
- 2. Microaggression.** From commenting "you're so articulate!" to confusing two co-workers of the same race, a lot of racial slights take the form of microaggressions. These incidents can be small and are often unintentional. However, that doesn't mean they're unimportant. Understanding microaggressions can help to provide context for how people of different backgrounds experience race differently.

- [This video](#) by Fusion helps to contextualize the way that microaggressions build on one another and explains the way that the asymmetry in who is most affected by microaggressions can make them hard to see.

3. **Privilege.** How easy is it for you to find a Bandaid that matches the color of your skin? Among folks working towards social justice, privilege captures the idea that we often benefit from aspects of our identity, even if there's no logical connection between the benefit and that aspect of our identity.

- One of the most important statements on white privilege, in particular, was written by acclaimed academic, Peggy McIntosh. You can find her essay, "Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack," on the [National SEED Project website](#).

4. **Implicit Bias.** Do you respond to people differently by their race? Would you necessarily know if you did? Implicit bias refers to the collection of subconscious and often unacknowledged prejudices individuals carry and act on, even when we aren't aware of it. There's a lot of contemporary psychology that supports this idea, however, it can sound like a challenge to a lot of people. Having a firm grasp of both the research and what implicit bias means in the struggle for social justice can help you to navigate difficult conversations about race and other forms of social difference.

- [This report](#) by the Kirwan Institute for the Study of Race and Ethnicity offers an overview of the current research on implicit bias.
- In conjunction with MTV, the Kirwan Institute also put together the website [Look Different](#) that explores the different forms of bias and helps to provide resources to begin thinking about how to recognize implicit bias.

5. **Institutional Racism.** Although it's much less socially acceptable to voice explicitly racist ideas today than it was in the 1950's, even systems and institutions with racially neutral policies can have disparate, discriminatory impacts on minority groups. Although this is hardly a new phenomenon, understanding the racially discriminatory impacts of institutions is an increasingly central part of conversations about race today. Institutional racism captures this important idea and can help provide a framework for thinking about how to develop more just institutions.

- [Race Forward](#), a research organization committed to supporting meaningful conversations about race, put together a great video that discusses institutional and systemic racism. They show how discussions about institutional and systemic racism are necessary for having meaningful conversations about racial justice today and yet are too often lacking from mainstream media narratives of racism.

In his book, *Racism without Racists*, Dr. Eduardo Bonilla-Silva helps to shed light on how racism operates today. Reference: Bonilla-Silva, E. (2014). *Racism without racists: color-blind racism and the persistence of racial inequality in America* (Fourth edition). Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc.

- Housing plays an outside role in whether or not a young person will have access to a good school. Ta-Nehisi Coates' 2014 [Atlantic article](#) helps to show how institutional racism operates in the American housing market.