



A REPORT FROM THE NYC COALITION FOR EDUCATIONAL JUSTICE

Chronically Absent

The Exclusion of People of Color from NYC Elementary School Curricula

New York City public school students represent an extraordinary diversity of cultures, countries, traditions and stories. This diversity is a remarkable resource that schools can draw on for connecting learning to students’ lives, and teaching students about the world they will grow up in. But are NYC schools teaching a diverse curriculum? To answer that question, the NYC Coalition for Educational Justice (CEJ) partnered with the NYU Metropolitan Center for Equity and the Transformation of Schools (NYU Metro Center) to examine ten commonly-used English Language Arts resources in NYC public elementary schools: three booklists (Scholastic, NYC Reads 365, and the New York Public Library booklist) and seven K-5 curricula (Ready New York/ CCLS, Expeditionary Learning, Teachers College Reading and Writing Project, ReadWorks, Pearson ReadyGen, Junior Great Books, and Great Minds). We compared their authors and cover characters to the demographic composition of NYC public schools and found that white authors and characters are massively over-represented.

These statistics mean that most of the 200,000 Latinx children, 130,000 Black children, and 80,000 Asian children in NYC public elementary schools graduate 5th grade having rarely read a book by an author of their cultural background. And many Latinx and Asian children graduate 5th grade having rarely read a book *about* a character of their cultural background.

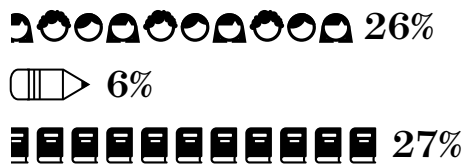
REPRESENTATION OF AUTHORS AND CHARACTERS IN BOOKS

NYC STUDENT POPULATION AUTHORS OF BOOKS HUMAN COVER CHARACTERS

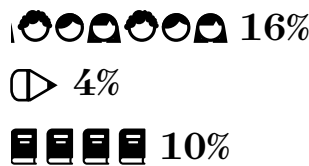
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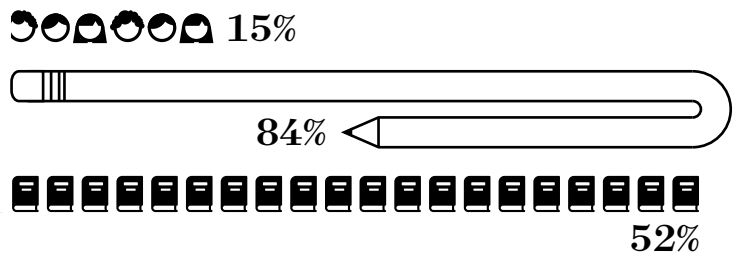
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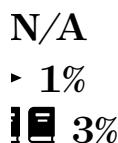
ASIAN



WHITE



NATIVE AMERICAN



These averages conceal even more alarming inequities:

Of the 71 authors in the Teachers College Reading and Writing Project K-5 grade curriculum, there is **not a single author or single cover character of Latinx descent.**

Of the 82 books in the Great Minds K-5 grade curriculum, there is **only one Asian author.**

Of the 140 books on the NYC Department of Education's Reads 365 elementary school list, 8 are by Black authors, 7 by Asian authors, 6 by Latinx authors, and 1 by a Native American author. The other **118 are by White authors.**

Among the 10 curricula, **not a single one had an author of Middle Eastern descent**, and 8 out of 10 didn't have a single cover character of Middle Eastern descent.

More than half the curricula (6) **did not have a single Native American author.**


When we add **animal characters** to our analysis, we find that students read more books whose cover characters are animals than books whose cover characters are Latinx, Black, or Asian people.

In 6 of the 10 curricula, there are more books with animals as cover characters than Latinx, Black, and Asian cover characters *combined*.

To gain a deeper understanding of the NYC ELA curricula, CEJ and the NYU Metro Center convened teams of parents, teachers, and community members to use the **Culturally Responsive Curriculum Scorecard** to evaluate their school's curriculum and identify which of five categories it falls into: Culturally Destructive, Culturally Insufficient, Emerging Cultural Awareness, Culturally Aware or Culturally Responsive. The teams felt that the majority of the curricula were *Culturally Destructive*, with a few scored as *Culturally Insufficient*. These scores indicate that problematic issues embedded in these seven ELA curricula go beyond numerical

REPRESENTATION OF COVER CHARACTERS

 NYC STUDENT POPULATION

 ALL COVER CHARACTERS

LATINX



BLACK



ASIAN



WHITE



NATIVE AMERICAN

N/A



ANIMALS

N/A



representation to the activities that students are engaged in, which are full of deficit messages about people of diverse identities.

There is no excuse for these disparities because there is a wealth of wonderful children's literature by and about people of color, readily available on websites such as: Social Justice Books (socialjusticebooks.org/booklists), American Indians in Children's Literature (americanindiansinchildrensliterature.blogspot.com), 1000 Black Girl Books (grassrootscommunityfoundation.org/1000-black-girl-books-resource-guide), We Need Diverse Books (diversebooks.org/resources/where-to-find-diverse-books), and Lee and Low (leeandlow.com).



Recommendations

CEJ calls on the NYC Department of Education to:

1. Create a culturally responsive English Language Arts curriculum for all students, from kindergarten through 8th grade.

Simply inserting diverse books into existing ELA curriculum will not be sufficient; the DOE must develop instructional and teachers materials that are engaging, asset-based, and culturally responsive. 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, as well as culturally responsive pedagogical methods.

2. 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 and Asian communities have no place in New York City schools, and should not be receiving tax dollars from our diverse residents. 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 Culturally Responsive Education (CRE)

Culturally responsive education (CRE) is a cultural view of learning and human development in which multiple forms of diversity (e.g., race, social class, gender, language, sexual orientation, nationality, religion, ability) are recognized as indispensable sources of knowledge for teaching and learning, and assets that contribute to positive academic outcomes.

CRE 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.

CEJ's full Platform for Culturally Responsive Education calls for the NYC Department of Education to implement CRE in the following ways:

Staff at all levels of NYC schools must represent the diversity of the student population and be skilled in culturally responsive education and anti-discriminatory practices

- Develop a more diverse pipeline of teachers by expanding programs to recruit and retain an additional 1,000 teachers and 250 school leaders of color by 2020
- Require that staff at all levels of the DOE are skilled in CRE, from the DOE Cabinet and leadership teams to school instructional and operations staff, by providing:
- Create a micro-credentialing system to recognize school staff with expertise in cultural proficiency, and inform hiring and promotion decisions

All NYC public schools must offer a variety of classes, curricula, projects and resources that are grounded in the rich diversity of the NYC student population

- Create and staff an Office of Culturally Responsive Education within the DOE's Division of Teaching and Learning to help integrate CRE throughout the system
- Convene and support teachers to collaboratively develop key curricular resources
- Expand curriculum and materials that schools can purchase with DOE funds, to include more diverse, contemporary and culturally accurate texts and resources
- Require that classroom and school libraries have an abundance of books authored by and featuring characters representative of the diverse populations of NYC

All schools must establish a positive, culturally responsive school culture that respects and honors youth of all races, cultures and abilities

- Require and fund training on culturally responsive discipline practices for staff, parents and students, including full-time Restorative Justice Coordinators in schools
- Eliminate arrests and summons for all non-criminal violations and remove metal detectors, which have a disproportionate negative impact on students of color
- Create safe spaces for student-led conversations, exploration and leadership around race, culture and other core identities

Parent engagement efforts must be culturally responsive, value parents as assets and experts, and build the capacity of school staff to engage effectively with families

- Expand research-based models such as Parent-Teacher Home Visits, Academic Parent-Teacher Teams, Parent Education & Empowerment Partners
- Require and support schools to conduct yearly tours of their neighborhood for school staff, in partnership with parents and neighborhood organizations
- Offer know-your-rights trainings for families in their native languages, and strengthen translation and interpretation services at all schools

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.

726 Broadway, 5th Floor
New York, NY 10003

f nyccej

t @cejnyc

y [youtube.com/watch?v=zhtdcjQtxtw](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zhtdcjQtxtw)

212.998.5501

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