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**QUOTE** “Training teachers to understand bias will not eliminate it, but it could create an institutional environment in which it is clear that understanding bias and its effects is critically important. The long-term return on investment is inestimable.”

– SORAYA CHEMALY

## INTRODUCTION

Over the past few years, statistics have shown an increase in racially disproportionate discipline ending in what is called the School to Prison Pipeline. Zero Tolerance policies and a more direct link to the criminal justice system through School Resource Officers have influenced this trend. In addition, research has shown a major contributor to this issue is the implicit bias of school personnel. According to the Ohio State University Kirwan Institute for the Study of Race and Ethnicity (2016), implicit bias refers to the attitudes or stereotypes that affect our understanding, actions, and decisions in an unconscious manner. Implicit bias does not necessarily align with our explicit beliefs.

Implicit bias is developed in our pre-adult years by our personal experiences. As educators, it can influence the way we respond to our students because we perceive students based on our implicit bias. The impact of this can create “cultural deficit thinking” based on appearance, behavior, and language. The consequence is that the number of referrals and degree of disciplinary action varies according to race, especially in subjective situations of disrespect, disruption, and defiance. As a result, these students miss instructional time, often have poor academic outcomes, drop out, and are more likely to become involved in the juvenile justice system.

Get **READY** to identify your own implicit bias.

[A Tool for Identifying Implicit Bias: Awareness of Common Shortcuts](#) from the University of Washington ADVANCE Center for Institutional Change lists eight shortcuts that can lead to erroneous conclusions.

Take an Implicit Association Test (IAT) at [Project Implicit at Harvard University](#) to identify personal implicit bias in several areas.

Read the [State of the Science: Implicit Bias Review](#) (2016 Edition) from the Kirwan Institute at Ohio State University to deepen your awareness of challenges presented to society by implicit bias.

**SET** your sights on reducing implicit bias in your school.

According to a Kirwan Institute Special Report, May 2014, “African-American Students without disabilities are more than three times as likely as their white peers without disabilities to be expelled” (p.1). This alone is enough to make us stop and think about our own practices as teachers and administrators.

So, what can we do to reduce our biases? According to *Four Ways Teachers Can Reduce Implicit Bias* published in Greater Good Magazine (Suttie, 2016) there are several steps that could help.

- Step one is to cultivate awareness of our biases.  
Our biases are natural and are used as shorthand for making quick social judgements in ambiguous situations. They become an issue when we are not aware of the impact they have on those around us (Suttie, 2016).
- Step two is to increase empathy and empathetic communication.  
Increasing our awareness of the communities in which our students live and learning about the circumstances of their lives show that we care. Which, in turn, enables us to, “consider environmental circumstances more closely when handing out punishments for misbehavior” (p. 5). According to a recent study, “training teachers in empathy cut student suspension rates in half” (Suttie, 2016, p.5).
- Step three is to practice mindfulness and loving kindness.  
Decreasing our stress level through mindfulness can have indirect effects on reducing biases. As well as “treating students with kindness and consideration is a sure way to bring out kindness in them, too” (Suttie, 2016, p.6).
- Step four is to develop cross-group friendships in our own lives.  
Cross-group friendships outside of our classrooms help us to decrease stress, prejudice, and our preference for social hierarchy, which makes us more receptive and understanding of the diversity in our classroom populations (Suttie, 2016).

By putting steps in place to reduce implicit bias in our schools, we will create safe, caring, and welcoming environments for our students. It’s in these environments where all students will thrive and be able to embrace the educational opportunities placed in front of them.

To find out more, **GO** to:

[Break the Prejudice Habit](#) - a Web site devoted to the prejudice habit-breaking intervention developed by Dr. Patricia Devine, professor of social psychology at the University of Wisconsin-Madison and leading expert in the scientific study of implicit bias.

[Equity Matters: Confronting Implicit Bias](#) - a webinar from Teaching Tolerance, an organization dedicated to creating inclusive educational communities for all children.

[Preschool Expulsions and Suspensions: What Early Childhood Leaders Need to Know about the Role of Implicit Bias](#) - a presentation by Dr. Walter S. Gilliam, Director of the Edward Zigler Center in Child Development & Social Policy and Associate Professor of Child Psychiatry and Psychology at the Child Study Center at Yale University School of Medicine, addressing the impact of implicit bias in classrooms for our youngest learners.

[This Test Reveals Implicit Biases You Don't Know You Have](#) - a video published by *The Christian Science Monitor* about the [Implicit Association Test \(IAT\)](#) at Project Implicit at Harvard University as well as strategies for addressing implicit bias in professional environments.

[Who Am I? A Race Awareness Game](#) - an educational app for children designed to promote culturally responsive discussions between children and adults around diversity.

**References:**

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