

AWKWARD CONVERSATIONS GUIDE

A roadmap for engaging and transforming the toxic schools narrative one conversation at a time

We are so glad you're here. We think this resource will be helpful as you navigate the very same conversations and moments that inspired us to create it. Please consider making a contribution <u>here</u> so we can be sure more resources like this are available in the future

INTEGRATED SCHOOLS

Through outreach, advocacy, and community building, Integrated Schools mobilizes families particularly those with racial or economic privilege - to practice antiracist school integration.

www.IntegratedSchools.org MaintegratedSchools.org

Integrated Schools

@IntegratedSchls

2nd Edition Updated 1/16/2023

@IntegratedSchools

 \overline{O}



YOUR VOICE MATTERS

The "schools" conversation happens everywhere: playgrounds, birthday parties, family get-togethers, even in line to get coffee. For many parents, school choice anxiety is fed by peer pressure, our own insecurities about parenting, and a cultural assumption that our child's success and happiness in life hinge heavily on our educational choices. It is also steeped in a racially-biased "broken schools" narrative that presumes that public education is failing us, and that schools are either "bad" (common) or "good" (exceptional).

For those of us thinking about integration and racial justice, these conversations can be messy and nuanced and complicated; fraught issues of parenting, community, race, and class are all in play.

This guide is specifically designed to help White parents* engage in the schools conversation in ways that ultimately transform the toxic schools narrative, one playground encounter at a time. While knowing what to say in the moment is not always easy, we have the power to expose racist ideas and begin to dismantle a White supremacy culture¹ so pervasive that most of our White peers are not even aware of the way it shapes our choices and impacts our society. **Your voice matters.**

HOW DOES THIS GUIDE WORK?

Drawing on parents' experiences across the country, this guide groups some of the common questions and concerns that White parents raise about schools into four main topics: **School Quality, Competition & Risk, Social Discomfort**, and **Safety**. Each of these topics is addressed on a separate page, using the ACT (Affirm-Counter-Transform) approach:²

- **Affirm** meet the other person where they are by affirming shared values.
- **Counter** offer factual evidence (from research and your own experience) and a different perspective or context that encourages others to examine their assumptions.
- **Transform** offer an engaging solution or way to re-frame our thinking about the issue or concern.

The common concern statements appear in a column on the left-hand side. Next to this we present a shared value-*affirming* response that integrating parents have found to be a useful pivot point for engagement. In the middle column, the common concerns are matched to suggested *counter* statements (factual evidence, context that de-centers Whiteness & White-normed values) that we can use to encourage our peers to examine their assumptions. In the final column, the initial concern or question is *transformed*, presenting an antiracist³ framing of the issue.

A GUIDE FOR WHITE PARENTS HAVING THOSE AWKWARD CONVERSATIONS ABOUT SCHOOL INTEGRATION

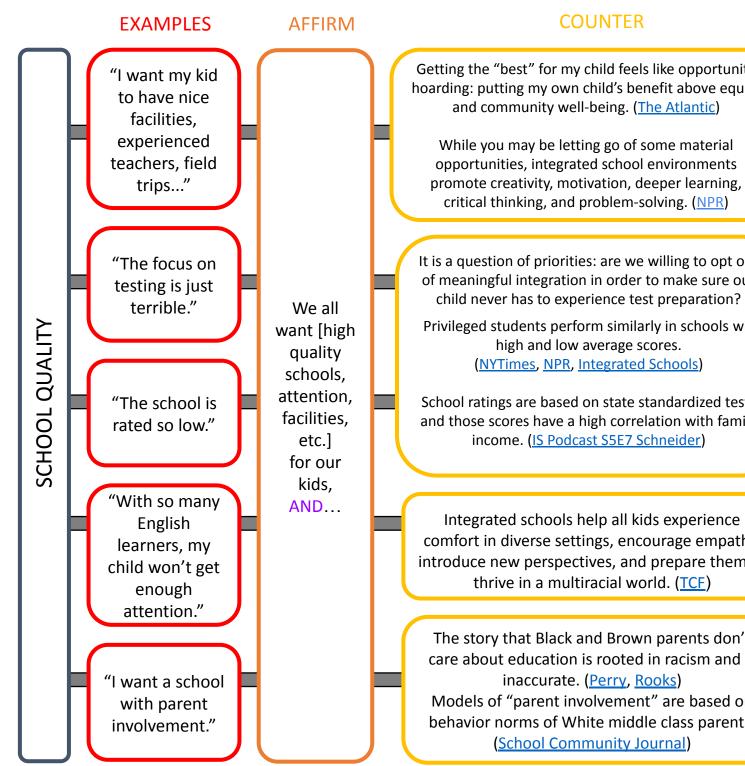
This guide is NOT a script! Don't feel like you have to memorize the material or be able to cite references at the drop of a GreatSchools rating! The main thing to take from this is that *You Have the Power* to engage in these conversations in a way that changes the way we talk about schools... and integration.

GENERAL TIPS

- Ask questions. How are we defining what is "the best" and "success?" What does
 it mean to "fit" at a school? These kinds of questions can help pin down the
 specific worries a parent has, either to address those concerns more specifically
 or to pull our "coded language" out of the shadows and call attention to the
 biases that shape our thinking.
- Share your story. Anecdotes are not data, but they can be convincing. Framing your responses within your own journey can help, e.g. "Our experience has been..." or "I've found at our school..."
- **Practicing antiracist school integration** is a powerful step towards justice, but also requires balance. We want to stop contributing to segregation **and** we believe that these experiences will benefit our kids. But focusing only on why integration is good for White kids slips quickly into a kind of opportunity hoarding; a using kids of color for the benefit of our own. Similarly, focusing on why integration is good for all kids and for democracy quickly becomes sanctimony and White saviorism. It's a juggling act of *both/and* and neither too much.
- **Recognize these are tough conversations.** Conversations about Whiteness are difficult. White folks often get defensive and offended by these big truths particularly if they feel unprepared or "set up." We have been deeply conditioned by our society to avoid engaging in these types of dialogues. Being thoughtful about the timing and the necessary preparation may increase the chances of a successful conversation. Please don't consider it a failure if someone's fragility prevents them from considering these ideas in real time. Remember you are "planting seeds" and the person you're confronting may need time to process the information and perspective you are sharing.

 For a deeper understanding of the concept of White supremacy culture and how it presents itself in our communities, please explore Tema Okun's <u>White Supremacy Culture</u> website.
 ACT comes from the <u>Talking About Race Toolkit</u>.
 For a deeper understanding of antiracism, check out Ibram X. Kendi's <u>How to Be an Antiracist</u>.

*A similar approach may be useful to anyone engaging this topic with a parenting peer, but the specific examples and suggested responses given here were developed with White parents in mind.



Getting the "best" for my child feels like opportunity hoarding: putting my own child's benefit above equity

It is a question of priorities: are we willing to opt out of meaningful integration in order to make sure our

Privileged students perform similarly in schools with

School ratings are based on state standardized tests and those scores have a high correlation with family

comfort in diverse settings, encourage empathy, introduce new perspectives, and prepare them to

The story that Black and Brown parents don't care about education is rooted in racism and is Models of "parent involvement" are based on behavior norms of White middle class parents.

TRANSFORM

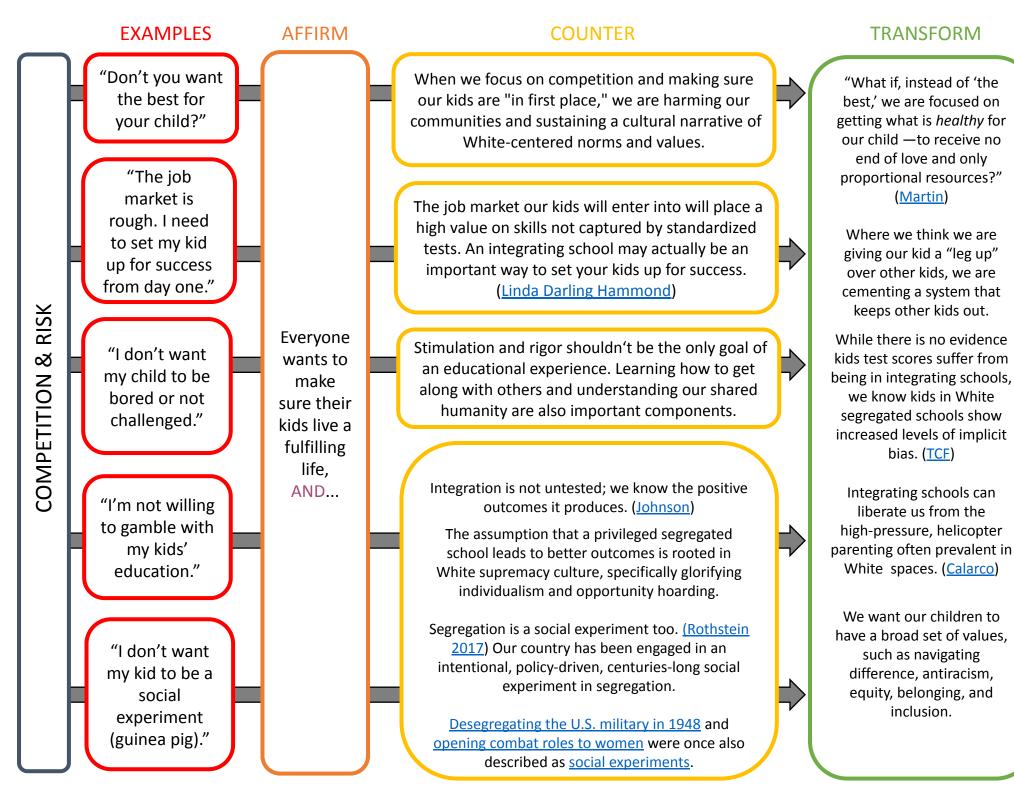
I cannot raise my kids in an antiracist way in a White segregated school. Nor can I practice antiracism while curating the diversity in my children's world. (Hagerman)

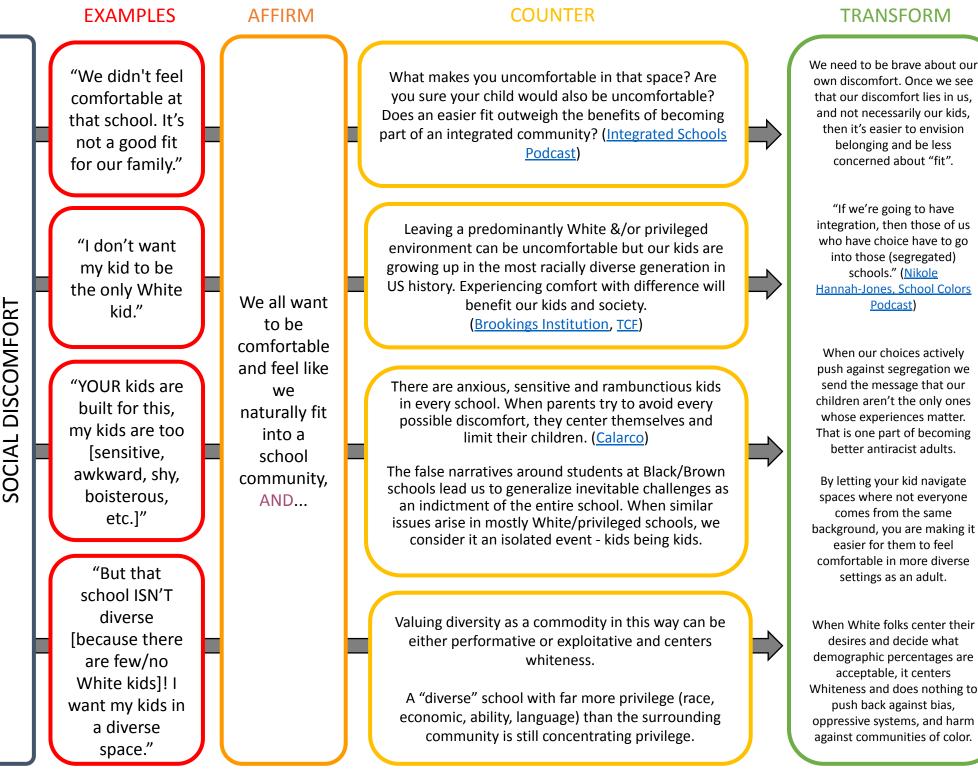
Standardized testing came out of the eugenics movement. It continues to suffer from issues of inherent bias and measures only a small sliver of the school experience. (Kirkland, Au)

Multilingual environments make all children better communicators, even if they are not bilingual. (Psychology Today)

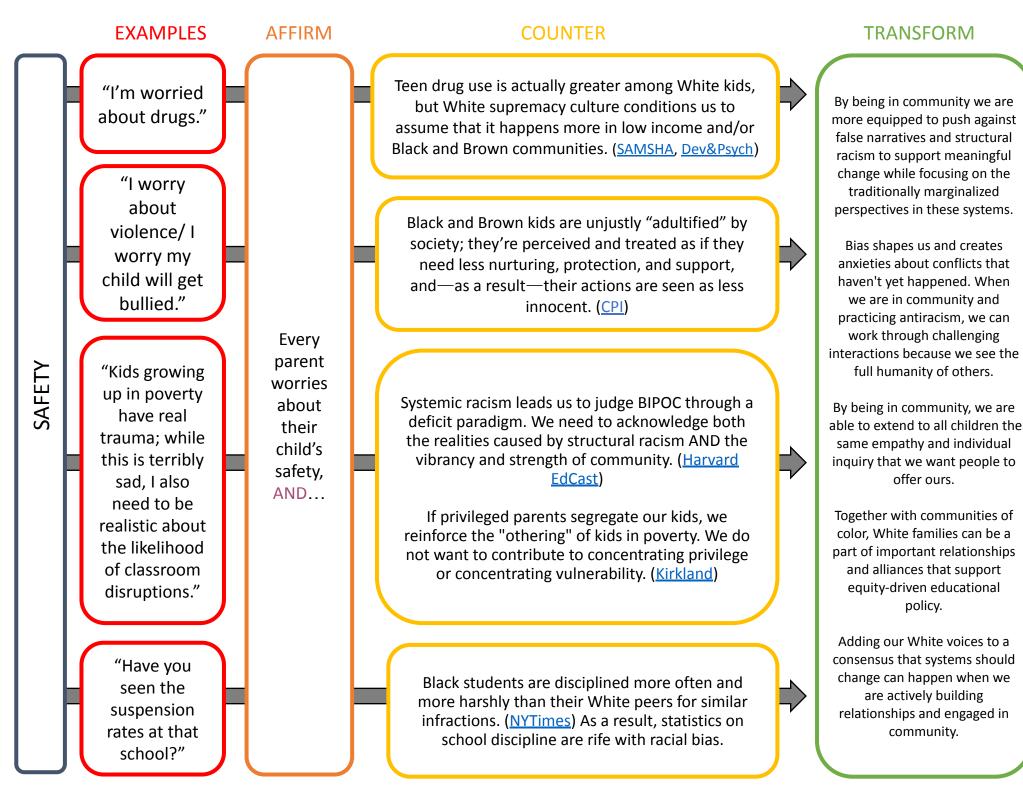
With a broader understanding of what "parent involvement" looks like, it is easier to see the ways communities invest in and are committed to their schools. (EmbraceRace)

© Integrated Schools 2023





© Integrated Schools 2023



© Integrated Schools 2023