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## Transforming PETE's Initial Standards: Ensuring Social Justice for Black Students in Physical Education

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### ABSTRACT

Calls to transform the initial Physical Education Teacher Education (PETE) standards to reflect social justice have garnered little attention. Recent events have magnified the racial injustices inflicted upon Black people in America and their ability to participate as full equals in a society influenced and characterized by white supremacy. Using critical race theory (CRT) as a framework, the authors examine the racial formulation of the historical and current installations of SHAPE America's initial PETE standards. Illustrated is the influence of white supremacy in PETE programs, the relationship to physical literacy, and the impact on Black students. After analysis, the authors integrate culturally relevant frameworks, and provide a blueprint of socially just PETE standards that challenge structural racism, and diversity initiatives promoted by SHAPE America and in higher education. The authors conclude that infusing Black perspectives is essential to the advancement of inclusive social justice standards in PETE.

### KEYWORDS

Physical education teacher education; culturally relevant standards; Black/African American; whiteness; standards-based education

In 1987, the Initial Physical Education Teacher Education (PETE) standards were adopted for implementation in PETE programs to establish competencies for teacher education, teaching licensure, and subsequently, accreditation. The National Association for Sport and Physical Education (NASPE) and the American Alliance for Health, Physical Education, Recreation, and Dance (AAHPERD) were the first producers of the standards, and are currently under the direction of the Society of Health and Physical Educators (SHAPE America) (Walton-Fisette & Sutherland, 2020). Originally, there were four standards with 23 candidate guidelines that PETE candidates were expected to demonstrate competency in prior to graduation. Subsequent revisions were made that comprise four editions, with the current iteration established in 2017 (NASPE, 1987, 1989, 2008; SHAPE, 2017). Today, there are six standards with 25 candidate competencies expected of teacher candidates (see Appendix). Although not all PETE programs are aligned to SHAPE's PETE standards, a large majority have endorsed the standards to serve as a guide for curriculum, instruction, teacher certification, and/or accreditation (Walton-Fisette & Sutherland, 2020).

According to SHAPE America (2017), "physical literacy is the ability to move with competence and confidence in a wide variety of physical activities in multiple environments that benefit the healthy development of the whole person." Although the current PETE standards are not explicit in the goal of promoting physical literacy, explicit reference is

made to the K-12 PE standards, which all begin with “The physically literate individual . . .” therefore, the implications that PETE candidate standards are aligned to K-12 standards and student outcomes are clear (SHAPE America, 2013). Furthermore, both sets of standards are produced by SHAPE America. Given this, the initial PETE standards theoretically provide the foundation to help K-12 students become physically literate. While achieving physical literacy is an ambitious goal, without socially just intentions, notions of physical literacy only reinforce whiteness.

## **SHAPE America and physical literacy**

SHAPE America found the argument for physical literacy compelling in Roetert and MacDonald (2015) assessment of the concept. In explaining how the organization adopted physical literacy as the goal of physical education, the authors discussed how the goal of physical literacy was combined with standards and grade-level outcomes to operationalize the concept of physical ‘literacy’ and create a framework for teachers to develop curricula and lesson plans. The rationale for this was stated as 1) practical, in that the concept of physical literacy would help teachers articulate to learners and the general public what PE is trying to accomplish, 2) to align PE on a more level playing field with other school subject areas which have adopted the term literacy and 3) the philosophical grounding of physical literacy validates embodiment as an important subject of study, with PE being a means by which students can learn about this human dimension. The characteristics of physical literacy are certainly worthwhile aspirations. However, it is fair to question whether physical literacy serves the needs of Black youth who are significantly impacted by structural inequalities and practices that undermine opportunities for them to achieve optimal health outcomes (Noonan, Velasco-Mondragon, & Wagner, 2016).

## **Authors’ positionalities**

As Black American academics who teach in PETE programs at predominately white institutions (PWI), we acknowledge that our Blackness, intersectionalities, and experiences influence the critical examination of the construction of SHAPE America standards. We are acutely aware of racism, anti-Blackness, and inequities underpinned by white supremacy that continues to negatively affect Black students and faculty at PWIs, in teacher education, K-12 schools, in physical literacy concepts, and in society (Hodge, 2014). We are also members and active leaders in SHAPE America involved in initiatives and roles designed to advance equity, diversity, and inclusion. As such, we have chosen to use our voices to confront systems that are detrimental to Black people, and offer a path that works toward racial and social justice in physical education.

## **Black America in 2020**

Harrell (2000) proclaimed at the outset of the 21st century that racism was still a sickness that had deadly ramifications for Black Americans. As racism is a problem that permeates every aspect of Black life, the well-being of Black Americans from the “crib to the coffin” (Jones et al., 2020) is worthy of introspection. Despite the immense optimism that existed with the election of President Barack Obama, the suggestion that the United States of

America had entered into an era of post-racialism in retrospect has been found to be premature. Recent poll data suggest that as many as 93% of Black Americans feel that they are targets of racial discrimination (National Public Radio, 2017). In respect to dealing with the police and the criminal justice system as a whole, over 80% of Black adults feel that they are treated less fairly than whites. Decades of systemic inequities, racial segregation, and anti-Black legislation have significantly impacted opportunities for Black Americans to build community wealth and maintain employment on the same level of their white counterparts.

Racism hurts Black children. Research points to a correlation between racism and low birth weight disparities among Black babies. From the time that they enter preschool, Black children are expelled and suspended from schooling two to six times as often as their white peers (Bell, 2020). Additionally, exclusionary disciplinary practices that target Black youth in schools are associated with lower test scores, higher dropout rates, and increased exposure to the juvenile justice system. This does not include inattention to the litany of untreated traumas, undiagnosed learning disabilities, instabilities in the home, lack of safe spaces to play, and other personal stressors that have become a recognizable characteristic of America's callous approach to the plight of Black youth. Indeed, racism is a pernicious and unique stressor with the ability to thwart the physical, physiological, and psychological health of Black Americans (Jones et al., 2020). As physical education has been touted as a means to address health disparities and these aforementioned areas, it is important to incorporate the Black experience into existing SHAPE standards as part of an inclusive strategy that clearly communicates to everyone that Black lives matter.

### **Social justice and Black representation in PETE standards**

Hodge and Wiggins (2010) mentioned that one of the ironies of physical education is that the profession has repeatedly failed to acknowledge the significant contributions of Black people. The social climate and ongoing history of discrimination in the United States that contributed to this tragedy have been well documented (Hodge & Wiggins, 2010; Wiggins & Wiggins, 2011). Aaron Molineaux Hewlett was the first African American appointed to the Harvard University Faculty as director of physical education and culture in 1859. It would not be until 1950, when Rosco Brown was appointed to the faculty at New York University, where another Black physical educator would be seen at a predominately white institution (PWI). Despite the struggle for representation at PWI's, Black Americans would apply their trade in Historically Black Institutions (HBCU's) as they created successful programs without dedicated resources and accolades for their achievements during most of the 20<sup>th</sup> century (Wiggins & Wiggins, 2011). Indeed, beginning with the editorials and publications of Edwin Bancroft Henderson in the 1940s, Black voices in AAHPERD (now SHAPE) have been instrumental in working toward social justice, despite their contributions to the field being unjustly ignored (Clark, Johnson, Sales, & King, 2020). Black pioneers in PETE included Dr. Leroy T. Walker, the first Black president of AAHPERD, and Lavonia Allison, PETE professor, who over a number of years made significant contributions to AAHPERD's curriculum (Clark et al., 2020) while taking active steps to dismantle segregation in the Southern District affiliate (Salyer, 2003; Smith & Jamieson, 2017).

Upon the arrival of 2020 and a new era in physical education, there is a call to reform the current PETE (and K-12) standards to reflect social justice and inclusivity to meet the needs

of students today (Culp, 2011; Walton-Fisette & Sutherland, 2020). Culp (2011) asserted that PETE programs needed to take a proactive approach that embeds social justice concepts throughout PETE curriculums rather than stand-alone applications. These recommendations included social justice curricula and standards in PETE programs that focus on all marginalized groups. With this in mind, and considering the current events, the focus of this paper, however, is to address anti-Black racism and social (in)justice as it pertains to Black people in America. This decision is based on the evidence that Black lives are not valued in [physical] education. For instance, U.S. public schools have shown to reproduce prison-like conditions for Black students rather than educationally supportive environments including unreasonable and disproportionate discipline, and misappropriate tracking into lower level courses (Allen & White-Smith, 2014; Kunjufu, 2012). Furthermore, the history of Black Americans is distinctively different from other marginalized groups. And, the Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement (Hillstrom, 2018) demands that institutional actions meet the empty promises of racial and social justice statements recently posted on institutional and organizational websites such as SHAPE America (SHAPE America, 2020). Hence, a commitment to Black life challenges the status quo of maintaining white supremacy, and acknowledges the urgent need to make effective changes.

Our aim is to examine the development of past and current PETE standards using critical race theory (CRT) to illustrate the promotion of physical literacy under white values that perpetuates white supremacy and poses harm to Black students. It is unfortunate that Culp's (2011) early call to include intentional social justice instruction/inclusion in PETE programs has largely been ignored, however, recent efforts to reform PETE standards have emerged. Based on past and current recommendations, we accept the challenge made by Walton-Fisette and Sutherland (2020) to develop explicitly socially just PETE standards along with Culp's (2011) recommendation of intent. As such, we will draw on CRT and culturally relevant/sustaining frameworks to dismantle racist and exclusionary practices that occur in PETE programs due to the implementation of the PETE standards without question of the impact on Black students in K-12 physical education programs. The goal is to develop race-conscious PETE standards that can lead to the development of teachers who can affirm Black students to reach their full potential and right to exist in physical education settings, and by extension, society at-large. Furthermore, the intentional restructuring of PETE standards will explicitly confront racism and support cultural awareness. Therefore, we will:

- (1) Identify how whiteness is reflected in SHAPE's Initial PETE standards;
- (2) Provide an initial vision for how standards should be revised and implemented;
- (3) Develop socially just/race-conscious PETE outcomes that serve Black children

### ***PETE, whiteness, and standardization***

Understanding race in America requires the investigation of whiteness and the normalization of white racial identity. Morrison (1992) put it bluntly, "In this country, American means white. Everybody else has to hyphenate." Undoubtedly, whiteness as a social construct has survived as cultural and historical contexts of race have changed over time (Hackman, 2015). Leonardo (2009) describes whiteness as "characterized by the

unwillingness to name the contours of racism, the avoidance of identifying with a racial experience or group, the minimization of racist legacy, and other similar evasions” (p. 170). The accepted normality of whiteness can also exist as everyday macroaggressions\* that can be demonstrated through hostile, derogatory, or harmful messages toward Black people (bell DiAngelo, 2018; Hooks, 1996). Further, whiteness is a currency that is accumulated and utilized through the creation of systems, legislative decisions, ideas, values, and curriculum practices (Azzarito, 2016; Culp, 2017; Simon, 2020).

Scholars (Blaisdell, 2016; Weilbacher, 2012) have discoursed at length on numerous entrenched standardization practices in the United States that have been detrimental to Black and other learners of Color. Weilbacher (2012) notes that the promotion of white ways of thinking and knowing through standardization has roots in the social efficiency movement of the early 1900s. In its initial form, social efficiency prioritized education as a means by which one can compete in a global economy or find gainful employment. As it has evolved into the 21st century, social efficiency fails to question the dominant order and does not view experiential knowledge or issues related to race and racism as essential (Kim, 2018). Given this, it is no surprise that the current tone of education undermines the ability of the teacher to learn about the students they teach and the experiences that impact them.

Weilbacher (2012) mentions that there are other cultural considerations to consider that impact the welfare and future success of Black and Brown students. Essentially, education that is based solely on the foundation of promoting standards is problematic for two reasons. The first is that those who write the standards often have experienced more privileged physical and social surroundings than many of the students on whom the standards are imposed. Second, teachers are forced to start with the standards that create fragmented or inconsistent learning experiences for Black and Brown students, in part due to how standards are constructed. White people who write standards do not know all students and the physical and social surroundings that influence their behaviors, especially Black students. The failure to incorporate education that diverts from norms of whiteness in conjunction with inadequate teacher preparation and institutional resistance to change creates a perfect storm for the exclusion of Black students. Irrespective of intention, these restrictions are transmitted through standards, ultimately serving as the doctrine for how students are expected to act, or in the case of SHAPE standards, how physical literacy is envisioned and performed.

## Critical race theory

With a better understanding of PETE and the implications of whiteness on standardization and physical literacy, we draw on critical race theory (CRT) to illustrate whiteness as reflected in the initial PETE standards. CRT is a theoretical framework designed to interrogate, confront, and disrupt white supremacist constructs, behaviors, and practices that negatively impact the wellbeing of Black people and other groups of color (Crenshaw, 1995). To use CRT, it is understood that the United States’ (U.S.) institutions, organizations, and agencies are fundamentally rooted in white supremacy. While CRT has its origins in law, and is evident in education more broadly (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995), CRT is starting to be used by scholars in physical education (Barker, 2019; Blackshear, 2020; Clark, 2020; Harrison & Clark, 2016). There are five tenets of CRT including the permanence of racism, interest convergence, critique of liberalism, whiteness as property, and counternarratives.

We, however, draw on whiteness as property and the permanence of racism in the examination of the construction of the initial PETE standards. Next, we draw on counter-narratives via Black voices and culturally relevant frameworks to reconstruct the initial PETE standards that work to achieve social justice for Black children (Crenshaw, 1995; Decuir & Dixson, 2004; Delgado & Stefanic, 1993; Hiraldo, 2010; Ladson-Billings, 1998, 2013; Tate, 1997).

### ***Whiteness as property***

Whiteness as property in the U.S. was initially associated with the enslavement of Black people who were used as human capital (objects), that included extreme abuse, rape, exploitation, and psychological warfare by white America to build wealth, thus, the term “property” (Harris, 1993; Leary & Robinson, 2017). Whiteness as property or to behold white skin also meant the property of freedom or the insurance that a white person could not be enslaved (Harris, 1993). Once enslavement became illegal, whiteness as property manifested (or permeated) itself into all dimensions of American life to ensure that white supremacist ideology and the legacy of slavery would remain intact (Harris, 1993). White privilege is the terminology commonly used today, which affords white people systemic advantages (power) in housing, employment, health, healthcare, and education based on erroneous constructions and beliefs around race (Bhopal & Alibhai-Brown, 2018).

### ***Permanence of racism***

Racism is part of the fabric of U.S. society and is deeply ingrained in the policies, practices, and institutionalized routines of education (Milner, 2017). One of the most salient examples of racism in education is segregation, when Black schools were significantly underfunded compared to white schools. After the U.S. Supreme Court unanimously deemed that de jure segregation between Black and white schools were unconstitutional, de jure segregation in schools became illegal (Bryne & Williams, 2005). Efforts to integrate schools, however, were met with resistance, as it took years for implementation. Furthermore, Black students were the recipients of violent racist attacks. In response, Black students were escorted to school by the National Guard for protection (President of the U.S. Executive Order 10730). While this act was symbolic of change and equity, this was the beginning of the end for many Black teachers and coaches, as jobs were lost due to discriminatory practices (Bell, 2004; Lumpkin, Stoll, & Beller, 1999). Leadership roles for Black people also diminished, as white people denied Black educators access to academic and social advancement (Lumpkin et al., 1999 as cited by Hodge, 2014), which put an economic strain on Black communities. Black students also lost out, as they were at a cultural disadvantage – not having the freedom to practice their cultural traditions while affirming their identity, which is a component to successful outcomes for Black children (Kunjufu, 2012; Ladson-Billings, 1995). In essence, institutional racism in education was simply reconfigured rather than dismantled.

Although legal segregation in schools ended 66 years ago, racist behaviors, beliefs, policies, and practices promote separate and unequal schools today. In fact, Black schools receive less funding than white schools, teachers at Black schools earn less

income than teachers at white schools, and Black teachers leave the profession prematurely due to undesirable work conditions, the silencing of their voices, the inability to make decisions, and the lack of autonomy (Pitts, 2019; The Shanker Institute, 2015), which are all symptoms of institutional racism. It is important to note that within the Black community, the role of an educator was one of the most prominent professions. Black children, consequently, became casualties to the fallacy that integrating into whiteness is a liberating act – an overlooked counternarrative (Bell, 1991).

### **Counternarratives**

Deficit models used to describe the plight of Black America are deafening that include unsubstantiated beliefs that Black people are inferior and lazy (Kunjufu, 2012; Quicke, 2019). In *There is Nothing Wrong with Black Students*, Kunjufu (2012) denounces deficit models often ascribed to Black youth. Instead, he offers data-supported counternarratives to white supremacist ideology on why and how Black students fail and achieve in schools. While Kunjufu (2012) identifies several schooling issues that stifle Black student development, “an irrelevant Eurocentric curriculum model,” (p. 109) is included, which teaches Black children to hate themselves and fosters the internalization of negative concepts of Blackness as defined by white people – including achievement. As a result, the erosion of Black self-esteem and confidence permeates in every facet of Black students’ lives. In contrast, when Black students are taught in African-centered environments and have Black teachers, they fare similar or better than their white peers (Kunjufu, 2012) – a consistent finding in the literature (Acosta, Foster, & Houchen, 2018; Ladson-Billings, 1995).

Clark (2020) has similar sentiments as Kunjufu (2012), however, his counternarrative setting is in PETE. Rarely used in PETE programs, Clark (2020) presents critical race pedagogy for Black students who attend historically Black colleges and universities (HBCU) to positively impact Black students in K-12. Clark (2020) suggests that PETE scholars should decenter whiteness. Rather if the intention is to teach and uplift Black folk, then the focus should be on Blackness. In agreement with Kunjufu (2012), Clark recognizes that an understanding of African-centered concepts coupled with Black teachers is paramount to the success of Black students. Approaches such as these affirm Black PETE candidates who in turn will affirm Black students in physical education, which contributes to social justice in academic settings for Black people.

### **Cultivating social justice environments**

Social justice approach to education is one that:

... actively address the dynamics of oppression, privilege, and isms, recognizing that society is the product of historically rooted, institutionally sanctioned stratification along socially constructed group lines that include race, class, gender, sexual orientation, and ability. Working for social justice in education means guiding students [and often being guided by students] in critical self-reflection of their socialization into this matrix of unequal relationships and its implications, analysis of the mechanisms of oppression, and the ability to challenge these hierarchies (Cochran-Smith, 2004, as cited by Sensoy & Diangelo, 2009, p. 350).

Although this definition is inclusive, the elusive nature of “race” does not encapsulate the historical, cultural, and modern-day Black American experience.

In the United States, contemporary social justice frameworks stem from the atrocities and injustices that have occurred to Black people during enslavement and Jim Crow segregation laws. *All* of the Civil Rights Acts have been made in effort to right the wrongs of the ill-treatment of Black people, which has resulted in significant inequities. Tangled with civil rights, affirmative action policies designed to eradicate employment and educational discrimination for Black people, people of color, and women have not reached the promise of equality for members of the Black community (Harris, 1993). While some progress has been made, even with protections under the law, Black people continue to face systemic racism and discrimination in all aspects of life to include housing, employment, economics, voting rights, health, access to health care, and education (Davis & Harrison, 2013). As such, a radical shift toward social justice is a necessity.

Socially just educational environments for Black students require a good understanding of effective pedagogies. Ladson-Billings (1995) introduced the theory of culturally relevant pedagogy, which is a reformative approach to teacher education that focuses on teaching strategies shown effective for Black American children. In recognition that culture influences educational outcomes, and after conducting research on effective teaching behaviors among teachers of Black students, Ladson-Billings (1995) asserts that culturally competent teaching is underpinned by three criteria:

- (1) The ability to develop students academically
- (2) A willingness to nurture and support cultural competence
- (3) The development of sociopolitical or critical consciousness (p. 483).

While culture (customs, mores, practices, and beliefs) and race (socially constructed physical distinctions according to pigment or melanin) are not one in the same, Ladson-Billings’ theory of culturally relevant pedagogy was as much about race as it was culture. To implement the above, there must be the understanding that the permanence of racism exists in schools and PETE programs, as these spaces consistently reproduce oppressive environments for Black students (Allen & White-Smith, 2014; Harrison & Clark, 2016; Hodge, 2014). Furthermore, and building on Ladson-Billings (1995) culturally relevant theory, contemporary pedagogies including *culturally responsive* (Gay, 2002; Wright, 2019), *culturally sustaining* (Cole, 2017), *abolitionist teaching* (Love, 2019), and *African pedagogical excellence* (Acosta et al., 2018) are other approaches that aim to liberate Black people in systemically racist academic environments. With this understanding, teachers must enact these transformative pedagogies for racial equity and social justice to occur (Harrison & Clark, 2016; Ladson-Billings, 1995; Tinning, 2016).

Harrison and Clark (2016) have further raised the consciousness that PETE programs need to include social justice and cultural competencies after race-related injustices transpired in 2016 (e.g., the killing of nine Black church attendees by a white supremacist). Unfortunately, tragic events that occurred four years ago run parallel to today with the senseless murders of Black people by white police officers and random white citizens (e.g., George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, Ahmaud Arbery, and countless others), which has inspired Black Lives Matter protests, and demands for social justice. Recognizing that PETE can aid

in the alleviation of current and historical injustices (Harrison & Clark, 2016), we offer culturally responsive PETE standards that foster social justice by incorporating the historical and cultural contexts of Black people in America.

## Methods

In this paper, we critically reviewed and evaluated the development of the initial PETE standards, the relationship to physical literacy, and the impact on Black students through a racialized lens as supported in CRT. Walton-Fisette and Sutherland (2020) recently conducted a thorough analysis of SHAPE's K-12 and initial PETE standards, which highlighted the lack of social justice language and outcomes. They pointed out that standards of yesteryear had more social justice language than standards today, which led us to examine the development teams for the current and previous versions of the initial PETE standards.

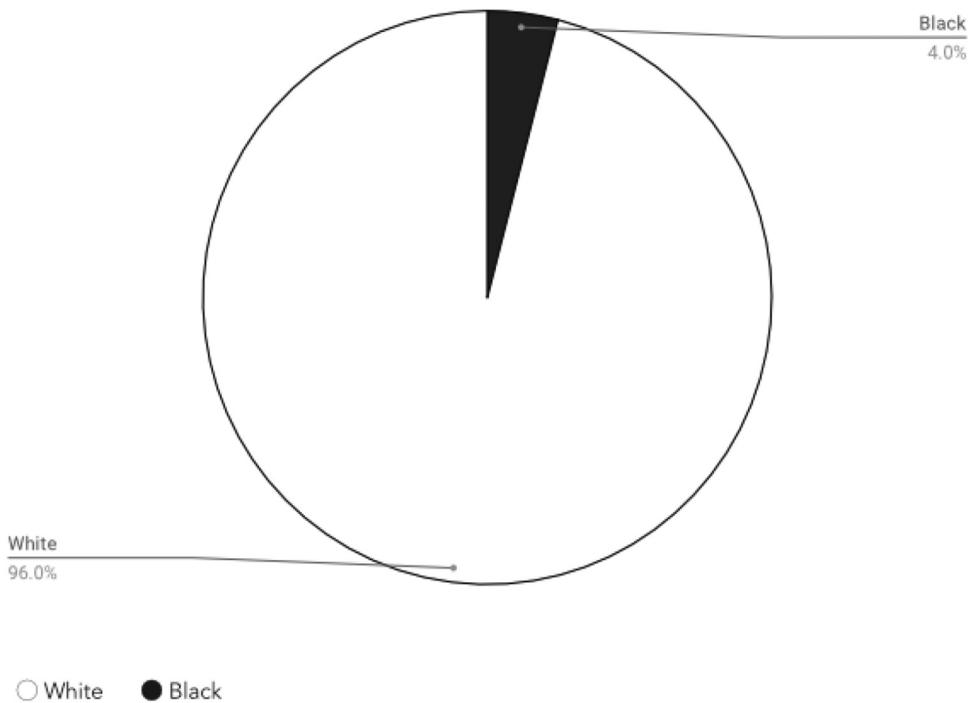
We identified the contributors' names listed in each edition along with their institutional affiliations at the time of publication. Internet searches were conducted to determine or confirm the presenting race and gender of each contributor as well as the associated institution, although most were known through our collective professional networks and affiliations. Once the presenting race and gender were confirmed and agreed upon with a 100% interrater reliability, we conducted frequency analysis and calculated percentages in each category. We shared a copy of the final, pre-published manuscript with SHAPE America's CEO and President for transparency and to ensure accuracy in reporting. Next, we drew on CRT's permanence of racism to discuss the racial and gender makeup of the development teams and the impact on the PE environment for Black children. Quantitative outcomes helped guide the PETE standard analysis. However, we adopted CRT's counter-narrative (Black voice) and culturally relevant principles to create a blueprint of culturally appropriate PETE standards. The goal is for the standards to reflect explicit social justice outcomes for Black students with the vision that teacher educators become culturally aware, competent, and literate (Culp, 2011).

## Results and discussion

Twenty-five people were directly involved in the development of the initial PETE standards. In Table 1, 24 (96%) of the PETE standard writers were white, and one (4%) Black. The gender makeup was balanced with 13 (52%) males and 12 (48%) females, and most ( $n = 22$ ; 81%) were affiliated with a predominately white institution. See Figure 1 for visual representation of racial demographics.

**Table 1.** PETE standards task force race, gender, and institution type percentages.

Standards	Race n (%)		Gender n (%)		Institution Type n (%)		
	Black	White	Male	Female	PWI	School District	NASPE Rep
1 <sup>st</sup> Edition (n = 8)	0 (0)	8 (100)	5 (62.5)	3 (37.5)	7 (87.5)	1 (12.5)	0 (0)
2 <sup>nd</sup> Edition (n = 5)	1 (20)	4 (80)	2 (40)	3 (60)	4 (80)	0 (0)	1 (20)
3 <sup>rd</sup> Edition (n = 5)	0 (0)	5 (100)	2 (40)	3 (60)	4 (80)	1 (20)	0 (0)
4 <sup>th</sup> Edition (n = 7)	0 (0)	7 (100)	4 (57)	3 (43)	6 (86)	1 (14)	0 (0)
Total (n = 25)	1 (4)	24 (96)	13 (52)	12 (48)	21 (84)	3 (12)	1 (4)



**Figure 1.** Initial PETE standards task force racial demographics. *Note. Racial Demographics of Initial PETE Standards Task Force Percentages*

Since inception, the initial PETE standards were developed through a white framework as illustrated by the predominately white development teams from the late 1980s to today. In four editions in just over 30 years, only one Black person has participated in the development of the initial PETE standards. The distinct lack of Black representation on the development teams illustrates whiteness as property as the development teams are essentially “owners” of the standards (Hiraldo, 2010) allowing them the “right to exclude” (Harris, 1993, p. 1714). This ownership status grants permission to permeate racism at the expense of Black students resulting from the lack of racial diversity among the development team. Racial exclusion of the past is evident today, as there are no representations of Black people on the most recent development teams – third and fourth editions (National Association for Sport and Physical Education, 2008; SHAPE America, 2017), further illustrating the permanence of racism and the cyclical return to whiteness, as Black physical educators had more influence in physical education curriculum in the 1960s than now. Lavonia Allison, for example, is a Black woman physical education pioneer who not only disrupted institutional racism by integrating the North Carolina Alliance for Athletics, Health, Physical Education, Recreation and Dance (NCAAPHERD), but also was instrumental in curriculum framework development for the national organization (AAPHERD – now SHAPE) (Clark et al., 2020; Jewett & Mullan, 1977; Salyer, 2003) further suggesting that the current standards remain the property of whiteness.

Patterns of whiteness are also supported by the institutional makeup of the contributors, as all associated institutions of higher learning were PWIs. Furthermore, field testing only

occurred at PWIs (National Association for Sport and Physical Education, 1987), which ensures that the property (standards) benefits white over Black students. Failure to include HBCUs and other minority-serving institutions highlights that primarily white students matter when determining the effectiveness of the initial PETE standards. Weilbacher (2012) asserts that educational teams composed only of white people are designed to ensure that white people can maintain white dominance, which will likely be to the detriment of Black children, as there is a litany of evidence that white educators engage in anti-Black behaviors directed toward Black students – including in physical education (Dagkas, 2018; Decuir & Dixon, 2004; Hylton, 2015; Martin & Smith, 2017; Weilbacher, 2012).

Although indicated in the first edition of the initial PETE standards that teacher candidates should be “capable of interpreting the physical education program to the many diverse communities that represent our society” (National Association for Sport and Physical Education, 1987, p. 53), descriptions of diverse communities, and processes to meet this expectation are absent from the document. Furthermore, the term diverse only appears a few times in the current iteration along with ‘equitable’ and ‘culturally competence,’ – stated one time each under the main standard as indicated in Figure 2 (SHAPE America, 2017).

In addition, there is no indication of what equitable and cultural competence actually mean, and the measure of these competencies are vague at best, which complement Walton-Fisette and Sutherland (2020) finding that standards of the past contained more social justice language than standards of today, however, practical application is not evident. Last, and perhaps most important, there is no mention of race, racial justice, or anti-Black racism, which challenges the recent Black Lives Matter statement posted by SHAPE America, as there are no physical education documents that indicate such (SHAPE America, 2020).

As illustrated in the lack of racial diversity among the development teams, and the limited diversity language used in the initial PETE standards, there is obviously a cultural disconnect between standard writers and the students that PETE candidates will eventually teach. As such, the standards need to expand beyond physical literacy concepts that are rooted in white privilege, as PETE candidates will be ill-equipped to effectively teach Black students. Based on this assessment, diversity is used to describe anyone who does not meet white normatives. Haphazard insertions of diversity suggest that PETE candidates will only reproduce inequalities inherent in the standards. Furthermore, failure to de-couple race from diversity initiatives used in the initial PETE standards indicates a commitment to the status quo of centering around whiteness rather than equitable standards for all.

*Diversity and Equity Language in SHAPE America’s Initial PETE standards*

**Standard 3: Planning and Implementation** Physical education candidates apply content and foundational knowledge to plan and implement developmentally appropriate learning experiences aligned with local, state and/or SHAPE America National Standards and Grade-Level Outcomes for K-12 Physical Education through the effective use of resources, accommodations and/or modifications, technology and metacognitive strategies to address the diverse needs of all students.

3b Plan and implement progressive and sequential content that aligns with short-and long-term plan objectives and that addresses the **diverse** needs of all students.

3c Plan for and manage resources to provide active, fair and **equitable** learning experiences.

3d Plan and implement individualized instruction for **diverse** student needs, adding specific accommodations and/or modifications for all students

**Standard 6: Professional Responsibility** Physical education candidates demonstrate behaviors essential to becoming effective professionals. They exhibit professional ethics and culturally competent practices; seek opportunities for continued professional development; and demonstrate knowledge of promotion/advocacy strategies for physical education and expanded physical activity opportunities that support the development of physically literate individuals.

**Figure 2.** Diversity and equity language in SHAPE America’s initial PETE standards.

Willful exclusion of race in the initial PETE standards illustrates the permanence of racism as there is no acknowledgment of the negative educational experiences Black students encounter in U.S. academic institutions. Furthermore, there is no recognition that standards rooted in African and/or Black culture are instrumental in the academic and social success of Black children (Acosta et al., 2018; Clark, 2020; Kunjufu, 2012; Ladson-Billings, 1995). The lack of explicit diversity language, action steps toward social justice, and the reported strength in the flexibility of institutional interpretation of the standards (National Association for Sport and Physical Education, 1987) implies that white faculty decide diversity outcomes and how diverse communities are best served ensuring that the standards remain the property of whiteness. Therefore, diversity is an empty promise of equity and social justice.

The lack of explicit diversity initiatives is problematic for several reasons—Black PETE faculty, scholars, and PE teachers are excluded from these conversations; most PETE faculty are white (Graber, Woods, Killian, Richards, & Rhoades, 2019); most PETE candidates are white (Data USA, 2016; National Center for Education Statistics, 2020), and the impact on Black students is not considered. Furthermore, teacher candidates' requirement to meet “diversity” competencies are weak and lack actual practices or demonstrations of diversity, equity, or inclusion (Weilbacher, 2012). For example, PETE candidates are expected to “engage in behavior that reflects professional ethics, practice, and cultural competence,” yet there are no cultural competencies presented. In addition, most PETE faculty lack cultural competence themselves (Wyant, Tsuda, & Yeats, 2020). Given these facts, and in recognition that the current standards are absent of race-conscious principles (Walton-Fisette & Sutherland, 2020), we understand that alternative approaches that include Black voices are necessary. As such, we propose standards with explicit competencies that PETE candidates should demonstrate during pre-service teacher education training that strive for social justice.

## **Black people, PETE standards and social justice**

### ***Counternarrative—Black voices***

Since Black scholars were not involved in the development of the current initial PETE standards, it is time that Black voices are represented to address the needs of Black children. SHAPE America recently issued a Black Lives Matter statement since the killings of Black bodies by white police officers, however, words are often empty when not attached to action. To their credit, however, SHAPE has begun to act in support of these statements that illustrate their commitment to equity and justice for all. For example, we have been invited to serve on several SHAPE committees, our suggestions to effect change have been considered, and SHAPE leaders welcome the difficult dialogue that is often involved when discussing race in America. Furthermore, SHAPE leadership accepted our participation in public discourse as we continue to work towards statements, policies, and practices that reflect an intentional focus on social justice for Black people. As such, Black voices are the counternarratives to whiteness in SHAPE America.

While these actions are commendable, we cannot ignore the fact that Black people are not currently engaged in the construction of position papers, standards, or policy, which is where the power lies. In addition, SHAPE's actions place the responsibility and additional

labor on Black people (and People of Color) to make change, rather than take responsibility as a white-led organization to make change themselves. Furthermore, definitions of social justice are inclusive, yet the initial PETE standards do not require candidates to demonstrate competencies that work toward inclusivity or social justice. Acknowledging that the initial PETE standards lack explicit socially just actions, we provide intentional outcomes that PETE candidates should engage in and develop during their pre-service training, and hopefully, continue as practitioners (see [Table 2](#)). Given that Black scholars lead this initiative, it is a start to dismantle physical education policies, practices, and standards that do not serve Black children.

Unlike SHAPE America's initial PETE standards, the social justice standards presented are guided by a critical race lens using African principles and Black cultural pedagogies to promote social justice for Black students in physical education. As suggested by Culp (2011) and Harrison and Clark (2016), we incorporate intentional historical and cultural contexts in our proposed standards to best serve Black children. We actively address social justice criterion across eight categories that includes 58 measurable cultural competencies that PETE candidates should demonstrate routinely throughout their PETE programs. As with the initial PETE standards, there is flexibility to meet group-specific needs by incorporating related issues that affect other marginalized and minoritized groups (e.g., LGBTQ>Stonewall>Gay marriage). For PETE candidates to effectively teach Black students, explicit criterion, expectations, and assessment of each competency should be required. Furthermore, all pre-service teachers **MUST** address these standards whether they are working with Black students or not. While the next steps are to field test the standards, it is our hope that these standards become integrated throughout all PETE programs.

## Conclusion

Milner (2017) notes that change is often purposefully and skillfully slow and at the will and design of those in power (p. 297). Given the state of current society and ongoing demonstrations of anti-Blackness in virtually every facet of life in the U.S., we feel that a focus on Black learners in physical education is not only timely, but a matter of life and death. For those unfamiliar with the plight of Black people in the United States, the previous statement is sure to provoke a range of emotions. However, a collection of data since the beginning of the 21st century suggests that outcomes for Black communities are worsening when compared to whites in relation to health, economic mobility, education, safety, and overall quality of life (Milner, 2017; The Shanker Institute, 2015). As it pertains to schooling, structural racism is so fixed as an omnipresent part of education, that it is hard for many to envision the long-term consequences of messages promoted through the hidden curriculum of physical education.

Earlier, we noted the incorporation of physical literacy into SHAPE standards. While generally accepted as a positive addition, the concept of "literacy" in the United States is contentious and should be further examined in respect to the promotion of quality physical education for Black youth. Venezky, Wagner, and Ciliberti (1990) remind us of the cultural, moral, and instructional dimensions to the provision of literacy (p.ix). Origins of the discussion of literacy can be traced back several centuries through colonial explorers and their desire to educate those who they deemed were illiterate "savages". Prendergast (2003) argues that



**Table 2.** Socially just physical education teacher education standards.

Outcomes	Standard 1	Standard 2	Standard 3	Standard 4	Standard 5	Standard 6	Standard 7	Standard 8
	Describe the effects of enslavement, Jim Crow, and systemic racism	Discuss Black Femininity and Black Masculinity	Demonstrate Care, Respect, & Advocacy	Demonstrate High Expectations	Demonstrate culturally consistent communicative competencies	Content Knowledge & Application	Implement Skill- and Fitness-building strategies	Implement Holistic Instructional Strategies
<i>Candidates will:</i>	1a. Discuss the effects of enslavement of African People in America	2a. Evaluate Black femininity and the Angry Black Woman label; Evaluate Black masculinity and machismo persona	3a. Engage in anti-racist behaviors	4a. Identify and focus on students' strengths	5a. Engage in cross-cultural /racial dialogue	6a. Describe content knowledge for teaching pre K-12 physical education that includes Black people (athletes and non-athletes)	7a. Identify opportunities for students to engage in physical activity in the community (parks, home, school, gyms)	8a. Encourage and allow students to express their individualism
<i>Candidates will:</i>	1b. Discuss the history of Jim Crow and segregation	2b. Evaluate sexuality (LGBTQ) and the concept of the Down Low in Black America	3b. Celebrate Black history and accomplishments yearlong	4b. Inform students and parents of high expectations	5b. Use Direct, Verbal Communication	6b. Apply content knowledge for teaching pre K-12 physical education that includes Black people	7b. Evaluate racial differences in motor skill development	8b. Ask students (and parents of young children) the preferred ways of learning
<i>Candidates will:</i>	1c. Acknowledge through analysis that systemic racism is inherent throughout US educational systems	2c. Discuss intimate and familial relationships (marriage, single-, two-parent, and multi-generation households) in Black communities	3c. Identify and evaluate implicit and explicit biases	4c. Discuss the school-to-prison pipeline phenomenon	5c. Collect language data and implement terminologies/language commonly used in Black communities	6c. Incorporate and expose students to Black authors (fiction, nonfiction, textbooks, journal articles)	7c. Discuss and evaluate the Black athlete/Black sport vs White athlete/White sport (myths vs reality)	8c. Display representations of Blackness beyond sports where Blacks are over represented (e.g. basketball and football)

(Continued)

**Table 2. (Continued).**

Outcomes	Standard 1	Standard 2	Standard 3	Standard 4	Standard 5	Standard 6	Standard 7	Standard 8
<i>Candidates will:</i>	1d. Describe the negative outcomes that result from systemic racism on Black students		3d. Monitor biases	4d. Identify how schools/teachers reproduce conditions that favor prison over education (e.g. excessive punishment of Black children)	5d. Demonstrate verbal and non-verbal affirmations of Black children	6d. Discuss the contributions of Black pioneers in physical education	7d. Explore opportunities or the lack thereof that underpin physical activity and athletic outcomes/participation for Black, White, and other groups	8d. Examine and remove content knowledge that poses harm to Black students (e.g. stereotypes, deficit language)
<i>Candidates will:</i>	1e. Identify causes of trauma and examine Black mental health; Discuss Post-Traumatic Slave Syndrome	3e. Track and compare punishment and discipline data among all groups and genders	4e. Analyze the causes of violence, incarceration, and the unfair sentencing of Black people	5e. Affirm students with dark skin and natural Black hair	6e. Plan and implement learning experiences for students who do not have technology available of the same quality as those with	7e. Discuss racial and cultural differences in approaches to health-related fitness (e.g. body size/body composition, beauty norms, cultural expectations)	8e. Adjust lessons/activities to meet students' needs	
<i>Candidates will:</i>	1f. Discuss the history of Black bodies performing physical work on plantations and on athletic fields	3f. Engage in the direct recruitment of Black students into PETE programs	4f. Hold students accountable for behaviors, work and rule violations	5f. Implement literacy strategies shown effective for Black children (oral/verbal communication)	6f. Invite Black scholars/teachers/parents to co-teach or lead a workshop	7f. Discuss colorism and the impact on Black students' physical activity practices/behaviors (e.g. exercise outside in the sun)	8f. Describe and apply common content knowledge for teaching pre K-12 physical education that includes Black people across all activities	

(Continued)



Table 2. (Continued).

Outcomes	Standard 1	Standard 2	Standard 3	Standard 4	Standard 5	Standard 6	Standard 7	Standard 8
<i>Candidates will:</i>	1g. Draw analogies between enslavement and professional athletics (e.g. football, basketball)		3g. Describe effective advocacy strategies to promote physical education and physical activity opportunities for Black children	4g. Model expected behaviors	5g. Call or e-mail parents weekly with positive news about students		7g. Evaluate the impact that racism has on health and fitness (e.g. stress response, cortisol release)	8g. Implement Black pedagogical strategies that promote a positive, safe, and engaging learning environment (e.g. African Pedagogical Excellence; African-Centered; Culturally Relevant/Sustaining; Abolitionist Education)
<i>Candidates will:</i>	1h. Discuss the exclusionary practices of Black people from physical education organizations		3h. Support policies, laws that positively impact Black children	4h. Assess student learning and provide immediate feedback			7h. Discuss why the White male body is the standard used for BMI measures and other anthropometric measures	8h. Attend workshops and professional development that promote cultural awareness among Black children and their families
<i>Candidates will:</i>	1i. Describe the conditions of Black people pre- and post-integration – schooling, physical education, economics, housing		3i. Request items/money from leadership; or, write a grant and develop other fundraising strategies to ensure all students have learning essentials					
<i>Candidates will:</i>			3j. Volunteer in spaces with Black children					

Acosta et al. (2018); Culp and Chepyator-Thomson (2011); Flory and Wylie (2019); Gay (2002); Harrison and Clark (2016); Howard (2001); Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995); Leary and Robinson (2017); SHAPE America (2017); Wright (2019).

literacy is essential to the maintenance of white identity, has historically been recognized as “white property” throughout American history and is replicated in courts, markets, and the composition of standardization initiatives. To be frank, perceptions of what literacy is in the United States cannot be discussed without acknowledging the impact of racism on Black people. Valant (2020) in reflecting on the banality of racism in education notes:

We are a country only a century-and-a-half removed from the enslavement of African Americans and its accompanying anti-literacy laws, which prohibited teaching slaves to read and write. The end of that era led not to some type of egalitarian or meritocratic society – or any sincere, sustained attempt to get there – but rather to the Jim Crow laws and de jure segregation of yesterday and the de facto segregation and structural racism of today. (Valant, 2020, paragraph 3).

In providing this context, we do not suggest that physical literacy has no merit. Rather, we challenge SHAPE America and similar organizations to be more forward thinking and responsive to the needs of Black youth. The data in this study indicate that the standard bearers who help “shape” SHAPE and ultimately physical education are overwhelmingly white, from predominantly white institutions, and are diverse only in gender. And if we only knew other identities regarding their sexuality, religion, (dis)ability, etc., it would likely showcase even more of the privileged, powerful groups. Consequently, the most recognizable national organization for physical education in the United States does not accurately represent the racial and ethnic diversity found in current American schools. There is much work to be done to ensure that Black perspectives are seen in future standards and are not ignored through the promotion of cultural routine.

## Note

\*Microaggressions are cleverly used to dismiss racism and its macro effects, thus the use of the term, macroaggressions.

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## Appendix

### SHAPE INITIAL PETE STANDARDS (2017)

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Standard 1: Content and Foundational Knowledge Physical education candidates demonstrate an understanding of common and specialized content, and scientific and theoretical foundations for the delivery of an effective pre K-12 physical education program.

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Candidates will:

- 1a Describe and apply common content knowledge for teaching preK-12 physical education.
- 1b Describe and apply specialized content knowledge for teaching pre K-12 physical education.
- 1 c Describe and apply physiological and biomechanical concepts related to skillful movement, physical activity and fitness for preK-12 students.
- 1d Describe and apply motor learning and behavior-change/psychological principles related to skillful movement, physical activity and fitness for preK-12 students.
- 1e Describe and apply motor development theory and principles related to fundamental motor skills, skillful movement, physical activity and fitness for pre K-12 students.
- 1 f Describe historical, philosophical and social perspectives of physical education issues and legislation

Standard 2: Skillfulness and Health-Related Fitness\*Physical education candidates are physically literate individuals who can demonstrate skillful performance in physical education content areas and health-enhancing levels of fitness

Candidates will:

- 2a Demonstrate competency in all fundamental motor skills, as well as skillful performance in a minimum of four physical education content areas (e.g., games and sports, aquatics, dance and rhythmic activities, fitness activities, outdoor pursuits, individual-performance activities)
- 2b Achieve and maintain a health-enhancing level of fitness throughout the program.

Standard 3: Planning and Implementation Physical education candidates apply content and foundational knowledge to plan and implement developmentally appropriate learning experiences aligned with local, state and/or SHAPE America National Standards and Grade-Level Outcomes for K-12 Physical Education through the effective use of resources, accommodations and/or modifications, technology and metacognitive strategies to address the diverse needs of all students.

Candidates will:

- 3a Plan and implement appropriate (e.g., measurable, developmentally appropriate, performance-based) short-and long-term plan objectives that are aligned with local, state and/or SHAPE America National Standards and Grade-Level Outcomes for K-12 Physical Education.
- 3b Plan and implement progressive and sequential content that aligns with short-and long-term plan objectives and that addresses the diverse needs of all students.
- 3 c Plan for and manage resources to provide active, fair and equitable learning experiences.
- 3d Plan and implement individualized instruction for diverse student needs, adding specific accommodations and/or modifications for all students.
- 3e Plan and implement learning experiences that require students to use technology appropriately in meeting one or more short-and long-term plan objective(s).
- 3 f Plan and implement learning experiences that engage students in using metacognitive strategies appropriately to analyze their own performance results.

Standard 4: Instructional Delivery and Management Physical education candidates engage students in meaningful learning experiences through effective use of pedagogical skills. They use communication, feedback, and instructional and managerial skills to enhance student learning.

Candidates will:

- 4a Demonstrate verbal and nonverbal communication skills that convey respect and sensitivity across all learning experiences.
- 4b Implement demonstrations, explanations and instructional cues that are aligned with short-and long-term plan objectives.
- 4 c Evaluate the changing dynamics of the learning environment and adjust instructional tasks as needed to further student progress.
- 4d Implement transitions, routines and positive behavior management to create and maintain a safe, supportive and engaging learning environment
- 4e Analyze motor skills and performance concepts in order to provide specific, congruent feedback to enhance student learning.

Standard 5: Assessment of Student Learning Physical education candidates select and implement appropriate assessments to monitor students' progress and guide decision making related to instruction and learning.

Candidates will:

- 5a Select or create authentic, formal assessments that measure student attainment of short-and long-term objectives.
  - 5b Implement formative assessments that monitor student learning before and throughout the long-term plan, as well as summative assessments that evaluate student learning upon completion of the long-term plan.
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Standard 1: Content and Foundational Knowledge Physical education candidates demonstrate an understanding of common and specialized content, and scientific and theoretical foundations for the delivery of an effective pre K-12 physical education program.

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5 c Implement a reflective cycle to guide decision making specific to candidate performance, student learning, and short- and long-term plan objectives

Standard 6: Professional Responsibility Physical education candidates demonstrate behaviors essential to becoming effective professionals. They exhibit professional ethics and culturally competent practices; seek opportunities for continued professional development; and demonstrate knowledge of promotion/advocacy strategies for physical education and expanded physical activity opportunities that support the development of physically literate individuals.

Candidates will:

6a Engage in behavior that reflects professional ethics, practice and cultural competence

6b Engage in continued professional growth and collaboration in schools and/or professional organizations.

6 c Describe strategies for the promotion and advocacy of physical education and expanded physical activity opportunities.

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