Appealing to Mississippi Values:
Identifying Values That Elevate Support for Education Reform
and for Addressing Racial Disparities in Mississippi

A FrameWorks Research Report

Prepared for the FrameWorks Institute
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INTRODUCTION

Since its founding in 1999, the FrameWorks Institute has been conducting communications research that helps to make constructive public discourse on social issues possible. Of all the issues that the Institute has been funded to research, the continuing complexity of issues at the intersection of education, racial disparities, and communications have been among the most difficult to address. On the one hand, education reform efforts hit “close to home” (that is, most Americans have had or will have children in the educational system at some point), so most people have very strong opinions about what an education is good for, what’s wrong with our current educational system, and what would “fix” that system. Unfortunately for advocates of progressive education reform, these prescriptions usually include some combination of fixing “neglectful parents,” “unmotivated students” and most of all “bad teachers.” These prescriptions for change, of course, leave a whole range of other potential reforms (like curricula, school environment, teacher training and mentoring, facilities, tenure and promotions policies) totally hidden from view.  

On the other hand, while Americans may hold equally strident opinions about race as they do about education, they are woefully shy about raising the issue of race in the public square. There is good reason for such hesitation, as race remains a divisive issue due to a variety of social, political and historical factors. Racial policy issues in the United States have always held a special place in American politics because of the country’s painful legacy around slavery as well as the racial exclusion policies and practices that followed. Moreover, despite the apparent “progress” the country has made in stemming the most vicious vicissitudes of race (even electing an African American to the highest political office), the continuing “problem of the color line,” as W. E. B. Du Bois so aptly put it, remains one of the country’s most serious ongoing challenges. It takes only a cursory glance at recent statistical data in key areas of well-being (health, education, criminal justice, or poverty) to ascertain that significant racial disparities exist and, in some areas, are widening.

Finally, from a communications perspective, the issue of race is especially problematic because of the way it tends to embed itself into a whole host of other issues. This is markedly the case, for example, as new research studies that seek to bring attention to disparities across racial groups are now regularly touted in the media, continually reminding the public that disparities exist but doing so in a way that frames the alleviation of those disparities as the responsibility of individual groups rather than to society and our communities at large. This, we would say, totally obscures the enormous benefits that accrue to society when we actively address racial disparities – especially those disparities that today characterize America’s educational system.

In this report, we examine the issues of education, race policy preferences, and communications
with specific focus on a state with some of the most severe problems in racial disparities and the educational performance of its students – Mississippi. More specifically, we present findings from two experimental studies in this report. The first study was specifically designed to frame education from the vantage point of different values and to evaluate the extent to which using different values could be shown to elevate public support for progressive education reforms. The second study was designed to capture the extent to which a different set of values might elevate public support for addressing racial disparities. In the second study, we take our analysis one step further to evaluate how values shape public support for addressing racial disparities in education as well as in a broader range of progressive proposals to improve children’s well-being: child mental health, early child development, social welfare, physical health, and immigration issues.

More generally, the research questions addressed by these studies are:

Are there particular values that can be shown to elevate public support for solving the problems inherent in the educational system in Mississippi and/or for addressing racial disparities in a wide variety of areas of children’s well-being?

For both studies, we conducted randomly controlled experiments using nationally representative samples to evaluate the performance of the values. We oversampled Mississippi residents to ensure that we could compare how those values fared in Mississippi given the larger national sample as a broader backdrop.

The findings presented in this report suggest that education and racial disparities can be effectively addressed in part through the structure of the communications about these issues. In this report, we address the role that values play in orienting people toward these issues, we discuss the methods used in the analysis, and we use the data from the experiments to highlight the values that have been shown to elevate public support for education reforms and for addressing racial disparities.

We note here that this report was specifically prepared for the W. K. Kellogg Foundation, which has had a long-standing focus on improving the lives of children, families, and communities in Mississippi. For the past several years, the Kellogg Foundation has supported the FrameWorks Institute’s work in Mississippi around the issues of education, race, and children’s well-being. As such, this report is one of a family of studies published at the Institute’s website [www.frameworks institute.org](http://www.frameworks institute.org), and with the support of the Kellogg Foundation, we have been able to offer recommendations to improve the communications capacity of policy experts and advocates who work on these issues.
Knowing the Values at the Intersection of Education and Race

A decade of FrameWorks research confirms a growing body of scholarship from the social and cognitive sciences which strongly suggest that how social issues are framed significantly impacts: how the public understands cause and effect; what role they attribute to public and private actors; and what effective solutions might entail. In a variety of issues areas, but especially in our research on early child development issues, education, and race, we have been able to document the effects of using different types of values to orient the public conversation.

By “values,” we mean big ideas like freedom, justice, and individual responsibility – all of which serve to structure how people reason and make sense of social issues. It is because these types of broad goals tend to powerfully shape the contours of policy thinking that they exercise a role akin to a gatekeeper – inviting people through a particular doorway to connect with an issue and then inviting them to think more broadly about opportunities to develop public strategies that address these goals. In addition to having the public reason about social issues from the vantage point of a values perspective, values also have the added benefit of helping the public understand the far-reaching consequences of failing to address the issue as a “public” or societal issue. As a result, in most of FrameWorks’ experimental studies, the treatments underscore what goals Americans hold for our communities and society. Moreover, we have been able to show the importance of helping the public think through the consequences of inaction on policies that support those values.

Our task in this research has been to use our qualitative work on how Americans think about education and, separately, on how they think about racial disparities, to identify, refine, and empirically test the capacity of a set of values to extend the public’s receptivity to progressive education reform and appeals to support race-based policy proposals. This process is a central component of FrameWorks’ Strategic Frame Analysis™ – a methodological approach to identify effective ways of communicating about social issues – and it is integral to our ability to empirically test messaging recommendations. More specifically,

Strategic frame analysis adopts the position, now current in several academic disciplines, that people reason on the basis of deeply-held moral values, more than on the basis of self-interest or “pocket-book” appeals. When we approach people as citizens, parents and stewards of their communities, we tap into powerful models that guide their thinking about themselves and their political responsibilities.

In sum, the experimental surveys conducted by the FrameWorks Institute (like those detailed in this report) are designed to test promising values that have emerged from our prior qualitative research on the issues we study in terms of their impacts on the public’s policy preferences.

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SUMMARY OF THE FINDINGS

This report details findings related to the effects of several value treatments on policy support in Mississippi for education and, separately, for policies that address racial disparities.

- Two overall findings are perhaps most important. First, both experimental studies allowed us to reconfirm what we have found in the balance of our experimental research – generally, getting any value in the communications message is better than getting no value if you wish to lift support for reform policies. Second, our findings suggest that incorporating strong values in communications about racial disparities has even stronger impacts on policy than we found in the broader national sample. Simply put, values matter a great deal in the public discourse about race and education, and they especially matter in Mississippi.

- For almost all of the values tested against education reform policies, we see improvements in public support for reforms after exposure to a value that articulates why reform is essential to, and benefits, society.

- More specifically, we find that all four of the values tested (Future Preparation, Common Good, Fairness Between Places, and Ingenuity) in the national sample moved public support above the control group. Consistent with the national sample, the majority of values tested in the study were able to best the control group in the Mississippi sample in elevating policy support. The only exception was Ingenuity, which was the only value shown in Study I to actually depress support for policy in the Mississippi sample.

- In terms of identifying the most effective value for messaging, we find that Future Preparation was the only value which proved to be statistically significant in elevating public support for education reform policy nationally. Of all of the values tested, Future Preparation also was the clear front-runner in terms of elevating policy support for education reform in Mississippi, although it did not reach the level of statistical significance. The latter is likely due to sample size, but it shows that messaging that incorporates the value of Future Preparation to talk about education reforms will elevate the levels of public support for those reforms. This finding holds true at both the national level as well as in the Mississippi context. As iterated in the survey, the Future Preparation message relied heavily on the idea that “pursuing policies that add new skills to the traditional curriculum to provide excellent schools, adequate educational resources, and quality educational experiences for our children” is an important societal goal worthy of policymakers’ attention.
- We reiterate the important finding that, although the value of Ingenuity has a null effect (or no discernible impact) on education reform policy support at the national level, it actually depresses support for education reform policies in the Mississippi data and, as a result, should be avoided in education-related communications.

- In Study II, which focused on racial disparities, we first examined racial disparities in education (even though we had a total of six policy batteries with which to assess the performance of the values). In talking about racial disparities in education, we find that the value of Prevention worked best to extend public support in the national sample; however, in the Mississippi sample, we find that two values – Prevention and Opportunity for All – were statistically significant and accomplished this task. Moreover, in the Mississippi sample, it is Opportunity for All that performs this task –best – almost doubling the effect size found compared to the use of Prevention.

- When talking about racial disparities in education, we also found that the results for the value of Ingenuity proved consistent with those in Study I. That is, Ingenuity actually was found to depress support for addressing racial disparities in education. So, once again, we suggest avoiding Ingenuity as a frame in communications about the K-12 educational system and also with respect to talking racial disparities in that context.

- As mentioned above, we had a wider array of policy batteries, in addition to the education battery, from which to judge frame effects in Study II. Those other policy domains were child mental health, early child development, social welfare, health and immigration. When we evaluate the performance of the values in the Mississippi sample on this broader array of policy issues, we find strong and robust results for Opportunity for All across ALL of the policy domains. This strong showing posted by the Opportunity for All value is consistent with FrameWorks’ previous research on race and race-based policy preferences more generally.

- We want to note that the benefit of the Opportunity for All value, especially in the Mississippi context, is that it overcomes a key cultural model on race (the notion that different racial groups have “separate fates”) and allows the public to see how enhancing opportunity could result in a better quality of life for everybody. In addressing this communications challenge with respect to race, this value opens up the space for the public to think more expansively about the issues at hand (whether those issues are education, health, social welfare, etc.) and avoid the trap of divisive thinking about what groups might benefit most from reform efforts. Given the way that Opportunity for All works to lift ALL of the policy areas we examined, it is clear to us that race is the “always present” issue and that when making the decision about
the type of frame to employ in messaging, a first assumption should be that the frames which are effective on race should be used first. Our analysis shows that the values that address race are particularly important because they seem to serve a kind of gatekeeping function, providing a bridge to broader conversation about policy-specific issues (child mental health, early child development, education, etc.).

- In addition to the Opportunity for All value, we also found statistically significant support for several areas of policy in the Mississippi sample after exposure to the Fairness Across Places value, which explains disparities as a malfunction of the resource distribution process. Most notably, exposure to this value showed statistically significant effects on three batteries (child mental health, health, and immigration policies). So, in addition to the positive effects of Prevention and Opportunity for All in the Mississippi context, we also found Fairness Across Places as particularly useful in elevating policy support in several policy areas.

- The Mississippi sample also made it clear that we should avoid the Fairness Across Groups value frame. The Fairness Across Groups frame (or the notion that some groups are struggling because they are not given a fair chance to do well) significantly depressed support for two policy areas – social welfare and immigration policy. This finding may speak to the negative social construction of “welfare recipients” and “immigrants” in public thinking. This finding is an important one because it is a common frame used by advocacy groups nationally and in the state.

- Many advocacy groups also use the language of “disparities” to talk about differences across racial groups in a wide variety of policy domains (health, education, housing, etc.). Our findings around the disparities value warrant a second look. We find that using the language of “disparities” in talking about educational policy actually depresses policy support in the national sample. Furthermore in the Mississippi sample, our analysis suggests that the only context where this language of “disparities” elevates policy support is in relationship to describing physical health issues. Thus, our recommendation is to avoid using the language of “disparities.” Mississippi policy experts and advocates in particular would be well to communicate the importance of addressing differences across groups largely in terms of Prevention or Opportunities for All rather than to resolve lingering “disparities.”

**Findings**

In this report, we evaluate the effects of several values on policies related to education and to addressing racial disparities. In this section of the report, we present the effects associated with
exposure to the values treatments or the “treatment effects.” In each study, the control group received no exposure to the value and was simply directed to answer questions about their policy preferences with respect to education and in Study II, about child mental health, early child development, social welfare, health and immigration. The “treatment groups” were first exposed to a statement explaining one of the values and then subsequently directed to answer the same set of policy preference questions. To estimate the “treatment effects” (or the difference in mean scores between the control condition and the experimental values treatments), we used a series of generalized linear regression models. Regression analysis is a useful technique because it measures the strength of the relationship between our control and the experimental treatments. By using this method, we can reliably measure the distance between how people think about policy when they are not primed with values (the control group) and what happens when they are first exposed to a value that reorients their thinking. We would say that a value is unsuccessful at reframing an issue if it cannot move public thinking beyond the control group and alternatively, it is successful when we see statistically significant improvements in support for policy after exposure to a treatment. A more detailed description of how treatment effects are derived, as well as the general design of the experiments and the analytical research methods employed, can be found in Appendix A.

Study I: Treatment Effects Related to Support for Education Policy

In the first study, we first evaluate the performance of the values treatments on our policy support battery. The policy support battery is a straightforward test that taps the approval/disapproval dichotomy – asking respondents if they strongly favor, favor, oppose, strongly oppose or have no opinion about a set of progressive education reforms. We combined responses in an index and summarized the results in Table 1.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 1. Summary of Treatment Effects on Education Policies</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Treatments</td>
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<td>All Values Treatments Combined</td>
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Disaggregated Treatment Effects

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<tr>
<th>Treatments</th>
<th>National Sample</th>
<th>Mississippi Sample</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Common Good</td>
<td>.005</td>
<td>.074</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fairness Between Places</td>
<td>.012</td>
<td>0.02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Future Preparation</td>
<td>.024*</td>
<td>.17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ingenuity</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>-.11</td>
</tr>
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Statistically Significant Differences *** p ≤ .001; **p < .05; *p < .10

The findings in Table 1 suggest that the treatment effects for all the values in the national sample
have means that are above the control group and appear to move public support in the right direction. For the Mississippi-specific sample, all but one of the values seem to best the control group in terms of elevating progressive education support. Looking more closely at the data, we find that one of the values, *Future Preparation*, *proved to be statistically significant with a treatment effect that is twice the size of any of the other values tested in the national sample. When we compare this to the Mississippi sample, it is clear the Future Preparation value has a much larger effect on public support than any of the other values tested but falls just short of statistical significance. The latter is likely to be the result of a much smaller sample size for the Mississippi data set but even still, the subsample allows us to see the fundamental impact of using this value over other values as well as over the control. As a result, we have strong indication at the national level and moderate indication in the Mississippi context that Future Preparation as a value works to elevate public support for progressive education reform policies. The specific iteration of Future Preparation in the way that it was provided in the experimental survey can be found in Appendix A, but it essentially focused on “pursuing policies that add new skills to the traditional curriculum to provide excellent schools, adequate educational resources, and quality educational experiences for our children.”

It is interesting to note that, in the national sample, the value of Ingenuity seems only to run about even with the control group (given the .000 effect of the treatment) but in the Mississippi sample, it becomes considerably less effective and fails to best the control group. As a result, the notion of Ingenuity as a catalyst for action in education reform has a kind of lukewarm reception at the national level but actually depresses support for policy in Mississippi and should be avoided in communications around education reform issues.

**Study II: Treatment Effects Related to Addressing Racial Disparities**

In Study II, we wanted to ascertain whether values that have moved support for addressing racial disparities in our national sample would have the same or a similar effect in Mississippi. We tested nine values in this study – six of which were derived from our qualitative research and shown to have great promise in that earlier work. Another three values included in the study were chosen because they are frequently used by advocates in the field. We did not expect the latter three values to perform well, based on our previous research, but we included them in the study to show the limited impact the current communications practice with respect to elevating public support for policy. That is, we wanted to compare values that we derived in our research against those currently in use by advocates to show the kind of traction that could be gained if they were to use alternative value frames.

We collected policy preference data in a wide variety of policy areas but we begin this analysis by
focusing on the results from the education policy battery in Study II. Table 2 presents the
treatment effects related to communicating about racial disparities in education. The first finding
from Table 2 is simply that the values we tested tended to have a stronger impact in improving
policy support for addressing racial disparities in education within the Mississippi context than
they did in the national sample as a whole. As a result, we first acknowledge that incorporating
values in communications about racial disparities in education is even more crucial in
Mississippi than we have found for other areas of the country. That is, the result of using values
as an integral part of the frame has stronger impacts in Mississippi than in the broader national
sample.

| Table 2. Summary of Treatment Effects on Addressing Racial Disparities in Education |
|-------------------------------|-----------------|-----------------|
| Treatments                    | National Sample | Mississippi Sample |
| All Treatments                | .032*           | .146**          |
| Treatments Commonly Used By Advocates | .019           | .117            |
| Reframing Value Treatments    | .044*           | .174**          |

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Treatments</th>
<th>National Sample</th>
<th>Mississippi Sample</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Treatments Commonly Used By Advocates</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Color Blind</td>
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<td>.091</td>
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<tr>
<td>Disparities</td>
<td>-.037</td>
<td>.130</td>
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<tr>
<td>Fairness Across Groups</td>
<td>.027</td>
<td>.125</td>
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<tr>
<td>Promising “Reframe” Treatments</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prevention</td>
<td>.067*</td>
<td>.187**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prosperity</td>
<td>.022</td>
<td>.004</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Opportunity for All</td>
<td>.043</td>
<td>.210***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interdependence</td>
<td>.033</td>
<td>.004</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ingenuity</td>
<td>.031</td>
<td>-.026</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fairness (Places)</td>
<td>.026</td>
<td>.059</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Statistically Significant Differences *** p ≤ .001; ** p < .05; * p < .10

Furthermore in evaluating the aggregate performance of the values, we can see that the
“reframing values” are twice as potent in elevating policy support for addressing racial disparities
as the values more commonly in use by advocates. The “reframing values” treatments boost
public support by 4 points on the dependent score over the control while the treatments in use by
advocates do so by only about 1 point on the dependent score. When we evaluate the
performance of these values in the Mississippi sample, the impact of the values is not only more
highly significant but result in more overall policy support. Reframing values in the Mississippi
sample raise public support by about 17 points on the dependent score over the control while the
values typically used by advocates do so to the tune of about 11 points. The two points to be
made here are as follows: (1) using any value is generally better than the control (as indicated by
the positive treatment effects all over Table 2); and (2) the “reframing values” (those that

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emerged from our qualitative work) are shown to be much more effective than the conventional values already in steady rotation by advocates. These two points are drawn from the finding that there is a sizeable positive treatment effect from using the values that were specifically chosen because they align with the major communications challenges on this issue (i.e., the reframing value treatments).

Another major finding to be drawn from this data is that there are some slight differences between the national sample and the Mississippi sample in terms of what works in communicating about racial disparities in education. From the national sample, we can clearly see that all but one value (Disparities) improves public support when compared to the control group. Most important, Prevention is the most salient value in the national sample in terms of promoting education reform, and it is the only value that reaches statistical significance.

Similarly, in the Mississippi sample Prevention improves policy support as well by about 7 points on the dependent score over the control. In addition to Prevention, we also found that a second value treatment actually performs better at this task – Opportunity for All. A look at the treatment effects shows that the stronger of the two values is Opportunity for All in Mississippi, which resulted in a 21-point jump on the dependent score. The latter indicates that Opportunity for All was able to raise public support for addressing racial disparities by 21 points on the dependent score when compared to the control. In communications terms, this is an enormous shift in policy support that results simply from the way in which the issue is framed.

We also note the performance of Ingenuity in this experimental study. Table 2 shows that the value of Ingenuity depresses public support for addressing racial disparities in education, and this finding is largely consistent with what we found in Study I as well as in recent experimental work conducted by FrameWorks.6

To extend our analysis here, we look more specifically at the performance of the values with respect to the Mississippi sample in particular. Table 3 presents the treatment effects for all six of the policy batteries in Study II side by side. In addition to highlighting the important findings with asterisks next to the statistically significant findings, we also wanted a visual representation of the statistical significance across the batteries – hence the highlighted areas. From Table 3 then, we are able to ascertain the robustness of Opportunity for All in addressing racial disparities in Mississippi given the shaded regions across all of the policy batteries. More specifically, we find that Opportunity for All not only garnered the most consistent and significant results across all of the values treatments, but it managed to do so at fairly high levels of significance.
In the experiment, the Opportunity for All frame was written in a way that specifically speaks to the broader societal outcomes and how they are undermined when not enough people have access to resources that help them to be successful. Narrated in this way, the performance of Opportunity for All across the batteries is not terribly surprising since several previous experimental studies by FrameWorks – especially our work on race – have shown the power of orienting the public to policy solutions using the Opportunity for All value. The conceptual benefit of the Opportunity for All value is that it overcomes a key cultural model on race (the notion that different racial groups have “separate fates”) and allows the public to see how enhancing opportunity could result in a better quality of life for everybody. Moreover, given the way that Opportunity for All helps the public “up and over” a key conceptual challenge (thinking about their fate as separate from other groups), we now understand this value and its power to help many navigate around divisive thinking about who benefits when policies are reformed. So rather than do the mental calculus of trying to estimate how they might benefit from policy reforms, people begin their thinking from the vantage point that beneficial impacts from reforms accrue to the community/society as a whole. While not everyone will be moved by such a message and some will revert back to their zero-sum thinking, our research suggests that a substantial block can be reoriented to think constructively about racial disparities by using the Opportunity for All value as part of the frame.

As a result, we suggest that when talking about racial disparities across a wide array of issues (as presented in Table 3), that policy experts and advocates in Mississippi assume that the communications challenges around race are key to moving the conversation about a variety of policy reforms forward with the public. Furthermore, when making the decision about the type of frame to employ in messaging, our research suggests that in Mississippi the first assumption...
should be that race is the “always present” issue in the conversation and that the values that specifically work to address the communications challenges of race should be employed first. The values that address race are particularly important because they seem to serve a kind of gatekeeping function, providing a bridge to broader conversation about policy-specific issues (child mental health, early child development, education, etc.).

Furthermore, in reviewing Table 3, we also find that the value of Fairness Across Places was able to lift policies in at least three policy domains in the survey – child mental health, health, and immigration policy domains. Fairness Across Places works well in part because it attributes responsibility for racial disparities to the broader allocation system rather than to individuals or groups. According to the narration of this value in the survey, “programs and services are not fairly distributed across all communities. When some communities are denied the resources they need, they are unable to overcome problems like poor health and education.”

It is useful to contrast the performance of this Fairness Across Places to the performance of Fairness Across Groups. Fairness Across Groups (or the notion that some groups are struggling because they are not given a fair chance to do well) is found in our analysis to depress support for social welfare policy and immigration policy in Mississippi. This is likely owed to the negative social construction of “welfare recipients” and “immigrants” in our society. In this way, this finding is not terribly unsurprising, but it is important to understand how thinking about fairness in terms of groups derails policy thinking. This finding speaks to the important distinction we make in our work around the value of “Fairness” more generally. “In general, when Fairness is seen as being between places not people, it is imbued with systems thinking. When blame is assigned to systems rather than people, and when mistakes that were made can be shown to have solutions, these Fairness frames prove powerful.”

Finally, we also want to call attention to one additional finding related to the disparities frame. Talking about differences in outcomes across racial groups using the language of “disparities” warrants some additional discussion here based on our findings. In the national sample, we found that using the value of Disparities (i.e., society needs to resolve lingering and unnecessary disparities in our community) actually depressed support for policy. When we look at this frame in the Mississippi context, while it was never negative, the only context in which it seemed to be significantly related to policy support was in relationship to health issues. That is, the only area for which framing racial disparities in terms of the “disparities” language seems to elevate public support is with regard to health issues. As a result, unless speaking specifically about health disparities, policy experts and issue advocates would do better to talk about the goals of policy reforms as Prevention or Opportunity for All, rather than to resolve lingering “disparities” in our society.

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CONCLUSIONS

The most important finding to emerge from these two experimental studies is that it is possible to elevate support for addressing racial disparities as well as for progressive educational reforms by reframing that discussion. That is, our results suggest that the use of Future Preparation in talking about education reform as well as Prevention and Opportunity for All in talking about educational disparities can work greatly to advance progressive policies. There are certainly other values mentioned as promising in this report, but these three are the clear winners in terms of their ability to move public policy thinking forward.

Three additional “takeaway” points seem germane to the findings in this report. First, despite the important points of difference that we highlighted between the national and Mississippi contexts, the results between the samples are more similar than different. That is, the basic findings in education hold (Future Preparation is the best value to communicate about education reform efforts) and racial disparities in education are consistent as well (Prevention serves to lift public support). The major difference is that a third value is added in the Mississippi data (Opportunity for All) and ultimately proves to be more powerful for talking about racial disparities in that context.

Second, the conventional practices used by advocates to talk about education and especially about race are not very powerful in terms of their ability to lift policy support. In Study II, we specifically test several frames that are common in the policy and advocacy literature for communicating with the public about racial disparities (Disparities, Color Blind, and Fairness Across Groups). We find these values are woefully inadequate for the task of redirecting public thinking around the key communications challenges inherent in these issues and that advocates could get much more mileage from their messaging by using other more constructive values that reframe the discourse. The only caveat to this general point that we can find is in the “disparities” language with respect to health issues in the Mississippi context.

Finally, it is really important to note that Opportunity for All functions well at lifting the conversation around disparities across a wide range of policy domains because it deals with the challenges of communicating about race. The practical implication of this finding is that policy experts and issue advocates working on issues from child mental health to immigration, to early child development and so on, should be able to usefully align their messaging with one another to multiply their impact on public thinking and the public discourse. The use of standard values across these fields might also be helpful in creating broad-based messages, perhaps for a media campaign, that cover a broad range of children’s and community-based issues.
In sum, our analysis suggests great reason for optimism about the possibility for changing the public discourse in Mississippi about some very long-standing challenges facing the state. Our optimism comes from the findings detailed in this report which suggest that there are strong, consistent, and effective values that present a real opportunity to elevate that discourse.
ABOUT THE INSTITUTE

The FrameWorks Institute is an independent nonprofit research organization founded in 1999 to advance the nonprofit sector’s communications capacity by identifying, translating and modeling relevant scholarly research for framing the public discourse about social problems. It has become known for its development of Strategic Frame Analysis™, which roots communications practice in the cognitive and social sciences. FrameWorks designs, commissions, manages and publishes multi-method, multi-disciplinary communications research to prepare nonprofit organizations to expand their constituency base, to build public will, and to further public understanding of specific social issues. In addition to working closely with scientists and social policy experts familiar with the specific issue, its work is informed by communications scholars and practitioners who are convened to discuss the research problem, and to work together in outlining potential strategies for advancing public understanding of remedial policies. The Institute publishes its research and recommendations at www.frameworksinstitute.org.

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APPENDIX A: RESEARCH METHODS

The findings in this paper are drawn from two experimental studies. The first study was conducted in June of 2009 to test the performance of specific values against a set progressive education reform policies. The study included a nationally representative sample of 1,852 registered voters (weighted on the basis of gender, age, race, education and party identification⁹) and was drawn from a national online panel.¹⁰ More than 500 respondents were assigned at random to the control group (517), while the remainder was assigned to one of four experimental conditions. Moreover, to specifically capture the extent to which the values worked to promote progressive education efforts in Mississippi, we added an oversample of another 500 cases from the state of Mississippi. We raise only one caveat here – while the oversample allows us to capture the main effects of the values on policy support, it does not allow us the capacity to ascertain differences across sub-groups in the Mississippi data (for example, racial or gender differences in effects). So our analysis focuses primarily on the main effects of the treatments in the Mississippi sample.

A second study was conducted in October 2009 using the same basic approach as outlined for Study I. This second study included a nationally representative sample of 4,275 registered voters (a larger sample to test a longer array of values) and, like the former study, it was also drawn from a national online panel and weighted on the basis of gender, age, race, education and party identification¹¹. More than 400 respondents were assigned at random to the control group (443); others were assigned to one of nine experimental conditions, and an oversample of 500 Mississippi residents was included for comparison purposes. The same caveats about sub-group analyses hold true here as well.

RANDOM ASSIGNMENT

The theory of random assignment in evaluation research design suggests that any variation between the control and the treatment groups not stemming from exposure to the stimuli of the treatments should be negligible or nonexistent. To test this proposition more specifically in our research, we conducted a series of overall F-tests on the national level sample to determine if there were any systematic differences in the race, gender, education and party affiliation between the treatment and control groups. We found no differences significant at the p>.10 level. Even so, as an additional precaution against selection bias caused by prior disposition or other observed characteristics, we also used statistical methods to control for the impact of a discrete set of demographic and political variables in the national level data. Whenever such methods are used to control for these factors, we note that in the text.
THE TREATMENTS

In both of our experimental surveys, we wanted to test the effectiveness of several values in lifting support for policies. In the first study, four text-based treatments were developed to represent specific values that might help respondents explain why society ought to make substantial progressive reforms to the educational system. The four values tested in the first study (Future Preparation, Common Good, Fairness Between Places, and Ingenuity) all emerged from several iterations of qualitative work (including interviews, media analyses, and peer discourse sessions) on the issue of education reform. The specific wording of each of the four study treatments can be found in Appendix B.

The second study was designed to test the extent to which a different set of values might help to explain why society ought to address racial disparities and, as a result, heighten support for policies that address disparities. In this study, we included two sets of values. The first set of values emerged from our qualitative work on race as promising candidates for reframing the racial disparities discourse. A second set of values were identified because they are commonly used by advocates and researchers to talk about disparities. We knew from our previous qualitative work that the second set of values were unlikely to elevate support for policy but saw this experiment as an opportunity to demonstrate to the field the contribution of empirically validated frames to the challenge of constructing more promising conversations around race. The values included in the study as “promising” based on earlier research included: Prevention, Prosperity, Opportunity for All, Interdependence, Ingenuity, and Fairness Across Places. The second set of values, based on current practice in the field, included Disparities, Fairness Across Groups, and Color Blind. Specific wording of the nine study treatments can be found below in Appendix C.

Each of the text treatments given to the survey participants consists of about 150 words. Each treatment is evaluated for its readability, and the average reading level of the treatments in this survey experiment was about 10th grade. In addition, to ensure that we are actually capturing true differences between the concepts in the values treatment, we write each of the treatments so that they have the same basic wording and structure. In this way, the wording of each treatment is essentially the same with the exception of 10 or so words that convey the basic elements of the value.

MEASURING PUBLIC POLICY PREFERENCES

To capture subjects’ policy preferences, we developed a set of exemplar policy questions (referred to here as policy batteries) to tap the approval/disapproval dichotomy of a series of progressive education policy proposals. We first collected a list of policy proposals being debated and
discussed among progressive scholars, policy experts, and issue advocates in the policy domains covered in the surveys. Those proposals were then used to devise a series of questions posed to subjects that helped us to measure the performance of the values.

In both studies we measured subjects’ ability to make policy choices in a fairly straightforward way – asking whether respondents strongly favored, favored, opposed, or strongly opposed a list of progressive policies – and examined the extent to which exposure to any of the value treatments made subjects more likely to support progressive policies. In the second study however, we developed several different specific policy batteries to see if public support varied across different policy domains after exposure to different values. In particular, we tested policy batteries that address racial disparities in the policy domains of child mental health, early child development, education, social welfare, health and immigration. The complete list of questions used to evaluate policy preferences can be found in Appendix D.
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APPENDIX B: TREATMENTS IN STUDY I

1. Control Group

2. Common Good
In a recent news editorial, John Wilson wrote that our nation’s success depends on our ability to support the common good for all. He says that supporting the common good means pursuing policies that benefit our entire society like providing excellent schools, adequate educational resources, and quality educational experiences for our children. So, even if you don’t have children, or your children are grown, or attend private schools, your tax dollars still go to support the public education system because it benefits everyone to have an educated population. Have you read or heard others talking about education reform in terms of advancing the common good in America?

3. Fairness Between Places
In a recent news editorial, John Wilson wrote that our nation’s success depends on our ability to make society fair for all. He says that fairness between places means pursuing policies that make resources available in all places to provide excellent schools, adequate educational resources, and quality educational experiences for our children. So, even if you don’t have children, or your children are grown, or attend private schools, your tax dollars still go to support the public education system because having a level playing field creates a fair society. Have you read or heard others talking about education reform in terms of fairness for different places in America?

4. Future Preparation
In a recent news editorial, John Wilson wrote that our nation’s success depends on our ability to prepare our population for the 21st century. He says that preparing for new challenges means pursuing policies that add new skills to the traditional curriculum to provide excellent schools, adequate educational resources, and quality educational experiences for our children. So, even if you don’t have children, or your children are grown, or attend private schools, your tax dollars still go to support the public education system because it prepares our students for the 21st century. Have you read or heard others talking about education reform in terms of preparing for the 21st century in America?

5. Ingenuity
In a recent news editorial, John Wilson wrote that our nation’s success depends on our ability to tap our ingenuity and innovation to solve social problems. He says that using innovation to meet challenges means pursuing policies that redesign programs and curricula to provide excellent schools, adequate educational resources, and quality educational experiences for our children. So, even if you don’t have children, or your children are grown, or attend private schools, your tax dollars still go to support the public education system because it provides the talent that keeps us innovative. Have you read or heard others talking about education reform in terms of developing the next generation of American ingenuity?
APPENDIX C: TREATMENTS IN STUDY II

1. Control Group

2. Disparities
Lately there has been a lot of talk about disparities in our country. Some people believe that discrimination continues to create differences in the quality of health and education programs and services available to people. This puts some groups at greater risk for problems than others. For this reason, it is important to reduce disparities by promoting programs and improving services available to those groups. According to this view, we should eliminate differences in the quality of services people can get because it harms their quality of life. Have you heard this explanation of why we should allocate societal assets to address disparities?

3. Color-blindness
Lately there has been a lot of talk about the value of having a color-blind society. Some people believe that in order to get to a point where race is no longer a dividing line, we need to resolve differences in the quality of health and education programs and services that racial and ethnic groups can get. These continuing differences block our ability to achieve a color-blind society. According to this view, we should promote programs and improve services to racial and ethnic minorities so that our nation can move on. Have you heard this explanation of why we should allocate societal assets to achieve a color-blind society?

4. Fairness Across Groups
Lately there has been a lot of talk about fairness between different groups in our country. Some people believe that some groups are struggling because they are not given a fair chance to do well. This is because programs and services are not fairly distributed among all groups in our society. When some groups are denied the resources they need, they are unable to overcome problems like poor health and education. According to this view, we need to make sure that all groups in our country have equal access to quality health and education programs and services. Have you heard this explanation of why we should allocate societal assets more fairly among groups?

5. Prevention
Lately there has been a lot of talk about prevention in our country. Some people believe that we should prevent health and education problems before they occur. When we don’t address them, they eventually become worse and cost more to fix. For this reason, it is important to promote programs and improve services that keep problems from occurring in the first place. According to this view, we can save lives and money if we make good prevention programs easier for everyone to access. Have you heard this explanation of why we should allocate societal assets to prevention?

6. Prosperity
Lately there has been a lot of talk about prosperity in our country. Some people believe that we should do more to address problems that undermine prosperity, like poor health and education. When we support
overall community well-being, it increases the chances that our society will thrive. For this reason, it is important to promote programs and improve services that keep our society moving forward. According to this view, developing human and community resources is vital to our ability to achieve a prosperous society. Have you heard this explanation of why we should allocate societal assets to create greater prosperity?

7. Opportunity for All
Lately there has been a lot of talk about opportunity for all in our country. Some people believe that too many people still face barriers to good health and education. Our country’s ability to achieve is undermined when not enough people have access to the things that help you succeed in life. For this reason, we need to ensure that everyone has access to the programs and services that strengthen opportunity in our country. According to this view, promoting programs and improving services that enhance opportunity will result in a better quality of life for the whole nation. Have you heard of this explanation of why we should allocate societal assets to improve opportunity for all?

8. Interdependence
Lately there has been a lot of talk about how we are all connected in our country. Some people believe that we will only succeed when all parts of the nation are in good shape. Problems of poor health and education that happen in one part of the nation end up affecting us all. For this reason, moving ahead as a country requires promoting programs and improving services everywhere so that we all benefit from our interconnection. According to this view, all communities must be able to realize their potential and contribute to the country. Have you heard this explanation of why we should allocate societal assets to recognize the connections among communities?

9. Ingenuity/Solutions First
Lately there has been a lot of talk about the need to use more innovation in our country. Some people believe that society is not applying enough American ingenuity to promoting programs and improving services that benefit communities. We can make progress toward solving health and education problems if programs are evaluated and the effective ones are continued. For this reason, innovation should be a priority. According to this view, smart states have significantly made conditions better in some communities by finding innovative ways to improve and promote health and education programs. Have you heard this explanation of why we should allocate societal assets to inventing better solutions?

10. Fairness Across Places
Lately there has been a lot of talk about fairness among different parts of our country. Some people believe that certain communities are struggling because they are not given a fair chance to do well. This is because programs and services are not fairly distributed across all communities. When some communities are denied the resources they need, they are unable to overcome problems like poor health and education. According to this view, we need to level the playing field so that every community has access to quality health and education programs and services. Have you heard this explanation of why we should allocate societal assets more fairly among communities?
APPENDIX D: POLICY BATTERIES FROM STUDY I AND II

STUDY I: POLICIES THAT ADDRESS EDUCATION REFORM EFFORTS

1. States should make funding available to extend the hours of instruction students receive (either by lengthening the school year or extending the hours in each school day).

2. States should require more art and music and provide adequate funding to do so.

3. Schools should be required to have programs that incorporate student mentoring by adults in their communities as one way of broadening students’ educational experiences.

4. Federal and state tax credits should be given to small businesses and nonprofit organizations that provide apprenticeships, job training, or practical professional experiences for high school students.

5. High school graduation requirements should be revised to incorporate a variety of practical, out-of-school learning experiences that will count for academic credit toward graduation.

6. Teacher candidates should be given financial incentives to do a portion of their field training in urban schools which are experiencing the greatest need for teachers.

7. Increased funding to provide basic health information should be provided by in-school health clinics.

8. Schools should place every student on an educational track that specifically prepares them for the possibility that they will go to college.

9. School districts should provide opportunities for teachers to update their teaching methods to include 21st century skill-building in areas such as teamwork, leadership, and global knowledge.

10. Greater federal funding should be made available to schools in low-income neighborhoods so that they can offer more programs that give students the educational resources to compete with students in more affluent neighborhoods.

11. Community colleges should be provided with more funding to incorporate policies and programs that have been shown to improve student graduation rates (such as intensive student advising, participation in learning communities, orientation programs, student success courses, and other approaches).

12. More funding should be directed toward programs that improve high school students’ preparation and transition to college.

13. Federal/state funds should be increased to reduce the disparity in funding between rural and urban school districts.

14. Federal/state funds should be used to develop stronger initiatives that reduce high school dropout rates in the United States.

15. Community colleges and universities should be given federal/state funds to help increase college completion rates, especially among low-income students.


**Study II: Policies That Address Racial Disparities**

**Child Mental Health**
1. Mental health and substance abuse services should be available and affordable for all racial/ethnic minority parents, caregivers and children who need them.
2. Provide funding for additional training of mental health professionals so they may learn to provide care that is sensitive to cultural differences of racial/ethnic minority children, adolescents, and their families.
3. Financial incentives should be given to states to incorporate mental health screening into their children’s health programs.
4. Provide grants to community health clinics to develop new (or improve existing) child mental health care services in minority communities.
5. Mental health services should be offered to racial and ethnic minorities in English only and not in multiple languages.
6. Racial and ethnic minority children should not get priority when it comes to allocating funding for mental health screening.

**Early Child Development**
1. Improve the quality of early care and education centers for racial/ethnic minority children by investing more resources in small class sizes, low teacher-child ratios, and highly skilled teachers.
2. Make high-quality early care and education programs more affordable for lower-income minority families by providing public subsidies.
3. Forgive federal loans for students who become trained and work for at least five years in child care and education programs in low-income minority areas.
4. Increase access to Early Head Start and other comprehensive, high-quality settings for minority infants and toddlers.

**Education**
1. Expand opportunities for “out-of-school” learning for minority students (after school homework clinics, after school learning, etc.).
2. Expand funding for programs at community colleges that effectively incorporate initiatives that have been shown to improve minority student graduation rates (such as intensive student advising, participation in learning communities, orientation programs, etc.).
3. Develop programs that help minority students make a successful transition from high school to college.
4. Improve the educational facilities and resources (such as newer computers and lab equipment) in high schools that have a high percentage of minority students.

**Social Welfare Policies**
1. Create tax incentives for businesses in low-income minority communities.
2. Expand the earned income tax credit, which results in more income for low-wage minority workers.
3. For those minorities transitioning from welfare to work, provide supplementary benefits like child care and health care, until their wages are above the poverty level.
4. Provide free pre-natal services.

**Health**
1. Increase recruitment and retention of underrepresented minorities in the health professions.
2. Improve funding for public hospitals and community health centers that provide comprehensive quality services to underserved minority populations.
3. Improve access to affordable health care for minorities by setting income-based standards for out-of-
pocket health care costs (such as lower premiums, copayments and deductibles).

4. Fund community health assessments that measure and try to improve the effect of the “built environment” (such as the quality of housing or the availability of healthy foods) on people’s health in minority communities.

Immigration
1. Support family reunification by reducing the federal backlog of applications from U.S. residents who wish to sponsor the immigration of an immediate family member.
2. Expand community-based immigrant resource centers that provide opportunities for recent lawful immigrants to learn English.
3. Create greater opportunities for immigrants to become permanent residents or citizens.
4. Make state-issued driver’s licenses proof of an individual’s identity and proof of authorization to drive a motor vehicle, regardless of immigration status.

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