

## **Abstract**

Environmental education (EE) is crucial for fostering ecological awareness, yet racial disparities persist in its accessibility. This thesis examined causes of these disparities, focusing on access to green spaces and EE curricula, in predominantly Black and White school districts in the Midwest. The existing literature acknowledges the importance of EE but falls short in addressing the racial gaps that hinder equitable access.

The primary objective was to assess and compare the level of access to green spaces and EE opportunities in predominantly African American and White school districts. Additionally, the study aimed to identify and analyze specific challenges that hinder access for both groups, with a focus on understanding the unique obstacles faced by minorities, particularly related to safety and availability. A qualitative approach was employed, conducting semi-structured interviews with teachers from selected school districts. The unique identifiers were assigned to maintain confidentiality. The questions were designed based on established concepts and inspired by similar studies.

The research uncovered disparities in access to green spaces and EE opportunities between predominantly Black and White school districts. Teachers provided valuable insights into challenges, revealing nuanced differences between minority and majority groups. The study also illuminated the intersectionality of race, socioeconomic status, and environmental opportunities. The discussion explored the implications of the findings, emphasizing the need for targeted interventions to bridge the identified gaps. The study highlights the role of race and socioeconomic factors in shaping students' environmental experiences and underscores the importance of inclusive EE frameworks. iii

This study contributes to the ongoing discourse on environmental justice and educational equity. It provides a nuanced understanding of how race influences access to EE and green spaces, offering valuable insights for policymakers, educators, and researchers. The findings underscore the imperative to address these disparities and pave the way for a more inclusive environmental education landscape.