



CRITICAL RACE THEORY INFORMATION

School boards across the nation have recently become embroiled in controversy and debates arising from opinions about Critical Race Theory. This is a complex issue, so in support of PSBA members, we are offering context and definition.

Critical Race Theory:

- What it is and what it is not
- The role of school board directors related to curriculum selection
- The distinction between Critical Race Theory and the equity promise made to all students

Helping Your Community Understand that Your Equity-Focused Initiatives Are Not About Teaching Critical Race Theory

Regrettably, concerns about Critical Race Theory have been misdirected at something very different — the equity-focused initiatives school boards are undertaking to ensure that all children of the community have access to a high-quality education and opportunities for success.

What is Critical Race Theory?

Critical Race Theory is just that – a theory.

- Critical Race Theory is a framework for examining the effects of race and racism in society. Being a theory, it has been discussed in graduate-level higher education and legal circles since the 1970s, not as curriculum, but as a point of discussion and analysis. Though originally focused on race, it has expanded to include the intersectional examination of the effects of other types of discrimination, such as those centered around gender, ethnicity, class and disability in society.
- Critical Race Theory should not be confused with Culturally Responsive Teaching and Leadership practices. Through these practices, teachers and school leaders affirm and incorporate inclusively the diverse cultural references, identities, voices, experiences and histories of all students and their families.

The Role of the School Board

The core of the public education system is based on local decision-making, aimed to address the will and needs of the whole community. Public school board directors are unpaid locally elected public servants, who, in their role as the governing body of a district, are dedicated to providing the best public education for every child in that district.

- Pennsylvania's local school boards are responsible for choosing and adopting educational curriculum aligned with academic standards that are established and mandated by the State Board of Education. It is neither required nor probable that Pennsylvania's school districts would contemplate adopting a curriculum built specifically around Critical Race Theory.
- School districts, under state and federal education laws, are responsible for ensuring that factors arising from race, ethnicity, gender, class, disability, homelessness and other circumstances do not limit any student's ability to access and benefit from district programs. Addressing barriers to opportunity that students may face — such as poverty, trauma, digital inequity and discrimination — is supportive of this responsibility.

The Promise of Equity

Misunderstandings about Critical Race Theory have caused the label "CRT" to be used to alarm, attack and undermine important efforts by public school systems to promote equity in their programs. These efforts are necessary to ensure that every child receives what they require to obtain a high-quality education regardless of their race, ethnicity, economic circumstances, gender, disability, history of trauma or other factors. Debates about Critical Race Theory are not beneficial to a school board's decision-making about a district's equity needs and goals.

PSBA is committed to assisting school boards in this essential equity work and in meeting their legal obligations. Recognizing that there is room for reasonable disagreement about many aspects of public education, we remain confident that every community wants the very best education for every student in their local district, so that every child can succeed.