

PARENT TOOLKIT

Advocating for Quality Curriculum

MAKING YOUR VOICE HEARD

What is High-Quality Curriculum?

A high-quality curriculum is built on **high expectations, aligned with robust scholarly standards, is academically rigorous**, and is designed to **meet all learners' needs** (Steiner, 2017). A high-quality curriculum provides more **coherence and connection in the sequencing of learning** between grade levels, and high-quality curriculum materials are created to engage students in a **deeper level of learning** and create a **focused direction** ([National Institute for Excellence in Education](#)).

Research confirms that implementing a “high quality” curriculum leads to improved learning outcomes for students. Curriculum considerations should include multiple research studies with evince of positive student outcomes over a period of time. Impact on student learning over several years is one of the best determinants of a curriculum’s quality. Curricula like the 1619 Project and CRT have none of the important determinants of research-based impact on student outcomes.

What are The 1619 Project, CRT, Action Civics, and Equity-Based Education?

The 1619 Project: The 1619 Project, and the concept of “reimagining” or “reframing” American history, has become a popular topic since the release of the initiative from *The New York Times Magazine* in August 2019. The stated goal of this project is “to reframe American history by considering what it would mean to regard 1619 as our Nation’s birth year” ([The 1619 Project](#)). The 1619 Project claims that one of the primary reasons the colonists declared their independence from Great Britain was to protect slavery. The 1619 Project purports that slavery was a primary driver of economic growth and infused brutality into American capitalism today. These claims are backed by very few sources and have been widely disputed.

Critical Race Theory (CRT): The intellectual origins of CRT go back to the critical legal studies movement of the 1960s and 1970s that was a byproduct of Marxist critical theory. CRT, organized in 1989, is defined in many ways, a common definition is as follows: “critical race theorists hold that the law and legal institutions in the United States are inherently racist insofar as they function to create and maintain social, economic, and political inequalities between whites and non-whites, especially African Americans ([Britannica](#),



[n.d.](#))." **CRT explicitly rejects the ideals of meritocracy and a color-blind society.** School districts across the country have adopted the following CRT definition: "The Critical Race Theory movement considers many of the same issues that conventional civil rights and ethnic studies take up, but places them in a broader perspective that includes economics, history, and even feelings and the unconscious. **Unlike traditional civil rights**, which embraces incrementalism and step by step progress, **critical race theory questions the very foundations of the liberal order, including equality theory, legal reasoning, Enlightenment rationalism and principles of constitutional law"** ([Delgado, Stefancic, 2001](#))."

Action Civics: The goal of action civics is described in *Education Week* as "not only to teach students how their government works but to harness that knowledge to launch them into collective action on issues they care about (Gewertz, 2019)." This form of teaching is highly controversial, as some view this as **legitimizing political protests for class credit.**

Equity vs. Equality Focused Education: The divide between equity and equality has been a topic of political debate in the American education system harkening back to the time of *Brown v. Board of Education*. Curriculum that is equity-based focuses on ensuring everyone has the same outcomes, while equality focuses on ensuring everyone has equal opportunities. Equity demands that treatment must consider race, gender, ethnicity, etc. The Civil Rights Act of 1964 prohibits discrimination on the basis of race, color, religion, sex, or national origin. Policies that support equity versus equality are often a threat to the Civil Rights Act because they promote treating subsets of the population (often people of color) differently.

It is important to note that while The 1619 Project, CRT, action civics, and equity in education are frequently discussed, **there is a multitude of other theories, policies, and curricula programs that are equally as bad and incorporate the same values.** Some examples of these are Learning for Justice Curriculum of the Southern Poverty Law, "We Stories" program of the Educational Equity Consultants, Black Lives Matter curriculum, Teaching for Change curriculum, and the Zinn Education Project. This list is not exhaustive, so it is critical to use the below methods to identify CRT and racially divisive curriculum.

How Do I Identify the Use of This Politically Motivated Curriculum?

Carefully review your child's textbooks, supplemental materials, homework, in-class activities, and digital content to help identify a politically motivated curriculum, instead of when it is high-quality and improving your child's education. It is much more likely that you will discover this content in the in-class activities and digital content versus the textbook, so it is crucial that you request transparency regarding ALL materials presented to your child.

It is also likely that these materials will not outright say "Critical Race Theory" or "The 1619 Project," so it is vital to scan the materials for keywords or phrases that imply these teachings



and result in revisionist history, bigotry, collective guilt, neo-segregation, racial discrimination, and race scapegoating in the classroom.

The [Texas Public Policy Foundation](#) has developed a very helpful list of keywords to look for and an explanation of why these are “buzzwords” for politically motivated content. Their list is below:

Equity: This has replaced “equality” for individuals on the Left. Instead of ensuring that every American has an equal opportunity to succeed, equity demands equality of outcomes.

Implicit/unconscious/internalized bias: This is the relentless search to find racism in every aspect of American life. If it is not immediately evident, look harder.

Social Justice/Restorative Justice: This is the belief that society must be torn down and remade in order fully to root out racism.

Systemic racism: According to CRT, racism is the original sin of America, and it persists everywhere to this day. Every institution is designed, they say, “to maintain the dominance of white people in society.”

Microaggressions: These are “subtle insults (verbal, nonverbal and/or visual) directed toward people of color, often automatically or unconsciously.”

Antiracism: This is CRT’s fictitious name, and the practical outworking of its central ideas.

White privilege: According to this doctrine, white people derive immense benefits from their race. According to one theorist (and Wisconsin politician), “America needs to be honest about how race has driven every decision from education to homeownership, and everything in between.”

White fragility: This makes CRT non-falsifiable. Any objection to any tenet of critical race theory is said to be white fragility.

Identity: Everything is about what you are, not who you are.

Ally/Allyship: According to Harvard University, an ally is “Someone who makes the commitment and effort to recognize their privilege (based on gender, class, race, sexual identity, etc.) and work in solidarity with oppressed groups in the struggle for justice.” Critical race theorists demand nothing less of the rest of us.



Social Construct: The idea that race is made-up; it is a fiction used by oppressors to control the oppressed. Oh, and also race is real and immutable. It is the one thing you cannot change about yourself, and it is all that matters (see identity).

Another helpful resource to identify “buzzwords” for divisive concepts can be found [here](#).

How Can I Speak Out Against This?

We know that teachers, principals, and school board members work hard to help children and families. We know that they are not all trying to indoctrinate children through the use of a low-quality curriculum. The concern is more about the well-intentioned but uninformed on how harmful deviating from a high-quality curriculum can be. When speaking out against this, parents can:

- 1) Educate school board members, teachers, principals, and other parents on the benefits of a high-quality curriculum.
- 2) Provide information on how the public feels about these issues in schools (this data is readily available online, and some are provided below).
- 3) Know your rights and advocate for them.

Below are a handful of data points and talking points to use when speaking out against politically motivated content in your school:

Data Points on High-Quality Curriculum:

- A 2017 report from Johns Hopkins University provided research on the effect of curriculum on student outcomes ([Steiner, 2017](#)).
- The authors concluded that a teacher’s or a district’s choice of curriculum significantly affects student learning. **The report concluded a positive impact on student achievement using a high-quality curriculum with an increase of as much as 10 percentile points in reading and 23 percentile points in math.**
- Studies of the top-performing countries in education worldwide reveal that one of the very few characteristics they share is a high-quality, content-rich curriculum.
- Only **40 percent of teachers reported using a “high-quality and well-aligned curriculum to learning standards”** (Voices from the Classroom, 2020).
- A 2017 RAND Corporation survey of 1,100 math and English and language arts teachers found that almost all rely on materials they have developed or selected themselves rather than use the curriculum supplied by their school district ([Opfer et al., 2017](#)). **The**



researchers found that 96 percent of teachers surveyed used Google to find lessons and materials, and 75 percent used Pinterest.

Public Opinion of Politically Motivated Curriculum:

- Eighty percent of people surveyed oppose using classrooms to promote political activism to students, including 64 percent who strongly oppose ([Parents Defending Education](#)).
- As a national objective, 52 percent prefer “equality” while just 16 percent favor “equity” ([Rasmussen](#)).
- Sixty-nine percent of people surveyed opposed schools teaching that America was founded on racism and is structurally racist ([Parents Defending Education](#)).
- Regarding offering freedom and equality, 62 percent of voters believe the United States is better than most other nations ([Rasmussen](#)).
- Seventy-four percent of people surveyed said they were somewhat or strongly opposed to teaching students that white people are inherently privileged and black and other people of color are inherently oppressed ([Parents Defending Education](#)).

Know your rights and advocate for them:

Parents have the right to:

- Question and review the curriculum taught in their child’s school by questioning local school boards and school administrators.
- Know what their child is learning in school.
- Question and address their child’s school officials and school board members at publicly designated meetings with proper notice of the meetings provided.
- Run as a candidate for the local school board.
- Expect that the academic curriculum taught in your child’s school aligns with state and federal law.
- Participate in the selection and approval of academic standards for the state.
- Obtain educational materials and curriculum taught to your child in the classroom.



Talking Points and Questions When Addressing Teachers, Principals, and School Board Members:

- As a parent, I stand with the overwhelming majority of people who do not want politically motivated content in school, do not want students to learn that white people are inherently privileged, and prefer equality to equity.
- Widely accepted, evidence-based curricula make a vast difference in educational outcomes. What are you doing to ensure that my children are receiving an evidence-based curriculum? Can you provide evidence that this curriculum has been successful in the past?
- Equality is a principle upon which the country was founded. My child should be taught about equality, NOT equity.
- Why are we spending time and resources on politically-motivated content when we know our children need a high-quality curriculum to succeed?
- I do not want my child to be taught they are an oppressor or oppressed because of the color of their skin.
- As a parent, I have the right to know what my child is learning, and I would like to be aware of the curriculum, classroom activities, videos, speakers, and books that my child will encounter.
- I support using a high-quality curriculum backed by evidence, and I do not support the use of ANY race-centric curriculum or policies.
- I support my child being taught the truth about American history, including the parts of our history I am not proud of. I do NOT support revisionist history or ANY curriculum that teaches systemic racism or that this country was founded on racism.

