



# PARENT TOOLKIT

*Advocating For Quality*

*Curriculum*



AMERICA FIRST POLICY INSTITUTE

## INTRODUCTION

The COVID-19 pandemic and heightened tensions over the teaching of racial and social issues have made curriculum, school boards, and education transparency a top priority among parents, students, and politicians alike. **Parents must have the tools they need to advocate for their students.**

As our children go back to school, it is more important than ever that parents have the resources they need actively to engage in their child's education. Roughly 56 million students are attending elementary and secondary schools in America, and parents have the right to transparency and accountability in their child's education.

In a [recent poll](#) from Parents Defending Education, 80 percent of people opposed the use of classrooms to promote political activism. When asked, the overwhelming majority of Americans did not want students taught that America is structurally racist, told there is no such thing as biological sex, taught that white students are privileged, and/or taught that America's founding was rooted in racism.

Despite the opposition to these teachings, the political rise of “wokeness” and ideas such as Critical Race Theory (CRT), The 1619 Project, and action civics have brought these race-centric concepts and policies into thousands of schools across the country ([Burke et al., n.d.-a](#)). Examples across the country include:

- An elementary [school in Philadelphia](#) forced **fifth-grade students to simulate a black power rally**, and the 10 and 11-year-old students marched on a stage with signs that said “Jail Trump” and “Black Power.” The entirety of the Philadelphia Public School System has adopted a new “Antiracism Declaration,” and the local teachers union **put out a video denouncing the United States as a “colony built on White supremacy and capitalism.”**
- Evanston/Skokie School District 65 in Illinois is teaching K-8 students that “Racism is a white person’s problem and we are all caught up in it,” that “**White people have a very, very serious problem** and they should start thinking about what they should do about it,” and that white students should “**sit in [their] discomfort**” ([Southeastern Legal Foundation, 2021](#)).
- North Carolina’s largest school district launched a campaign against “whiteness in educational spaces” and **instructed teachers to ignore parents’** concerns about their equity programs ([Rufo, 2021c](#)).

- In Cupertino, California, an elementary ***school required third graders to analyze their racial identities and rank themselves*** according to their “power and privilege” ([Rufo, 2021a](#)).
- The lesson plans of public schools in Buffalo, New York, suggest that when students are in kindergarten, ***teachers ask students to compare their skin color and watch a video that illustrates dead black kids speaking to them*** about the dangers of being killed by “racist police and state-sanctioned violence” ([Rufo, 2021b](#)).
- [Oregon Department of Education](#) has adopted CRT in mathematics, going as far as to say that White supremacy is reinforced by the belief that teachers are teachers and students are students and that ***valuing independent work is White Supremacy culture***.
- [California education officials](#) are urging teachers to adopt “A Pathway to Equitable Math Instruction: Dismantling Racism in Mathematics Instruction.” The guide is geared explicitly toward math but provides a “collective approach to dismantling white supremacy.”
- [Rockville Center High School](#) in New York gave out a homework assignment that “demonized” the police.

**This is proof that parents have the right to be concerned that these teachings could come to their schools.**

The United States has worked hard to develop into a country driven by character, work ethic, and virtue, ***not a race and biological identity***. The growing movement of race-centric, anti-American thought and rhetoric in our schools threatens to dismantle that very achievement. These policies are a step back into a time when it was acceptable to treat people differently based on the color of their skin.

Public schools and state and local district school boards are accountable to the taxpayer. With the appropriate tools, parents can become involved and ensure that their child is receiving the best possible education. ***There has never been a more critical time to advocate for your child and the preservation of America.***

**This toolkit provides 10 ways for parents to ensure their child has access to quality education.**

# TABLE OF CONTENTS:

1. Engaging with Local School Boards .....	1
2. Meeting with Local School Board Members .....	5
3. Requesting Access to Curriculum Plans and Instructional Materials .....	7
4. Voting in School Board Elections .....	9
5. Running as a Candidate for Your Local School Board .....	10
6. Requesting to Participate in Selecting and Approving Academic Standards with the State Board of Education .....	13
7. Making Your Voice Heard .....	14
8. Directing Local School Boards to Use Civics and History Materials That Teach Non-Biased and Non-Politically Motivated Content .....	20
9. Visiting Your Child’s School and Requesting to Observe Classroom Instruction .....	22
10. Attending Parent Teacher Association (PTA) and/or Parent Teacher Organization (PTO) Meetings .....	24

# 1. ENGAGING WITH LOCAL SCHOOL BOARDS

## What are Local School Boards?

- School board members wield a great deal of power as elected officials. Local school district boards do not report to the state board of education. They only are accountable to the voters in their local jurisdiction—that means YOU!
- Local school boards establish and maintain a basic organizational structure for the local school system.
- There are roughly 14,000 school boards across the country and about 100,000 school board members and 95 percent of the school board members are elected to their positions ([What Every Parent Should Know about Their School Board | Parenting, n.d.](#)). They represent the largest group of elected officials in the country.
- School board members set a district's priorities for spending, resolve legal and disciplinary issues, acquire land, and even initiate eminent domain proceedings. They approve curricula meet federal and state mandates for public schools, appoint superintendents, adopt budgets, and help to maintain educational excellence ([Alexander, S. Kern and Alexander, David, 2001](#)).

## What Happens at a School Board Meeting?

- Every board meeting is different, but listed below are the common components occurring in most meetings. Please review your school board's policies to ensure the exact procedures of your school board meeting.
- A local school board's parliamentary procedure is a matter of local policy. Most boards follow [Roberts Rules of Order](#), which describes how meetings are run, how motions and votes are taken, and other procedures. Usually, the superintendent or school board president gives a general update and announcements before any new business.
- The most effective way to get an item that requires board action onto the agenda is to contact the board president or superintendent before the meeting. Items can be added to the agenda at the beginning of a meeting, but it is more difficult because there would need to be a motion made by a board member to amend the agenda to add an item and must be affirmed by a vote of the board members. To help board members be prepared for meetings, it is better to have a new agenda item added before the actual meeting.

- Board members follow a pre-approved agenda. ***There are two opportunities for public input at board meetings:***
  - During the time for public comment on agenda items at the beginning of the meeting.
  - During the time for public comment at the end of the meeting.
- Board members listen to public input and take it into account during discussion and deliberation. However, Board members have no direct interaction with the public during a regular school board meeting.
- The board president acknowledges and thanks members of the public for their input as appropriate. Once Board members make their comments, they will move to discussion on an agenda item. At this point, the audience (you) and staff no longer participate.

On the following page is a screenshot of a board meeting agenda from Virginia Beach City Public Schools. Thoroughly reading an agenda and supplemental materials is a great way to help identify policies that don't align with your values and can give you an avenue to advocate for the policies you would like to see. Good school board meeting agendas are detailed and include links to documents being discussed and note when updates are made to the agenda. By clicking on the photo at the top of the following page, you can see the entire detailed agenda. This includes discussions on religious exemptions, non-discrimination policies, the treatment of transgender students, employment actions, student suspension policies, and much more. This is an example of an informative school board agenda meeting materials.



## VIRGINIA BEACH CITY PUBLIC SCHOOLS CHARTING THE COURSE

School Board Regular Meeting Proposed Agenda (continued)  
Tuesday, August 24, 2021

- 7. Adoption of the Agenda**
- 8. Superintendent's Report**
- 9. Approval of Meeting Minutes:**
  - A. August 10, 2021 Regular School Board Meeting **Added 08/23/2021**
- 10. Hearing of Citizens and Delegations on Formal Agenda Items**

The School Board will hear public comment on Formal Agenda items at the August 24, 2021 School Board Meeting. Citizens may sign up to speak by completing the [online form here](#) or contacting the School Board Clerk at 263-1016 and shall be allocated 4 minutes each. Sign up for public speakers will close at noon on August 24, 2021. Speakers will be provided with further information concerning how they will be called to speak. In person speakers should be in the parking lot of the School Administration Building, 2512 George Mason Drive, Building 6, Municipal Center, Virginia Beach, Virginia 23456 by 5:45 p.m. August 24, 2021. Speakers signed up to address the School Board through Zoom or by telephone should be signed into the School Board Meeting by 5:45 p.m. All public comments shall meet the [School Board Bylaw 1-48](#) requirements for Decorum and Order.
- 11. Consent Agenda**

All items under the Consent Agenda are enacted on by one motion. During item 7 – Adoption of the Agenda – School Board members may request any item on the Consent Agenda be moved to the Action portion of the regular agenda.

  - A. Religious Exemptions
- 12. Action**
  - A. Personnel Report / Administrative Appointment(s)
  - B. Unsolicited PPEA
  - C. Policy Review Committee Recommendations
    1. Policy 5-7 / Non-Discrimination/Non-Harassment of Students **Updated 08/23/2021**
- 13. Information**
  - A. Program Evaluation Schedule 2021-2022
  - B. Policy Review Committee Recommendations

### How Can Parents Get Involved?

- Parents should search when and where the school board meetings take place. Usually they take place at least once a month. Information on school board meetings is on the school district website.
- **School board meetings are public meetings and are required to give public notice at least 5 days before the meeting date and time.** Attending local school board meetings helps parents stay vigilant and keeps them aware of what is being taught in the community.
- Parents can keep track of board activities by **reading the meeting minutes (notes of what happened)**, which must be posted on the school district website.
- Board meeting minutes will also include budget documents to observe spending on all activities, trainings, and any personnel changes.
- Reviewing the school board's mission and vision statements posted on their websites will help you become familiar with their priorities as a board and their policies and procedures.

- Many school boards have committees and workgroups that give the school board advice or make recommendations about issues. For example, school boards are typically required by law to involve parents, teachers, students, and community members in developing and reviewing school policies. School board directors are often eager to hear from parents who volunteer their time. **Contact your school board members and offer to help with any workgroup.**
- Parents can set up a parent group on social media for families in the community so that parents can share information and PTA activities for more involvement opportunities.
- Parents can contact school board members directly. Usually, contact information for individual board members can be found on the school district’s website under “board members.” If it is not posted online, contact the number on the website and request this information.
- Parents have the right to ask school board members their position on various issues.

### **Sample Questions about Curriculum Adoption:**

1. Has this district adopted a curriculum focused on “antiracism,” “dismantling White Supremacy or privilege,” “equity,” “social or racial justice,” or any content that suggests biological factors play a major role in societal opportunity?
  - a. If so, these are elements of CRT. How do you believe these to be elements of a high-quality curriculum? How do you believe these teach students to prioritize hard work, merit, and equal treatment of peers independent of biology?
2. Where can we find the approved academic standards for each grade level?
3. What is included in the school district’s diversity and inclusion plan?
4. How much money and time are you spending on race, gender, equity, diversity, and social justice programs?
5. What accountability measures do you have in place to ensure the supplemental materials used in classrooms are aligned with a high-quality curriculum?
  - a. What do you define as a high-quality curriculum?



## 2. MEETING WITH LOCAL SCHOOL BOARD MEMBERS

Meeting with individual school board members is a great way to fully understand their views on issues and obtain more information on given topics. School board member information is typically posted on the website (if you cannot find their email or phone number, you can call the district line), and many members will take time to meet with you or a small group of parents.

### **Strategies for Speaking with School Board Members:**

- When setting up the meeting, be specific about what you are interested in discussing. ***Be clear if you are planning to discuss general topics or a particular policy.***
- ***Consider bringing other parents with you*** for the meeting with a board member. Keep the meeting small and let the board member know who you will be bringing ahead of time.
- Parents and community members have a lot of expertise to bring to school board members. Be sure to connect with them by sharing a personal story of how the policy you are discussing is affecting your child or your family. Be sure to share your expertise on the issue as well as ***suggested solutions to the issue.*** Your expertise does not need to be your professional or educational background. As a parent, your expertise may be rooted in your experience as a mother or father or even a concerned community member.
- ***Follow up with the entire school board after your member meeting.*** It is always helpful to present your concerns or points officially to the entire school board through a letter or one-page summary on the topic. These notes will then become part of the public record and are included in the board minutes. You can do this by sending an email to all members of the school board or the board secretary.
- School board members typically have official email addresses with the school district. ***Letters, emails, and phone calls can also be a good way to communicate*** with them. A sample letter is linked below:

## [Sample Letter to the School Board](#)

\*\*Below is a screenshot of the opening of the letter

June 22, 2021

**Meridian Public School District Board of Directors, Dr. Everett and Mr. Harvill,**



Thank you for the time and effort you have put into the Meridian School District. All of you play a huge role in the

community, and we appreciate that what you do is challenging. With this in mind, we, the Meridian Parent Coalition, a group of concerned community members, parents, Meridian School District staff and Alumni, have concerns that need to be addressed.

We understand that decisions have not been reached on the sex education curriculum or the teaching of Critical Race Theory in the classroom. We are asking for the Board of Directors to work with us to find curriculum that is deemed age appropriate and in alignment with our values. We, the Meridian Parent Coalition, believe ALL children should be treated with dignity and respect. We also believe that families have the primary responsibility and ability to teach and influence our children the core values we hold true. We are requesting Transparency, Communication and Accountability. We acknowledge that we have placed our children in your care for an education that aims to enhance a learner's basic age-appropriate skills and prepare graduates for lifelong learning and employment. We are committed to a district that is free of divisive teaching and ideology influence.

### 3. REQUESTING ACCESS TO CURRICULUM PLANS AND INSTRUCTIONAL MATERIALS

As a parent, you have the right to request access to the curriculum and instructional materials. Parents often receive materials directly from the school through your child's packet of information sent home throughout the year. As a parent, you also have the right to speak with your child's teacher and principal. In addition, parents can request to see the materials used in their child's classroom.

The school district website also provides additional details about meetings, trainings, and programs on diversity, equity, and inclusion. Through [state freedom of information or sunshine laws](#), parents can request to see public records more formally. All trainings, programs, and curricula related to CRT or equity-based curricula can be requested. Once you receive the documents, you can share what you observed with parents and post them on social media.

By clicking the link above, choose the state the child attends school in and select "Sample Freedom Of Information Act request." It will give you an outline, like below, that can formally request information from the school district.

#### **How to Submit an Open Records Request:**

Each state has its laws for record requests and open meeting requirements. Open Records laws detail the records, documents, and information of state agencies and local governments. Most freedom of information laws require that public records requests be made in writing. [The National Freedom of Information Coalition](#) is a great resource that provides information about individual state laws along with sample letters of request by state. All state agencies in government must disclose if requested. Your state may offer trainings and guides to educate citizens about the specific laws in their state, best practices for making requests, and resources for citizens when agencies fail to comply with requests. A list of additional resources about your state laws can be found [here](#).

#### **What to include in Public Records**

- Identify the appropriate person to send the letter to.
- Be specific about what you are requesting but not overly narrow about the labels or terms you use. For example, schools may respond that they do not teach "critical race theory" if that exact phrase does not appear in any course materials. However, if, in addition to "critical race theory," you also list critical race theory scholars or topics like "curriculum materials that discuss systemic racism and disadvantages to meritocracy," you are more likely to receive the information you are looking for. As another example, you can say, "materials used in teacher training from 2020-21 school year, Diversity,

Equity, and Inclusion materials for 2020-21 school year, **outgoing and incoming emails from Mrs. Jones from January 1, 2020 – July 31, 2021.”**

- Confirm receipt.
- Pay any fees.
- Follow-up with regular emails until it is received. Many Districts have legally mandated timelines to return your requests, and if they want more time, they need to state a reason. Be prepared to respond to any such requests. You can object or agree.

## 4. VOTING IN SCHOOL BOARD ELECTIONS

There are roughly 14,000 school boards across the country and about 100,000 school board members. Of these school board members, 95 percent are elected to their positions. They represent the largest group of elected officials in the country.

School board elections receive the least amount of attention and have the lowest voter turnout. From 2018 to 2020, [Ballotpedia covered](#) elections for 2,803 school board seats in 960 school districts across the United States. They found that between 35 percent and 40 percent of the school board elections covered were unopposed each year and that incumbents won between 57 percent and 61 percent of contested seats.

The quality of public schools is largely dependent on school board decisions regarding how children are educated and how tax dollars are spent. Local school board elections are an opportunity for parents to express views on education issues by voting for a candidate that best aligns with those views. It is a powerful way to support children. With low voter turnout for such an important position, there are many ways that parents can encourage people to vote in these crucial elections.

### **What to Look for in a School Board Candidate:**

- Does the school board candidate have a genuine interest in improving public schools?
  - Do they have a background that supports helping children? Are they positively involved in the community?
- Is the candidate a visionary and able to understand the system and help plan for the future?
- Does the candidate know about public schools? Are they aware of the issues in your district?
- Are they committed to public education? Do they believe in the importance of public education and that every child deserves an outstanding education?
  - Do not be afraid to ask what they believe is “high quality” education and for curriculum plans they have seen and think would benefit the school.
- Is the candidate committed to a high-quality curriculum?
- Does the candidate share the same values as you, and are they committed to preserving those values in local schools?
  - Make sure to look for whether the candidate is being funded by a group or individual that supports divisive concepts.
- Are they focused on putting students front and center and not special interests?

## 5. RUNNING AS A CANDIDATE FOR YOUR LOCAL SCHOOL BOARD

You do not need a background in public education or public policy to run for a school board position. Although it differs from state to state, there are some common qualifications that most states have to be eligible to be a candidate for a school board election. Check with your local school board to see your specific requirements. The most common candidate requirements:

1. Be a registered voter.
2. Be a resident of the district that he or she is running in.
3. Have at least a high school diploma or a certificate of high school equivalency.
4. Have no felonies.
5. Not be a current employee of the district and/or be related to a current employee in that district.

***Some states require candidates to file a petition to run for a school board position.*** These petitions require a certain number of valid signatures and sometimes a small filing fee. Check with your county election commission or district superintendent's office to determine your exact local requirements.

Becoming a school board member is a significant commitment. It takes time and dedication to be an influential member. Candidates may run for a school board seat because they have a child in the district and want to impact education or because they want to serve and support the district.

***To find out information about your next local school board election, you can visit the district website.*** If you cannot find this information on the website, you can call the district or the superintendent's office for more details.

### **Running for School Board Position:**

To bring awareness of your interest in serving on the school board, a good start is to share information with the community. Candidates can reach out and connect with thousands of voters through social media platforms for little to no cost. Here are some suggestions on how to begin a campaign after you have filed your paperwork for candidacy.

1. **Create a Facebook page, Instagram account, and Twitter account** to promote your campaign. These accounts are usually free and can be easily accessed and shared by friends, family, and supporters. These accounts should be updated frequently and be used to reach your constituents daily. For extra amplification, you could use the promotional features offered by the platforms to reach more viewers. Make sure you are only advertising to people in your district and eligible to vote for you.
2. **Utilize your church community** for support and awareness. Your church community is a great ally. Many families are eager to volunteer and rally behind your cause.
3. **Knock on doors** in your community and introduce yourself to your neighbors. Your volunteers from church or social clubs could also help knock on doors on your behalf. Face-to-face interactions are important to help your community get to know you better and remind them of the upcoming election. Make sure to have a pamphlet or palm card to leave with potential voters.
4. **Make use of yard signs** to increase name recognition and serve as a reminder of upcoming elections. These signs should feature your name and what position you are running for in big, bold, and easy-to-read font.
5. **Host meet the candidate events** in local public venues. It can be as simple as hosting an event in a neighborhood park, inviting friends and neighbors, and asking them to invite a few friends themselves. If permissible, you can also organize an ice cream truck to meet you in a local neighborhood for a casual ice cream social or host an event in your local public library. These events should be simple, cost-effective, and give the community a chance to speak with you one-on-one.
6. **Recruit volunteers** to help you make phone calls, knock on doors, organize events, and educate the public on your campaign. Volunteers should be local community members, including members of the youth community. Colleges and universities often have clubs and organizations of students that love to get involved.
7. **Build a campaign website** to present information about yourself and the issues that are important to you. Keep the website updated with news and events to make it easy for voters to view your position on current events on education. You can also include a campaign press kit for voters and local media. The kit can include a candidate biography, cover letter describing yourself and the campaign, digital copies of brochures and flyers, headshots or photographs, and a frequently asked questions document on the major issues facing the candidate.
8. **Local media**, including newspapers, radio, and TV, are a great way to gain name recognition while advocating for issues that are important to you. Send short and simple press releases announcing your candidacy and what your vision is for the

district. Keep them under half a page, and make sure to include your district, name, campaign contact information, and webpage.

9. **Do not be afraid to fundraise.** Fundraising is often an intimidating part of campaigning but don't let it scare you! Fundraising can be done through in-person asks or on your digital platforms. Before making any asks, make sure you familiarize yourself with campaign finance laws (these are state-specific and can be found on your Secretary of State webpage). And remember, by donating to you, people are investing in the future of their child's education. A thank you note is customary when someone gives a donation or lends a helping hand in a local election.
10. **Seek endorsements** early on from trusted officials and leaders in your community and state. This will boost your name recognition along with voters' confidence in you as a candidate.

### **What is the time commitment to be on the school board?**

While school boards typically meet only a few times a month, the time commitment to be an effective school board member is considerable. Ahead of meetings, you will need to study materials to make the best possible decisions, ask questions, and do your research on issues you do not fully understand. Beyond board meetings, meetings, work sessions, and district events will require your time and attention.

### **What is the compensation for a School Board Member?**

Most of the time, serving as a school board member is voluntary and unpaid. Some states ban school districts from paying school board members, while others pay their school board members' salaries. This is different in each state, and it is important to look at your state's website to determine more information.



## 6. REQUESTING TO PARTICIPATE IN SELECTING AND APPROVING ACADEMIC STANDARDS WITH THE STATE BOARD OF EDUCATION

### **Does the Federal Government Require Academic Standards?**

The Federal Law Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) requires each state board of education to develop and implement academic standards and an accountability model that includes indicators of success, addresses subgroups, provides interim measures of progress, and meets long-term goals.

### **Who Creates the Academic Standards?**

Every state board of education submits the ESSA plan to the Department of Education for review and approval. This plan must include the academic standards adopted by the state board of education.

### **How are Academic Standards different from Curriculum?**

State academic standards are the starting point in the curriculum-setting process. They establish the goals and aspirations of what students are expected to master in the classroom. Standards influence testing materials, teacher preparation courses, and teacher professional development training. Curriculum is defined as the courses offered by a school ([Merriam-Webster, n.d.](#)). In Pre-K and K-12, the term curriculum is commonly used to refer to all of the academic lessons and content taught within a classroom.

### **How can Parents be Involved in this Process?**

Much like reaching out to the local school board members, parents can **directly contact the state school board members**. You can find contact information for your state board of education members [here](#) (on the United States Department of Education website). Ask how you can be involved in the process of developing academic standards. Depending on your state statute, many state boards of education must have a parent serve on the board. A list of how members of the state board of education are selected can be found [here](#) (on the Education Commission of the States website).

## 7. 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 can be 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.

## 8. DIRECTING LOCAL SCHOOL BOARDS TO USE CIVICS AND HISTORY MATERIALS THAT TEACH NON-BIASED AND NON-POLITICALLY MOTIVATED CONTENT

### Understanding the Adoption Process

It is essential to understand the curriculum adoption process in your school district. The United States Constitution does not mention education; public education is a function of the states. This was the true intention of the Founders.

State constitutions include provisions for a system of public schools and usually require a “general, uniform, or efficient” system. State legislative enactment gives local school boards the power and to develop policies, rules, regulations, school finance or budgets, staffing, curriculum, and overall school operations within the district boundaries. Except for the District of Columbia and Hawaii, every state has statutory provisions outlining the local school board’s authority. Hawaii and the District of Columbia have only one single public school district (Education Commission of the States, 2020).

In some states, local school boards, which primarily consist of elected members, have the final approval or denial of a selected curriculum to be used within their schools. Nineteen states have a state-level adoption process for instructional materials. The state-level adoption process means that the State Board of Education creates a pre-approved list of recommended books and materials for implementation. However, the local school board has final approval and can choose materials not on the list. The remaining 31 states allow school districts to select their materials with no input from the state board of education, giving the local districts more flexibility to determine what works best for their specific district.

### How to Identify Politically Motivated Civics Education

Carefully reviewing your child’s textbooks, supplemental materials, homework, in-class activities, and digital content can help identify a politically-motivated curriculum versus high quality and improving your child’s education. **Section 7 provides keywords to identify this type of content and data points to speak out against it.**

### How to Participate in The Curriculum Adoption Process

- Volunteer to participate in committees within the school district, including those of curriculum adoption.
- Attend school board meetings.
- Speak with board members individually and with parent groups.



- Contact your school and local school district and sign up to assist in the curriculum process, classroom, in school board working sessions, at the school at any time.
- Ask questions of teachers, principals, and school board members.
  - Do not feel bad about asking questions. It is YOUR child, YOUR community, and YOUR tax dollars.
- Remember that you have a **right** to transparency. If the board is not being transparent, you can submit a freedom of information request to obtain desired information.

## 9. VISITING YOUR CHILD’S SCHOOL AND REQUESTING TO OBSERVE CLASSROOM INSTRUCTION

\*\* If this is not possible, do not hesitate to set up regular ZOOM meetings with your child’s teachers and administrators. Teachers usually appreciate the open and direct dialogue.

### **Am I allowed to show up at school and observe a classroom?**

Many school districts require that parents notify the teacher before observing classrooms. You should check the school policy before you arrive and see if a formal observation request is needed. Some school districts have a reasonable limitation on observation times, and many do not allow parents to observe during standardized testing.

Regardless, as a parent, you have the right to observe your child during the school day. The ESSA law includes language that states **“parents have reasonable access to staff, opportunities to volunteer and participate in their child’s class and observation of classroom activities.”** If these requests are not being met, it is reasonable to contact the school counselor, administrator, or a school board member.

The simplest way to observe your child is by emailing the teacher directly. A teacher’s information is listed on the school website, or you can send a note with your child to give to the teacher. Remember, your child’s teacher is working his or her best for the student, and open dialogue will be the key to success.

### **What to look for when I am observing a class?**

The profession of teaching has changed and evolved over the years. Teachers all have their own styles and when observing the classroom, look at the students and the materials (papers, books, videos, guest speakers, etc.) to gauge the teacher’s success.

- Is the class focused on a clear and high-quality learning objective?
- Do the students understand what they are doing, and can they demonstrate what they learned through knowledge and skills?
  - Are they engaged in a learning atmosphere?
- Is the class being taught material that is consistent with the schools’ policies?
- Are any of the activities centered around “social justice”, “white privilege,” or “action civics”?
- Is the teacher moving around the classroom, ensuring all students are engaged?

- Are the students on task and thinking about the lesson at hand?
  - Talking in the classroom is a good thing and group work is a teaching strategy that helps children learn.
- Is there positive energy in the room?
- Are students allowed to share their opinions openly and freely, or are class discussions one-sided?

## 10. ATTENDING PARENT TEACHER ASSOCIATION (PTA) AND/OR PARENT TEACHER ORGANIZATION (PTO) MEETINGS

The [Parent Teacher Association \(PTA\)](#) is a nationwide network of parents and teachers that work together in national, state, and local organizations to help children. [The Parent Teacher Organization \(PTO\)](#) is an independent organization comprised of parents and teachers, similar to the PTA, but usually has more financial freedom and structure.

**PTA membership at the local level is open to any parent in the district.** There are almost 6 million members in 23,000 local chapters across the United States. A PTO structure may not have a membership fee but provide opportunities for parents, teachers, and students to engage.

Involvement in your child's education is likely to have a positive effect on their long-term success. Students with involved parents are more likely to have higher grades, better social skills, and more likely to graduate from high school and attend post-secondary information. There are many ways parents can be involved in the schools.

Attending PTA or PTO meetings offer a great opportunity to interact with other parents, talk with teachers, and ask questions about curriculum and instruction. You are not required to volunteer at the school if you join the PTA or attend PTO functions.

- Join the local PTA: [Join Your Local PTA | National PTA](#)
- Join the National PTA: [National Parent Teacher Association | National PTA](#)
- Join your school's PTO: Ask your school principal or email your child's teacher to get involved.

**If your school hosts a "Back to School" night, you will likely be able to meet the leaders of these groups. In addition, PTA and PTO leaders are often listed on the school's website.**

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