

# SCHOOL BOARD MEMBER TOOLKIT

## *Curriculum Adoption*

### ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES OF DISTRICT SCHOOL BOARD MEMBERS

As a school board member, you are a public servant beholden to the citizens in your community. These individuals rely on you to use finite resources wisely and adopt goals and priorities to improve the district's education system.

#### Core Responsibilities as a School Board Member:

- To **approve curriculum** and textbooks based on standards, goals, and policies adopted by the board.
- To **review and evaluate curriculum** as it relates to student assessment results.
- To hire and **hold accountable** the superintendent of the school district.
- To create a **responsible budget** and tax rate to advance the educational success of the students in your district.
- To provide parents and community members **transparency** on what is occurring in their local schools.
- To empower parents and community members to be able to effectively hold the board **accountable** when adopting curricula, budgets, and policies.

\*Please note that exact responsibilities vary by state. You will need to consult your district-specific board member policies or more detailed information.

#### What is My Responsibility to Parents and Community Members?

*School board members are champions for the community.*

- Work to ensure the needs and desires of the public are brought to life by carrying out core responsibilities.
- Know what to look for and understand what parents in the community want for their children.



- Engage one-on-one with parents and community members.
- Review curriculum plans, training guides, and policies and advocate for quality and nonpolitical content.

## What Should I Look Out for in District Curricula, Training Guides, Policies, Websites?

Today's pressing debates about political activism and race-centric and equity-centric policies and activities in schools have resulted in informative data regarding what parents do and do not want their students to be subjected to in the public school system.

*Survey Data on Political Activism and Race Centric Policies:*

- [Data from a recent survey](#) indicates that 80 percent of Americans oppose the use of classrooms to promote political activism to students.
  - Seventy percent said it is not important or not at all important to “teach students that their race is the most important thing about them,” compared to the 25 percent who think it is somewhat or very important.
  - Sixty-nine percent opposed schools teaching that America was founded on racism and is structurally racist.
- [Another survey](#) found that 75 percent of parents with K-12 students did not believe schools should teach that “the founding ideals of liberty and equality were false when they were written, and America’s history must be reframed” ([Burke et al., 2021](#)).
- Just 20 percent believe we should recognize that America was founded on racism and start over with something new ([Rasmussen, 2021](#)).
- Freedom, equality, and self-governance are seen as accurately describing America’s founding ideals by at least 70 percent of every demographic group measured ([Rasmussen, 2021](#)).

*Today’s “hot” politically motivated content:*

- **The 1619 Project:** The 1619 Project—named after the year the first slave ship arrived in America from Africa—promotes the concept of “reimagining” or “reframing” American history through a political lens. It has become a popular topic since the release of the initiative from *The New York Times Magazine* in August of 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](#). We are not proud of parts of American history, like slavery, but that does not mean we should reinvent our history to fit a narrative.



- **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. A common definition of CRT 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 one’s treatment of another person 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 threaten 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 are many other theories, policies, and curricula programs that are equally as bad and incorporate the same values**. Some examples of these are the Learning for Justice Curriculum of the Southern Poverty Law Center, the “We Stories” program of the Educational Equity Consultants, Black Lives Matter curricula, the 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.

As a school board member, you have a key role in the curriculum approval process. It is important that you carefully review the curriculum, training, and policy guides that the district posts. In alignment with what the **majority of Americans want, content should be high-quality and not political, race-centric, or equity-focused**. Identifying race-centric, equity-focused, or political content can be challenging. It will not always include the above terms, so it is important to review each document closely.



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](#).

