

Responding to politically motivated attacks on racial equity in schools

Educators across the country are experiencing a well-coordinated, multi-state attack on racial equity in public education.

KEY CONCEPTS FOR RESPONDING

1. Seize the moral high ground and engage on our terms. With attention on education, let's talk about the teaching and curricula we support, and communicate how it benefits all students.
 - For example: "We want California to be a place where every child can grow up to pursue their dreams, no matter what they look like or where they come from."
2. Ascribe motivations to the opposition. Instead of reflexively repeating the opposition's claims to dispel them, (e.g. "we are not teaching grade schoolers about XYZ"), talk about why they're attacking standards, equity and classroom educators.
 - For example: "Powerful groups want to keep us divided so we don't come together for better schools, affordable college, accessible health care and the other things regular families need."
3. Bring the conversation back to what we want. Don't stay on defense.
 - For example: "We want to prepare our students to be critical thinkers, good citizens and future leaders by giving them a more honest look at where we've been as a state/nation and where we're at. (Keep it aspirational and forward-looking. Avoid negative formulations like, "reducing racial disparities in test scores," or "closing the achievement gap.")"
4. Avoid the academic term "critical race theory." This phrase, unfamiliar to most audiences, has been redefined by the political right as an all-purpose racial dog whistle. Talk instead about the more honest and more complete education our students deserve.

SAMPLE NARRATIVE

Almost all of us want our kids to have an education that encourages them to understand who we are, where we came from and what we're capable of being, no matter our skin color, background or ZIP code. But the same lawmakers and think tanks that want to defund our classrooms and spend public money on private-school vouchers are now trying to turn us against our own schools.

They're misleading Californians about the lessons our educators teach about history, culture and politics. Instead of supporting a more honest and complete education about race in America, they hope to divide us, so we don't join together to demand all that our students and their families need.

As educators, we know our students deserve the freedom to see a fuller picture of our state and nation — the good and the bad, the noble and the cruel — because we're educating the leaders of tomorrow. We can't let the prejudices of a few billionaires, and the politics they pay for, deny the next generation the education they will need to bring Californians together to make a state where everyone can thrive, no exceptions.

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Teaching the truth: “Critical race theory”

A growing number of people understand and publicly acknowledge the ways our laws, practices and institutions in the United States harm Black, Indigenous and other people of color.

Unfortunately, the right has resorted to its usual dog whistle strategy of distraction and division. This coordinated effort uses the phrase “critical race theory” as a catch-all for their anxieties about losing power and dominance.

The goal is to use schools and college campuses to stoke fears about what we teach our students so they can undermine trust in our public schools and its teachers and ultimately cut education funding.

What is critical race theory?

It’s an academic framework that is more than 40 years old and is centered on the idea that racism is systemic, not just a product of individual bias or prejudice, and embedded in our policies and legal structures.

Critical race theorists shift the focus away from individual people’s actions and toward how systems uphold racial disparities.

Who’s behind the attacks

Conservative activists and the politicians who do their bidding have redefined critical race theory as a sweeping term to describe anything that has to do with equity, cultural competency or education about race. This tactic is not a good- faith debate about pedagogy. It is intended to exploit racial divisions.

Groups like the Center of the American Experiment are touring the states trying to push a false narrative about what’s being taught in our schools to block kids from learning our shared stories of confronting injustice.

This attack on CRT is a coordinated effort across the country. Christopher Rufo, an opponent who works for the conservative Manhattan Institute, and [raises money opposing CRT](#), wrote this on Twitter: **“We have successfully frozen the brand — ‘critical race theory’ — into the public conversation and are steadily driving up negative perceptions. We will eventually turn it toxic, as we put all of the various cultural insanities under that brand category. The goal is to have the public read something crazy in the newspaper and immediately think ‘critical race theory.’”**

- The 1776 Project PAC is a new political action committee that backs school board candidates who oppose critical race theory, arguing it’s “hostile to white people.”
- The Center for Renewing America created a toolkit for “Americans who are fed up with state sanctioned racism” on how to “combat critical race theory and reclaim your local school board.”
- CTA chapters statewide should expect an onslaught of attacks and prepare to discern these extremist board members during their local school board endorsement processes.