

Critical Race Theory (CRT)

What School Board Members Need to Know

In light of recent debates surrounding critical race theory, the Alabama State Board of Education's discussion of a resolution addressing the issue and legislation expected during the 2022 legislative session, many school boards in Alabama and across the nation are receiving questions. Here is some information designed to help you manage questions from parents and community members.

1. **First**, let's consider what critical race theory is and what it is not:

What it is

Critical race theory (CRT) is a framework and/or analytical tool primarily used in university-level courses. Originating in the 1970s, CRT was first used as a way to help law students think critically about the impact of historical and present-day racism on the legal system. In the 1990s, some colleges of education also started incorporating CRT into their coursework to help aspiring school administrators and teachers better understand inequities in the context of education.

What it isn't

Critical race theory (CRT) is not part of social studies curriculum and has never been part of social studies curriculum in Alabama.

2. **Second**, let's look at required content for Alabama social studies instruction. The state's current social studies curriculum can be found at AlabamaAchieves.org. It's important to remember that in Alabama, curriculum must be adopted by the Alabama State Board of Education in consultation with stakeholders -- educators, parents and community members -- and only after public hearings.

Of course, teaching social studies and history will at times require discussion about historic instances of racism. This often prompts students' questions or requests for additional discussion on how some elements of history continue to play out in our communities. Our teachers have experience and expertise in managing these discussions.

3. **Third**, it's important to note that the terms critical race theory and educational equity are not the same and should not be used interchangeably.

Unlike CRT, which is a tool primarily used in institutions of higher education, **educational equity is a K-12 term referring to federal and state policies and requirements**. Specifically, the term is closely associated with "No Child Left Behind" (NCLB) legislation that was led by former President George W. Bush and signed into law in 2002. This watershed moment in US education policy established clear requirements for school districts to disaggregate achievement data by student groups as a way to address and close achievement gaps.

Additionally, in recent years, **the terms equity work or diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI)** have become commonplace in K-12 education as many districts revisit and renew their local efforts to close achievement gaps as required by the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA). When signed into law in 2015, ESSA further advanced equity in US education policy by upholding important protections outlined in NCLB. At the same time, it granted flexibility to states in exchange for rigorous and comprehensive state-developed plans designed to close achievement gaps, increase equity, improve the quality of instruction, and increase outcomes for all students.

We hope you find this information helpful as questions arise about this topic.