

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS: CRITICAL RACE THEORY

WHAT IS CRITICAL RACE THEORY?

Critical race theory (CRT) has been around since the 1970s and refers to a broad collection of legal and academic topics that seek to understand and address inequality and racism in the United States. It is a tool primarily used at the university level to help students think critically about the impact of historical and present-day racism. CRT submits that bias is embedded within the American culture and is systemic in our institutions, laws and public policy. CRT posits this systemic bias is primarily responsible for the unequal outcomes evident in systems such as health care, education, employment and the justice system. CRT seeks to explain why racial inequities exist in our systems and how these disparities might be eliminated.

WHY ARE WE HEARING ABOUT CRITICAL RACE THEORY NOW?

Recently, there has been significant media coverage about CRT, bringing an awareness to the general public. Media coverage tends to confuse the terms critical race theory and educational equity, however, creating confusion about what is occurring in local schools related to equity work. These terms are not the same and should not be used interchangeably.

POTENTIAL TALKING POINTS AROUND CRITICAL RACE THEORY

Given the general misunderstanding of CRT, engaging in a debate of the pros and cons will most likely end up frustrating all involved. Most parents and community members are most concerned about what is happening in their schools. The best approach is to listen to the concerns and then share some facts about your district's student population and the work occurring around diversity, equity and inclusion. In other words, what is in place to help all students be successful.

BELOW ARE SOME POTENTIAL QUESTIONS THAT YOU MAY WANT TO BE PREPARED TO ANSWER. PLEASE TAILOR YOUR ANSWERS TO BEST FIT YOUR CIRCUMSTANCES.

WHY ARE YOU SO CONCERNED ABOUT EQUITY?

Our data clearly indicate that many of our students of color, special education students and students living in poverty are performing well below other students (look at your district data to determine where the disparities are and point those out). This is concerning and we are working hard to increase access to opportunities for all students to be successful and to close opportunity gaps between students. We want all of our students to graduate from high school and move into careers and/or higher education. We want to make sure our schools are set up so that all students are able to succeed, and some students need additional or different supports to be successful. Here are some of our initiatives (use specific examples from your district).

HOW DO YOU DEFINE EQUITY?

Share or paraphrase your district's equity statement.

AREN'T EQUITY, DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION WORK REALLY CRT IN DISGUISE?

This is a good opportunity to ask for clarification. Ask them to explain what they mean by CRT in disguise. Listen respectfully and ask questions for understanding. Have them share what their specific concerns are regarding their students or school. Once you have heard their issues, calmly correct misinformation and share what your local school district is or is not doing in contrast to what a larger national narrative may be suggesting.

Try to reframe the discussion by sharing the goals and efforts within your district to ensure every student has access to an equitable education and what they need to be successful.

DO OREGON STATE STANDARDS REQUIRE TEACHING CRT?

CRT is not a curriculum and is not included in Oregon state standards.

WHAT DO OREGON'S ACADEMIC CONTENT STANDARDS REQUIRE?

Senate Bill 739 (2013), required the Oregon Department of Education to develop academic content standards for Oregon Studies and prepare materials to support teacher training and classroom instruction in this area. These standards focus on a balanced representation of the contribution to society by men and women of color in Oregon. The state's **current Social Studies Standards** have been in place since 2018. A **new set of standards** is available for districts, and will replace the 2018 standards for the 2026-27 school year. The Legislature has recently added the following requirements to the social studies curriculum: Tribal and Shared History (**SB 13 (2017)**), Holocaust and other Genocides (**SB 664 (2019)**) and Ethnic Studies and Inclusive Education (**HB 2845 (2017)**, **HB 2023 (2019)**).

ADDITIONAL ARTICLES AND ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Education Week: [Critical Race Theory is not a curriculum. It is a practice.](#)

Education Week: [What is Critical Race Theory and why is it under attack.](#)

AP News: [What is Critical Race Theory](#)

American Bar Association: [A Lesson on Critical Race Theory](#)



RESOURCES

The Oregon School Board Members of Color Caucus (OSBMCC) was founded in 2016. Caucus membership is open to all elected or appointed members of any public board of education in Oregon who identify as persons of color and whose board is an active member in good standing with the Oregon School Boards Association. For more information visit the [OSBMCC web page](#).

Special thanks:

This document was based on the Washington State School Directors Association's and Minnesota School Boards Association's documents on Critical Race Theory.



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