



Leading Now



Frequently Asked Questions for District and School Leaders

This resource offers ways to address community concerns with an intention of building trust, understanding, and clarity.¹ They may not be the exact questions you receive, but they cover a broad range of topics. You should adjust these to suit the context and concerns of your community and conversation. For proactive messaging tips, please refer to these talking points.

1. Are you teaching critical race theory?

- a. Critical race theory has come to mean a lot of different things to different people. Could you tell me what specifically you are wondering about?

2. Are you teaching my child that America is bad?

- a. We celebrate the good parts of our history and nation, as well as give students an honest account of our country and where we have erred, so we can learn from them.
- b. America is a work in progress. As the Founding Fathers wrote, we endeavor to form a more perfect union. We are not perfect yet, and that progress is not finished. We need our young people to make it even better in the future.

3. Why are you teaching about race and racism? Why do we even need to talk about it?

- a. We talk about race and racism in the context of understanding history, advancing justice, and overcoming inequality.
- b. Topics such as slavery, Jim Crow, and the civil rights movements are all essential parts of history that are required by state standards.
- c. Students need to be able to discuss real issues that are common in our history, politics, country, and society whether we teach about it in school or not. By giving students the tools to do so, we can help prepare them and build the skills in our society to have hard, honest, and civilized conversations to all of our betterment.
- d. We want students to become thoughtful and informed citizens who believe in equality and treat others fairly and with empathy.

4. Isn't [X age] too young to be learning about these topics?

- a. Students bring their own lived experiences and perspectives into learning, and these are often shaped by race. Those experiences start before students ever walk into the classroom.

¹ This resource has been adapted from our friends at Campaign for Our Shared Future (COSF). To learn more or contact COSF directly, visit <https://www.campaignsharedfuture.org/>.



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- b. Children are aware of race and gender differences as toddlers and begin to internalize social attitudes towards those identities.
 - c. When we, as a school community, are prepared and open for conversations and foster safe environments, these can be powerful moments of mutual growth and learning for all students.
 - d. Kids are smart, attentive, and intuitive—and they are often ready for far more than we, as adults, think they are. We cannot shield them from complex and inevitable topics such as racism, sexism, and discrimination. It is up to us to shepherd them safely through exploring and understanding them.
- 5. What does race have to do with math or science? (Related: Are you saying Black students can't meet the same math standards/are you setting lower expectations for Black students?)**
- a. Updating math, science, and other curriculum and teaching standards is about helping all students succeed—it is not just about race.
 - b. Students learn differently, engage differently, and process information differently. We have known for a long time that the one-size-fits-all approach to teaching and learning is too prescriptive and does not work for all students.
 - c. It's time for curricula that support every student, regardless of race, income, or ethnicity, to perform on grade level in math and every other subject.
- 6. Does this single out one race over another? (Related: Are you saying all white people are bad/that one race is better than another? Doesn't this portray some people as "victims" who have no agency?)**
- a. The issue at hand is giving honest, quality information to all students that will help them succeed.
 - b. We celebrate diversity and honor all people's histories and backgrounds.
 - c. We cannot celebrate each other if we do not recognize each other; we cannot work together if we do not understand each other.
 - d. Engaging in compassionate diversity and equity conversations prepares students to live in a more modern, empathetic, diverse, innovative world.
 - e. Recognizing the obstacles and challenges that people face also allows us to focus on resiliency and the ability for those to be overcome through community, civil engagement, and change.
 - f. The goal of this work is to lift everyone in our community up, together.
- 7. Are you separating students by race?**
- a. No, we do not practice segregation.
 - b. Students should celebrate, learn from, and talk to each other. Diverse conversations and perspectives make for deeper learning and richer relationships.
 - c. Through facilitated open and honest conversations between different races and backgrounds, we can help young people become more curious about and understanding of one another.



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8. Don't parents have the right to decide what their children learn?

- a. Parents have many avenues for input into their children's education, such as voting, setting up meetings with their schools, and participating in public meetings. We encourage them to advocate for their children through those avenues.
- b. Our job, as educators, is to do what is right for children. We have to stay focused on what we know, have seen, and have proven is good for all students. That includes:
 - i. Using content that reflects the diverse identities and experiences of the students and families in our community, and in our country. Students are more engaged and learn more when they see themselves in their content and classrooms.
 - ii. Exploring curriculum and pedagogical approaches that support student well-being and maximize student learning.

9. Are your teachers prepared to handle these types of conversations?

- a. Teachers are professionals—we trust them to navigate challenging situations and conversations every day.
- b. Teachers are continuous learners. We are seeking out professional learning opportunities and resources to grow their skills in new, important, and meaningful ways that support them in the classroom.
- c. We are committed to doing this work in kind, responsible ways that support all our children, community members, and educators.

Many topics and practices have become associated with or called into question by critical race theory and may be brought into conversation as points of query or concern for parents. The above responses or talking points might be of use in answering questions about the following:

- 1. LGBTQ+ and transgender representation in schools/curriculum
- 2. Social emotional learning
- 3. Culturally responsive education (sometimes referred to as culturally responsive teaching —or CRT —and often confused with critical race theory)
- 4. Parents' rights, parents' bills of rights, and "mom groups"
- 5. Book bans
- 6. Resource allocation (spending on ethnic studies/diversity initiatives)