



Truth in Our Classrooms Bridges Divides: A Messaging Guide

Background:

When it comes to race and politics in education spaces, there have been varying levels of pushback over the years. Recently, these efforts have become more concerted, resulting in state level policy moves against Critical Race Theory (CRT) in curriculum, “divisive concept,” attacks on local districts, and scapegoating of individual educators. This new level of aggression is part of a culture war that is playing out at a national and global scale. District leaders and legislators can change the narrative with attention to racial equity, culturally responsive curriculum, and meaningful learning. *Use this document when you need to find or provide background information, talking points, and well-research frames for your messaging.*

Top 5 Messages:

1. Truth in our classrooms propels young people towards a more united, inclusive, and just future.
2. Trust students to talk about what’s happening in the world around them.
3. Coordinated efforts to control curriculum come from aggressive right-wing instigators who want to stop educators and districts from working toward racial equity.
4. When educators teach the truth, students start to see themselves as part of a bigger story.
5. Banning conversations about racism in schools is a form of censorship. A shared, honest understanding of the past bridges divides.

Culturally Responsive Education is the solution, not the problem.

Culturally Responsive Education (CRE) is a method of rigorous, student-centered learning that connects curriculum and teaching to students’ experiences, perspectives, histories & cultures. CRE cultivates critical thinking instead of just test-taking skills; relates academic study to contemporary issues and students’ experiences; fosters positive academic, racial and cultural identities; develops students’ ability to connect across cultures; empowers students and inspires them to fall in love with learning.

5 Talking Points About Culturally Responsive Education:

- Our [state/district’s] goal is to make sure every student has equal opportunities to succeed in school and has access to accurate, comprehensive, and relevant curriculum.
- There is a long and painful history of race and education in [our state]. Students are ready for systems and institutions to change. Creating a just and equitable learning environment that embraces the history and experiences of its learners is not only good for students, but also for our communities and our shared future.
- We cannot pretend to be race-neutral or “colorblind” if we are ever going to address and account for the inequalities that students of color face.



- Many districts around the country have already incorporated culturally responsive curricula in classrooms. The result is that students of color are affirmed and validated by having their unique histories and experiences elevated among their teachers and peers.
- Research shows that students who see positive representations of themselves in their curriculum have improved educational outcomes. For students of color as well as white students, CRE decreases dropout rates and suspensions, increases student participation, confidence, academic achievement and graduation rates.

Resources:

- [NYU Metro Center's CRE Hub](#)
- [Learning for Justice](#)
- [Center for Anti-Racist Education \(CARE\)](#) & [Is your U.S. History text racist?](#) From CARE
- [Facing History and Ourselves](#)
- [Multiculturalism, Race & Ethnicity in Classics Consortium \(MRECC\)](#)

Get to know more about Culturally Responsive Education through the stories of people who have shaped and been shaped by it. <https://crehub.org/stories>

Why attack Critical Race Theory?

For an accessible breakdown of CRT, see: bit.ly/CRTbreakdown [Google Doc](#)

Critical Race Theory shows how racial inequity is baked into all of our social structures, and our social and political structures reproduce racism in ways that go far beyond interpersonal dynamics. Repairing a society that is divided by racism requires understanding of how the past relates to the present and how the structures that shape our lives affect people differently based on race.

At a national level, the forces behind the anti-CRT effort is **“to get the [Supreme Court](#) to rule that school and workplace trainings based on the doctrines of critical race theory violate the 1964 Civil Rights Act.”** On recent legislation to block 1619 and or CRT: "The larger purpose, it seems, is to **rally the Republican base**—to push back against the recent reexaminations of the role that slavery and segregation have played in American history and the attempts to redress those historical offenses. The shorthand for the Republicans’ bogeyman is an idea that has until now mostly lived in academia: critical race theory.” [Atlantic article](#)

Is it really about Critical Race Theory? No, it’s much bigger than that: “...the right has transformed a term that originally referred to an academic school of thought into a catchall for resentments over diversity initiatives and changing history curriculums.” - Michelle Goldberg, [NYT](#). The range of attached meanings includes but is not limited to:

- Making students “affirm, adopt or adhere to” belief systems that claim individuals of any race, sex, ethnicity, religion or national origin are responsible for past actions done by members of the same group ([Idaho](#))
- Belief systems that claim a group of people as defined by sex, race, ethnicity or religion are inferior or superior to others
- Mandatory diversity training, social justice and diversity and inclusion programs in schools, and Culturally Responsive Education
- “Race essentialism, collective guilt, and neo-segregation”

Who is really behind the attacks on CRT?

- Far right foundations and institutes like [Koch](#), Heritage, and Fordham ([breadcrumbs](#))
- Parents Defending Education, and many other groups (not “grassroots,” founded and driven by a number of individual influencers/agitators)
- Trumpism & [1776 Report](#) / 1776 Unites & Commission
- America-first, Back to Basics, “foundational history,” “Love America Again” curriculum (see [Turning Point Academy](#))

Frames and Messages

References: *FrameWorks Institute's [Talking About Racial Equity in Education](#), [Making the Case for Equitable and Just Public Education](#), [Quickstart Guide to Changing the Narrative on Public Education](#), [Models of Education Thinking](#), [Communicating about History: Challenges, Opportunities, and Emerging Recommendations](#); *We Make the Future [Messaging Guide](#)**

1. DO Advance a positive vision of educational opportunity that centers race. ([Example Recommendation](#)). Include solutions when talking about problems and disparities.
2. DO lead with an aspirational appeal to shared values, not a stark negative evaluation of the status quo. Explain “how it happens” before talking about “who it happens to more often”.
3. DO invoke common values (especially interdependence, shared fate, pragmatism, and ingenuity) that apply to all at the top of a communications, and subsequently explain how these values are derailed by racial bias and inequity.
4. DO remind people of our common belief that everyone deserves to be in an educational environment in which they can succeed and how failures in the system hurt everyone.
5. DONT focus on the triumphant individual or other mechanisms that exceptionalize or engage in a rhetorical debate around victims vs victors.
6. DONT use edu-speak and policy jargon.

“What’s the problem with teaching the story of everybody? It’s not about blaming someone, it’s about understanding each other.” - Abdi, HS student in Oregon

Shift From	Shift To
Values of patriotism, colorblindness, race neutrality, American exceptionalism, “unity,” individualism, Capitalism, meritocracy	Interdependence, collective responsibility, diversity, empathy, belonging, curiosity, pragmatism, ingenuity The idea of “colorblindness” makes it possible to believe that we are living in a meritocracy where anything is possible for anyone to achieve. In reality, people of color encounter hardships every day that white people do not. It is our collective responsibility to acknowledge, talk about, and change this reality so that every young person can reach their full potential.
Overarching anti-CRT stance as presented in this Heritage Foundation report - “Critical race theory is a grave threat to the American way of life.”	Students are ready for systems and institutions to change. Trust students to talk about what’s happening in the world around them. Students need to learn the full and diverse range of U.S. history and current events, even when it doesn’t live up to the values we believe in.

	<p>The U.S. is both founded on ideals of liberty, freedom and equality, <i>and</i> has been built on slavery, exploitation, genocide, and exclusion. If we want our future to be different, we have to deal with the past openly and honestly.</p>
<p>“Divisive Concepts” / False unity</p>	<p>Our bonds, as society and individuals, are built around truth and conversation. Lies and misinformation are what will deepen the divide.</p> <p>Facing divisive topics head on is a long tradition in this country. The Declaration of Independence was divisive. The abolition of slavery was so divisive that there was a Civil War. Let teachers teach, and keep politicians from legislating away our right to the truth.</p>
<p>Teaching about race and politics in schools is “indoctrination.”</p>	<p>We can’t deny students from having access to information about issues that affect their daily lives.</p> <p>Students need to learn about how power, race, and oppression intersect to be prepared to take on challenges now and in the future. Banning conversations about racism in schools is a form of censorship.</p> <p><i> (“When students are denied the chance to see how power, race, oppression, and resistance played out in the past, they are left ill-prepared for the present and the future.” - Maureen Costello, CARE blog)</i></p> <p>If teachers are only allowed to talk about why the U.S. is “great” without talking about its flaws, then we’re asking them to teach propaganda, not history. These efforts are attempting to prohibit the teaching of ideas they don’t like - that’s censorship.</p>
<p>Fears such as “CRT inflicts emotional and psychological harm” / makes children feel bad about being White; turns White children into “bad guys”; decenters White history</p>	<p>The U.S. is stronger because of its incredible diversity, and so are our classrooms. Young people are ingenious and capable of learning about different races, cultures, and histories in the classroom.</p> <p>Teaching about the cultures of a wide range of students isn’t something to fear. A shared, honest understanding of the past bridges divides.</p> <p>Many districts around the country have already incorporated culturally responsive curricula in classrooms. The result is that students of color are affirmed and validated by having their unique histories and experiences elevated.</p> <p>Research shows that students who see positive representations of themselves in their curriculum have improved educational outcomes. For students of color as well as White students, CRE decreases dropout rates and suspensions, increases student participation, confidence, academic achievement and graduation rates.</p>
<p>“Just because I do not want critical race theory taught in school does not mean I am a racist.”</p>	<p>Racist incidents are happening all around the country - they can be interpersonal, but the bigger problem is in our institutions and systems, and anti-racist curriculum is one way to make our education system better.</p>
<p>CRT needs to be banned from schools as a preventative</p>	<p>CRT is not an official part of the curriculum of most schools. However, if the actual issue is whether or not we should talk about racial equity in</p>

<p>measure.</p> <p><i>*Note: This frame is in use and is why “CRT is not taught in our schools” will not be effective.</i></p>	<p>schools, the answer is yes.</p> <p>We need racial equity to be an important and central part of our curriculum, at all grade levels and not just in history classes.</p> <p>Young people need skills and knowledge to navigate the world in which they live. We live in a world where racial injustice isn’t just historic - it’s ongoing. If we only care about the discomfort of White parents and students, we can’t get to a place where every student can reach their full potential.</p>
<p>Parents need to turn in teachers and schools who are teaching CRT</p> <p>(examples: PDE Indoctrination Map and CriticalRace.org database)</p>	<p>If parents have a question about how a class is being taught or how curriculum is being used in schools, it works best to have an honest conversation with the educator, principal, superintendent, school board, and/or school community.</p> <p>A direct approach strengthens relationships, whereas reporting teachers on questionable websites that are trying to map what they deem as “bad behavior” is harmful to educators and our school communities.</p>

Additional Sample Messages

Update and edit to fit your audience and support your own communications efforts.

The myth of historical progress

Often when there are opportunities to reflect upon our past and use its lessons to foster healing, solidarity, and community, there is a common refrain among the Right. They argue that our country has come so far that to look back, to talk about the past is divisive. They claim that racial inequality no longer exists. They cite examples like the election of our first Black president, rather than statistics about income and education inequality that often falls along racial lines to support these claims. These arguments are fundamentally attempts to reassert power and control that the right feels that it loses when people develop a deeper, collective understanding of the origins and ongoing challenges of our country. The idea that the United States no longer has racial inequality and to discuss otherwise thwarts unity is the myth of historical progress.

While it is true that landmark legislation like the Civil Rights Act of 1964, Brown vs. The Board of Education, the Fair Housing Act of 1968 and others held the country accountable to its values of equality and opportunity for all, it is also true that America was built by the labor of enslaved Africans on the stolen land of the indigenous. And because of that history of racial violence and oppression, and the subsequent bias it breeds, racial inequality is woven throughout our social systems and that does not change because we cease talking about it. To remedy that requires continuous reflection and redress. Learning about the past — the good and bad parts of it, whose history has advantages and disadvantages — is necessary to meaningfully move forward and secure true social progress.

The case for culturally responsive education

As many Black educators and advocates note every February, Black history is American history. And the same goes for Indigenous history, Latinx history, and that of Asian Americans. They cannot be separated. But often, beyond acknowledgement of a few notable figures or designated months, students do not often learn these histories. That not only impacts students' learning but also harms their sense of self and the communities around them.

People of color have made indelible contributions to the United States to which they deserve credit for - from its existence to its economic success. Culturally responsive education enables that by encouraging a more expansive understanding of who we are as a country and how we got here. That is something that everyone benefits from. Research shows that Black and Brown kids do better in school when their teachers reflect them and their experiences, but also when the curriculum does so as well. Data also shows that White children benefit and grow by being exposed to more diverse stories and people. Culturally responsive education pushes us - as community members, students, educators, and parents - to consider the collective and honor the resilience, beauty, and contributions of all.
