



Critical Race Theory (CRT)

What You Need to Know About the Misuse of CRT

In order to support school boards in their effort to respond to the public's questions related to critical race theory (CRT) and public schools, this flyer provides basic information designed to help you manage questions you might receive on this issue.

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

What it is

Critical race theory (CRT) is a discipline and analytical tool primarily used in university-level courses. Originating in the 1970s, CRT was first used as a tool 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 schooling.

some elements of history continue to play out in our communities. Colorado teachers have experience and expertise in managing these conversations.

And finally, as media channels and members of the public are confusing some key terms, it's important to note that the terms critical race theory and educational equity are not the same and shouldn't 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 not only disaggregate student achievement data by disability, gender, language, race, and socio-economic status, but also to close achievement gaps where they exist.

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.

What it isn't

Critical race theory (CRT) is not part of the K-12 Colorado Academic Standards.

Second, we should clarify what is taught in Colorado social studies classrooms. The state's social studies standards can be found on the Colorado Department of Education (CDE) website. It's important to remember that in Colorado, standards must be adopted by the Colorado State Board of Education in consultation with stakeholders — educators, parents, and business representatives—and only after public hearings.

Of course, teaching social studies and history will at times require discussion about historic instances of racism. This, in turn, often prompts students' questions and requests for additional discussion on how

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

Academic Critical Race Theory

A discipline and analytical tool primarily used in university-level coursework

Politicized Critical Race Theory

A national movement to conflate CRT with long-held beliefs and work in K-12

Educational Equity

The intentional allocation of resources, instruction, and opportunities aligned with federal and state requirements

Standards and Curriculum

What You Need to Know



Colorado is one of only six states with an express constitutional provision for local control over instruction.

While “[t]he general supervision of the public schools of the state” is vested in a state “board of education,” Colo. Const. art. IX, § 1, local “school districts of convenient size” as provided by the general assembly “shall have control of instruction,” Colo. Const. art. IX, § 15.

However, the Colorado General Assembly passes laws that do influence and impact standards and curriculum.

Academic standards in social studies, dance, drama/theatre arts, music, and visual arts are being revised in 2021-22, as a result of a new standards revision schedule required under House Bill 20-1032 (section C.R.S. 22-7-1005(6)) passed during the 2020 legislative session. CDE encourages all stakeholders to contribute comments about the current standards by emailing the department at any time during the revision process costandardsrevision@cde.state.co.us.

To read more about the review and revision of the Colorado Academic Standards, along with previous drafts, committee meeting summaries, and public feedback, see a complete listing of resources for all the content areas. Districts will have two years to review and revise their local standards as needed with implementation scheduled for the 2020-21 school year, which is the first year the Colorado Measures of Academic Success (CMAS) assessments will reflect the content of the 2020 standards. Visit CDE's website at <https://www.cde.state.co.us/standardsandinstruction/standards> for additional details and to access all content standards.

Recent legislation that influences standards, curriculum, and assessments for Colorado students include:

HB19-1192 Inclusion of American Minorities in Teaching Civil Government

Requires the history and civil government of the United States and Colorado to be taught in all public schools, including but not limited to the history, culture, and social contributions of “American Indians, Latinos, African Americans, and Asian Americans, the lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender individuals within these minority groups, and the intersectionality of significant social and cultural features within these communities, and the contributions and persecution of religious minorities.” Establishes the History, Culture, Social Contributions, and Civil Government in Education Commission. Requires the State Board of Education to take into consideration any recommendation by the Commission during its 6-year review and when reviewing the standards for history and civics.

HB20-1336 Holocaust and Genocide Studies in Public Schools

Requires the State Board of Education (SBE) to adopt standards related to Holocaust and genocide studies on or before July 1, 2021 and requires CDE to create and maintain a publicly available resource bank of materials pertaining to Holocaust and genocide courses and programs, which must be available for public schools by July 1, 2021. It also requires each local board of education and charter school to incorporate the standards adopted by the SBE into an existing course that is currently a condition of high school graduation for school years beginning on or after July 1, 2023.

