



Our Mission

The mission of the Association of Alaska School Boards is to advocate for children and youth by assisting school boards in providing quality public education, focused on student achievement, through effective local governance.

Educational Equity versus Critical Race Theory

What You Should Know

Across the country, we are witnessing groups of people asking about and demonstrating against *critical race theory* (CRT) and confusing that scholarly work with the efforts of public schools to provide equity of educational opportunity and success for all students. Some state legislatures are passing bills focused on this issue. In light of recent events at school board meetings across the country, AASB wants to provide Alaska school boards, staff, and stakeholders with accurate information about the difference between *critical race theory* and *educational equity*. Here is some information designed to help you manage the questions you might receive on this issue.

First, let's consider what critical race theory is historically and how the term is being utilized in the current context.

CRT historically: Critical race theory (CRT) is an analytical tool developed by legal scholars approximately 40 years ago for use in university-level courses to help students think critically about the impact of historical and present-day racism, primarily on the legal system.

CRT in today's context: The term "critical race theory" is being inaccurately used by some to encompass a wide range of distinctly different topics, including educational equity, social-emotional learning (SEL), cultural responsiveness, and restorative practices. It is also being used to describe the discussion of racism in classroom instruction.

Now, let's consider what educational equity is: a recognized educational approach to providing opportunities and achieving excellent outcomes for all students.

- Students come to our schools from various backgrounds, with different strengths and at varying degrees of readiness. What works for one student or in one school may not work for another. Indeed, because of the vast diversity within Alaska, what works for one district may not work for another. ***That is why local control of education – an AASB fundamental belief – is critically important.***
- Simply put, pursuing educational equity is being intentional about identifying issues that are preventing students from fully engaging in their education and then providing targeted solutions or resources to

address them. It is not a one-time program or event, but an educational framework of operating that requires ongoing evaluation of data and delivery adjustment.

- Approaches to educational equity will be different in every district, but the goal is the same: excellent outcomes for all students. ***An excellent education for every student every day. (AK DEED)***

The term “educational equity” 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 U.S. education policy established clear requirements for school districts to disaggregate student achievement data by race and close achievement gaps where they exist.
- Many districts have revisited and renewed their local efforts to improve student outcomes as required by the 2015 passage of Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), which further advanced the core intent of NCLB.

Alaskans at the state and local level are involved in determining what students learn in classrooms.

- State standards are determined by the State Board of Education, in consultation with stakeholders including educators, parents, and business representatives, and only after a public process as required by state statute.

Example state standards for History:

A-5) Understand that history is a narrative told in many voices and expresses various perspectives of historical experience;

A-7) Understand that history is dynamic and composed of key turning points;

B-2) Understand the people and the political, geographic, economic, cultural, social, and environmental events that have shaped the history of the state, the United States, and the world;

C-2) Use historical data from a variety of primary resources, including letters, diaries, oral accounts, archeological sites and artifacts, art, maps, photos, historical sites, documents, and secondary research materials, including almanacs, books, indices, and newspapers;

D-4) Recognize and demonstrate that various issues may require an understanding of different positions, jobs, and personal roles depending on place, time, and context;

- Instructional materials and curriculum adoption occur at the district level and only after public review and discussion at school board meetings as required by state statute and in compliance with district policy.

Working toward student achievement and excellent outcomes for all students is the essential work of school boards. ASSB strives to be a resource for our members in this work, providing district leaders with leadership strategies and best practices for improving student outcomes. ASSB supports school boards and staff to increase educational opportunities for each child through culturally responsive practices adapted to local needs and priorities.

We hope you find this information helpful as questions arise about this topic and invite you to learn more on our website: <https://aasb.org/services/>. ASSB offers a wide variety of services and resources pertaining to school climate, cultural responsiveness, social-emotional learning, family engagement and partnership, just to mention a few.

AASB wishes to recognize the Arizona School Boards Association, the Texas School Boards Association, and the Washington State School Directors Association as the source for most of the materials contained in this communication.