



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

Talking Points and Leadership Tips

The following talking points and tips are intended to help you as public-school leaders respond to questions and criticisms about public schools and critical race theory (CRT).

Ask individuals, “What do you mean by critical race theory?” and “What are your concerns?”

Critical race theory (CRT) is a framework and analytical tool primarily used in university-level courses. Originating in the 1970s, CRT was first used to help law students think critically about the impact of historical and present-day racism on the legal system. This work initiated a more inclusive perspective of American history rather than a more exclusionary narrative told from only one viewpoint.

When you hear “Stop teaching critical race theory.” and “Ban critical race theory curriculum.”

Critical race theory (CRT) is not part of social studies curriculum and has never been part of the social studies curriculum in Alaska. The Alaska state standards for English Language Arts (ELA) and Social Studies do not include CRT curriculum.

A few Examples 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;

Actively promote a positive vision of education, opportunity, and inclusion in your community—advocate for your school district’s values.

Be clear about what your school community stands for. Routinely remind your staff, families, and community of your school district’s shared values, with a particular emphasis on values like fairness, respect, inclusion, kindness, responsibility, equity, pragmatism, etc.

Educational Equity is not Critical Race Theory

In recent years, the terms equity work or diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) have become commonplace in K-12 education. 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 the 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.

Have robust procedures in place for public meetings.

As publicly elected officials, a large part of the job to which you were elected centers around the idea that the public will need to communicate their concerns, beliefs and occasionally praise the public education system. It is important to honor this basic democratic tenet. In fact, the principle of educational equity is founded on the idea of providing an opportunity to each individual. Thus your ability to emulate that ideal in your public service as a school board is important. However, that does not mean the public, or one element of the public, has a right to coerce and control your meeting to their own ends.

Your school board meeting is a meeting held in public, not a meeting of the public. When faced with disruptive attendees not willing to participate respectfully and appropriately, you will need to lean on solid and consistent procedures (for example, agendas with specific times and formats for public input), clear expectations for behavior in meetings, as well as the personal strength and leadership confidence to enforce the rules fairly and consistently for all.

Be very cautious about creating opportunities for individuals to “take over” meetings while emotions are high. Focus on small group dialogue. Seek input in writing rather than using a report-out approach. Be able to turn off microphones if needed to enforce time limits. When you are taking public comments or testimony, it is a time for the Board to listen and not engage in debate. Also, be sure the public is speaking to the Board and don’t allow comments to become a public debate between proponents and opponents.

Plan ahead for the possibility of escalating political action and changing forms of demonstration and advocacy. You may want to talk with local law enforcement leaders about how to work together if needed to ensure the safety of public meetings or address potential harassment.

An issue that brings out big emotions.

One of the skills board members need is the ability to hear people who are emotionally charged without becoming dismissive, defensive, or emotionally charged ourselves. It is not okay to dismiss the content of constituents’ concerns simply because they might be expressed in a way that is uncomfortable for us. So, while it is essential to have robust procedures in place to ensure public meetings remain safe and productive during times of high emotions, it is also important to give your community outlets to express themselves in meaningful ways.

Increase the amount of time set aside for dialogue and facilitated reflection.

It is much harder to stereotype, demonize, and dismiss each other if we truly know each other. Supporting strong relationships that cross typical demographic or political lines within your educational community is one way to help inoculate your district against extremists. Create opportunities throughout your system for tabletop or small group dialogue with thoughtful prompts. This work is not linear, and it is dialogue-heavy. It can also feel isolating, especially if your community is heavily divided. Set aside time for people to connect in meaningful ways.

Invest in relationships.

Do not do this work alone.

Create a leadership team that can be co-learners, thought partners, and key connectors in the work. Start with your existing leadership team and build your collective capacity to understand and talk about bias, look for patterns in your student outcomes data, and listen deeply to those we disagree with. Remember to include students and family members in this early work. Build out from there. This alone will bring immediate benefits to schools and families.

Embrace the idea that this is community work, not just a school district initiative. In addition to building capacity within your internal circles of leadership and influence, invite local businesses, Tribes, healthcare, child care providers, other community coalitions, etc., into the conversation. Such a leadership group creates inclusion and strength in the work.

Also, remember that you are not alone as a leader. Connect with others you trust. Talk about your experiences, share your concerns, seek support and guidance. AASB, ASA, NEA, Alaska DEED, and other professional associations may have resources and connections that can help you navigate the complexities of these times.

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.