



Educational Equity and Critical Race Theory

What You Need to Know

In light of recent events at school board meetings in Arizona and elsewhere and bills just passed in Arizona ([§ARS 15-717.02](#)) and other states, people are asking questions about critical race theory (CRT) and public schools. Educational equity also has become part of the discussion. Here is some information designed to help you manage 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 awareness and restorative practices. It is also being used to describe 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 of the state, what works for one district may not work for another. That is why local control of education – ASBA's bedrock 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 a way of operating that requires ongoing evaluation of data and adjustment of interventions.
- Approaches to equity will be different in every district, but the goal is the same: excellent outcomes for all students.

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 not only disaggregate student achievement data by race, but also to close achievement gaps where they exist.

- Many districts have revisited and renewed their local efforts to close achievement/opportunity gaps as required by the 2015 passage of Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), which further advanced the intent of NCLB.

Arizonans 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 public hearings as required by state statute.
- Textbook and curriculum adoption occurs 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. ASBA strives to be a resource for our members in this work, providing district leaders with leadership strategies and promising practices for closing the achievement/opportunity gaps.

We hope you find this information helpful as questions arise about this topic and invite you to learn more on our website:

<https://azsba.org/about/equity/>