



WHAT IS CRITICAL RACE THEORY?

Frequently Asked Questions

ASSOCIATION OF CALIFORNIA SCHOOL ADMINISTRATORS 

Scholars apply Critical Race Theory as a lens to analyze policies and the law. It is a high-level legal concept that holds that racism can impact multiple societal areas, ranging from housing, education and everything in between. Critical Race Theory proponents use this messaging to explain why “separate but equal” policies and institutional segregation were maintained for years.

What does K-12 education have to do with Critical Race Theory?

The complex legal aspects of Critical Race Theory make it impossible for the theory to be taught in California public schools. Critical Race Theory should not be confused with equity, which many school districts have incorporated into their teaching methods and curriculum.

Does Critical Race Theory encourage discrimination?

Absolutely not; the tenets of Critical Race Theory do not tell people what to believe. The theory simply provides context to the roots and how systems tend to favor certain groups. In the United States, white people have historically been favored. That said, Critical Race Theory does not promote discrimination against one racial group; that would, in fact, be counter to the central beliefs of Critical Race Theory.

Is Critical Race Theory the same as equity and diversity or social justice?

No — Critical Race Theory is an approach used by scholars to explain why policies were implemented that disadvantaged (a subset of) people of color.

Equity and diversity is a principle used in education to further the belief that every student matters regardless of race, socioeconomic status, sexual orientation, or physical or neurological abilities. Despite these differences, every student is entitled to a quality education and equal opportunities to achieve it.

Further, the principles of equity and diversity are often incorporated into curriculums, teaching methods and overall education management to ensure each student feels comfortable, included, and valued.

Social justice is the understanding that equal opportunities are not inherent. In order to uplift disadvantaged students, leaders must be proactive, thoughtful, and strategic in their approach.

Is Critical Race Theory the same as ethnic studies?

No — Ethnic studies is the interdisciplinary study of people of color. While ethnic studies celebrates culture and heritage, it is more than just multicultural studies. Ethnic studies examines the often-unnoticed contributions made by people of color in various fields, and digs deeper to examine how power structures and forms of oppression continue to impact social, emotional, cultural, economical, and political outcomes.

Critical Race Theory, on the other hand, analyzes policies to determine if racism played a role in its development.