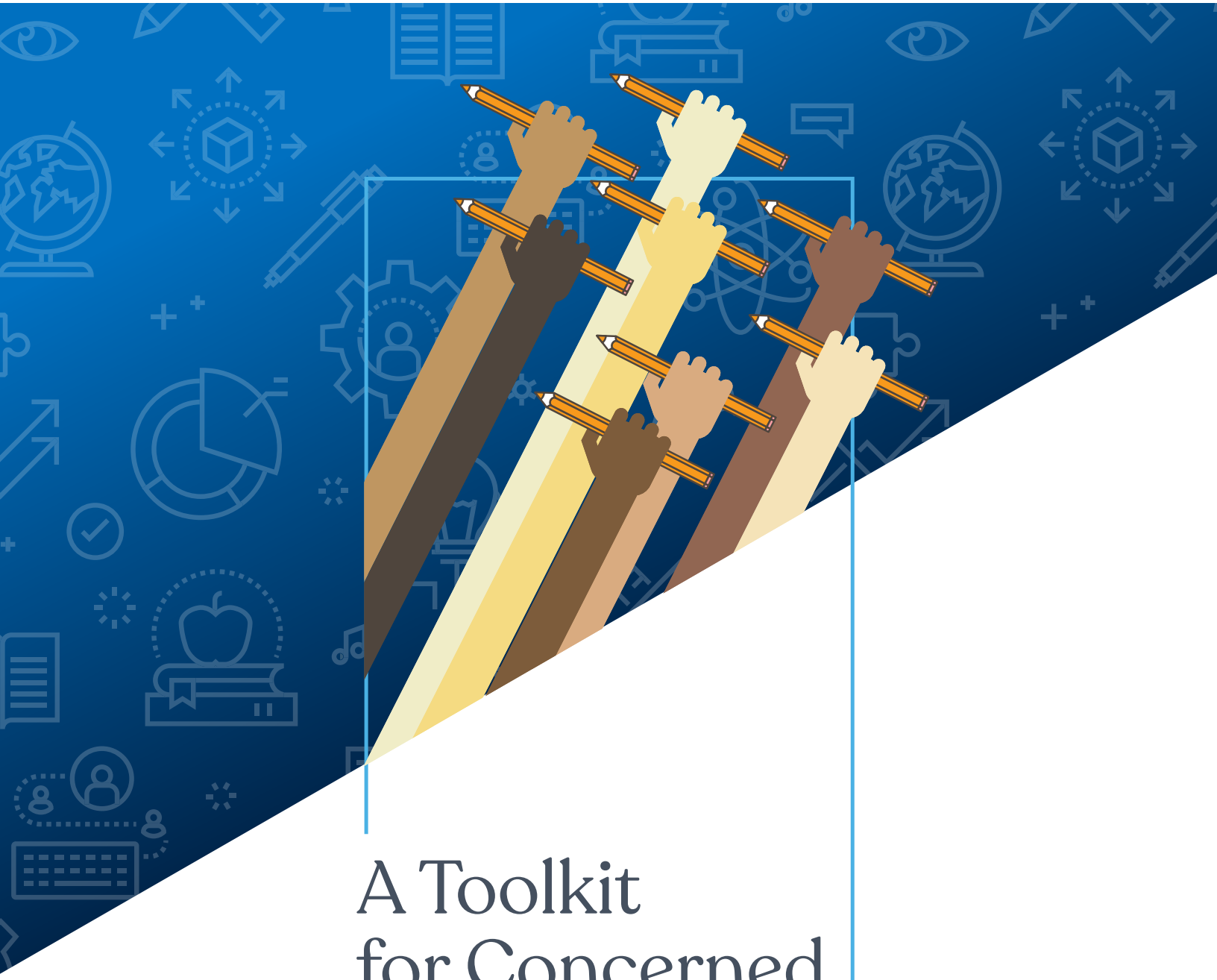
Woke Schooling



A Toolkit for Concerned Parents

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Contents

Introduction 3
Critical Pedagogy 3
Fighting Back 4
A Critical Pedagogy Glossary 5
What Can Parents Do? 14
Whom Can I Ask for Help? 21
Endnotes 22

Introduction

Something peculiar is spreading throughout America's schools. A public school system just outside the nation's capital spent $20,000 to be lectured about making their schools less racist.[1] At a tony New York City prep school, a teacher was publicly denounced by the administration for questioning the idea that students should identify themselves in terms of their racial identity.[2] Educators in California are locked in pitched combat over a statewide model curriculum overflowing with terms like "hxrstories" and "cisheteropatriarchy."[3]

"Kids are very aggressive now in their views, and pushing kids to other views," one New York parent said of his child's school, adding that "if you're not with us, you're against us, and you're the problem."[4] "They are making my son feel like a racist because of the pigmentation of his skin," one mother said of her son's experience at a Los Angeles–area prep school.[5] Teachers in North Carolina's Wake County Public School System, facing this kind of pushback, were told to ignore it as a sign of "white parents" finding it "hard to let go of power [and] privilege."[6]

If you're reading this guide, perhaps something similar is happening in your child's school. Perhaps the school has issued an "antiracism statement" denouncing itself as racist or white supremacist. Perhaps it has required parents and students to attend training on "diversity, equity, and inclusion." Perhaps such discussion is leaking into your child's classes—not just in history or English but math and science. Perhaps your children have come home talking about how their whiteness, or blackness, or Asian-ness, or Hispanic-ness, really defines who they are, not their individual personality, hopes, and dreams.

In the wake of the death of George Floyd in May 2020, Black Lives Matter protests across the country ignited a burst of institutional changes in colleges and companies. High schools were not immune, as scores of students used social media to charge their peers and teachers with racial offenses from the slight to the obscene.[7]

In response, teachers and administrators have felt about for how to respond to accusations of racism that, quite reasonably, horrified them. Whether through preexisting school diversity offices, conferences, or the Internet, many have settled on a particular, radical brand of race theory—the theory now coursing through so many schools, including perhaps your child's.

Critical Pedagogy

An appropriate name for this phenomenon has proved elusive: "wokeness," "the successor ideology," or "neo-racism" have all been floated. In the context of schooling, sometimes critics allude to "critical race theory" (CRT), a school of thought in law schools that has been adapted into the educational domain. But because CRT is both overinclusive (it includes concepts not used in schools) and underinclusive (not all the ideas emergent in schools come from CRT), it is not the most apt name for what's going on.

Rather, what we are interested in here might be termed "critical pedagogy." "Critical pedagogy" names—without exhaustively defining—the host of concepts, terms, practices, and theories that have lately taken hold in many public and private schools. This term alludes to a connection to CRT—it might be thought of as critical race theory as applied to schooling—but also to "critical studies" and "critical theory," a broader set of contemporary philosophical ideas that have been particularly influential in certain circles of the modern Left.

In the American context, ideas espoused by proponents of critical pedagogy are the product of an influential group of thinkers in the 1970s and 1980s who were disappointed with the progress made on racial equality in America after the end of the civil rights movement. Given persistent racial disparities of wealth, health, and educational outcomes, critical pedagogy advocates argue that ostensible advances in racial relations are, in fact, a cover for persistent white supremacy that, they say, is inextricably entwined with the very fabric of American society.

Given this outlook, *any* particular racial inequality is taken to be evidence—indeed, a product—of racism. In an educational context, proponents of critical pedagogy claim that lower academic achievement and test scores among black or Hispanic students, higher dropout rates, school discipline, and nonrepresentative racial composition in admissions to selective private and public high schools are all evidence of persistent, systematic white supremacy.

This theory is behind many changes taking place in our schools. Constant conversation about race, including compelling students to identify and sort themselves along racial lines, is meant to resist "colorblindness." Endless workshops teach students to overcome their "white fragility" and embrace "antiracism." Efforts to end standardized testing are taken to be a blow against the "myth of meritocracy"—the presumption that educational outcomes reflect an individual's natural talent and hard work. Most important, students must be repeatedly reminded that theirs is a racist, white supremacist, nation, in whose crimes they are daily complicit.

Fighting Back

If all this makes you uncomfortable, you are not alone. Parents across the country are increasingly worried about the extremism spreading in their children's schools. These parents are not bigots and racists—they endorse tolerance and respect for all people and believe in equal justice under the law. They believe, as Martin Luther King, Jr., said, that people should be judged not by the color of their skin but by the content of their character. This is precisely why they are ill at ease with critical pedagogy, with its emphasis on teaching children that their skin color does matter—and that it is perhaps the only thing that matters.

Critical pedagogy has been germinating in our schools for decades, but its recent explosion has galvanized many parents to action. If you are with them—if you, like them, believe that the solution to racism and intolerance is not the further entrenching of ethnic stereotypes and division by race—then this toolkit is for you.

This guide is meant to give parents who are concerned about critical pedagogy a starting place to begin to respond to it in their children's school. The next section of this toolkit presents a glossary of critical pedagogy terms to give you the tools to understand what, exactly, your school's administrators mean by "antiracism" or "implicit bias." The final section offers groundwork for how to get organized, steps inspired by conversations with parent activists who have already been successful in this project.

If you are a parent worried about your child's miseducation but afraid to speak up for fear of being called a "bigot" and a "racist," recognize this: you are not alone, and thousands of parents like you are preparing to fight back.

A CRITICAL PEDAGOGY GLOSSARY

Proponents of critical pedagogy speak a complicated, often confusing, language of their own. They go on about "white fragility" and indict "white supremacy"; they complain about "implicit bias" and "microaggressions." Understanding what they mean is important in understanding what critical pedagogy is. It's also valuable for demystifying this often-confusing ideology, which is the first step to combating it.

The glossary that follows offers detailed definitions of commonly used critical pedagogy terms. While some criticism of certain ideas is offered, the focus is more on offering an explanation of these ideas in the terms and language of their proponents, in order to give you a better grasp on how their users think and feel.

Achievement Gap

The "achievement gap" is at the root of the controversy about race and schooling. This term "refers to the disparity in academic performance between groups of students," particularly between black and Hispanic students, compared with white and Asian students.[8] For example, on the National Assessment of Educational Progress (the "nation's report card"), white eighth-graders outscored black eighth-graders by an average of 32 points on a 500-point scale in math and 28 points in reading.[9] The high school dropout rate among black students is 24% higher than the white rate, while the Hispanic dropout rate is nearly twice the white rate.[10]

The source of this gap, its persistence, and how to close it are all subjects of debate. The Obama administration identified key goals for closing the gap, including requiring a high, uniform standard for academic instruction, using statewide measures of student progress, increasing access to high-quality preschools, and holding schools that do not show progress accountable.[11]

Critical pedagogy advocates, however, see the achievement gap as proof of the persistence of racism and white supremacy. Gloria Ladson-Billings—a former professor of education at the University of Wisconsin who helped introduce critical race theory to education—rejected the idea of an "achievement gap" in her 2006 presidential address to the American Educational Research Association.[12] Instead, she called disparities in test scores an "education debt" that comprised accrued injustices done to black and Hispanic students and that is enshrined in school funding disparities. (Complicating this narrative, research shows that poor school districts receive slightly more funding than rich, and within districts, poor and minority students receive slightly more funding—1%–2% on average—than non-poor, white students.)[13]

More recent commentators have put it in blunter terms. Bettina Love, a professor of education at the University of Georgia, has written that "the achievement gap is not about White students outperforming dark students; it is about a history of injustice and oppression," identifying it entirely with "racism and White rage," which has left students as metaphorical "sharecroppers" unable to escape the debt.[14]

Others have argued that the idea of a gap is per se racist. Boston University professor and "antiracism" commentator Ibram Kendi has argued that the racist roots of standardized testing invalidate such assessments.[15] Kendi prefers different standards of achievement for different students:

> What if different environments actually cause different kinds of achievement rather than different levels of achievement? What if the intellect of a poor, low testing Black child in a poor Black school is different—and not inferior—to the intellect of a rich, high-testing White child in a rich White school?. . . What if we measured literacy by how knowledgeable individuals are about their own environment: how much individuals knew all those complex equations and verbal and nonverbal vocabularies of their everyday life? What if we measured intellect by an individual's desire to know? What if we measured intellect by how open an individual's mind is to self-critique and new ideas?[16]

Responding to this view in the *Washington Post*, liberal commentator Matthew Yglesias notes that we could accept Kendi's analysis, but "the fact remains that if African American children continue to be less likely to learn to read and write and do math than White children, and less likely to graduate from high school, then this will contribute to other unequal outcomes down the road."[17]

Affinity Group

The term "affinity group," broadly construed, signifies a group organized within a school or workplace that is defined by its members' shared interest or identity—most often, but not exclusively, their racial or sexual identity. In an educational context, an affinity group is meant to give students a space to discuss their experience of their identity within the classroom context—an opportunity, proponents argue, to process the experience of feeling different in their school.[18]

Such groups are increasingly common at many progressive schools. Sidwell Friends—the prestigious D.C.-based prep school attended by Sasha and Malia Obama, among other children of influential figures—offers, for example, the Asian Student Association, the Biracial Club, the Black Student Union, an LGBTS group, the Jewish Culture Club, and a separate South Asian Students Association.[19] But these kinds of groups are not confined to private schools. For example, the New York State Department of Education separated public school teachers by race for breakout groups after a discussion of the killing of George Floyd.[20] While these groups often appear at the high school level, some proponents argue that schools should begin implementing affinity groups as early as middle or elementary school.[21]

In addition to affinity groups focusing on minority identities, some encourage the formation of "white" affinity groups. Although these are meant to foster criticism among the members about their own supposed shortcomings, such as "white fragility," they also serve to reinforce white racial identity.[22] By differentiating students by race or ethnicity and privileging certain categories over others, affinity groups may promote bullying—as, for example, Jewish students at one prestigious New York prep school reported:

> For many of Fieldston's Jewish families, several told me, what distinguishes the problem at their school can be traced to the recently implemented Affinity Group program.... At the time, several families asked the school to add a Jewish affinity group; they acknowledged that no other religious group was offered, but argued that Jewishness should also be seen as a marker of ethnic and minority identity—not least because it has been seen so for centuries by oppressors of Jews. According to several parents, they were politely but firmly told that no such group would be forthcoming.... As certain teachers remodeled their courses, Jewish students found that their concerns about anti-Semitism were met by classmates who plainly suggested that, first, they should be considered white and privileged—and that second, as such, they could not be considered victims of discrimination.[23]

Antiracism

The canonical contemporary characterization of "antiracism" (sometimes stylized "anti-racism") is drawn from Ibram Kendi, who writes:

> The opposite of "racist" isn't "not racist." It is "antiracist." What's the difference? One endorses either the idea of a racial hierarchy as a racist, or racial equality as an antiracist.... One either allows racial inequities to persevere, as a racist, or confronts racial inequities, as an antiracist. There is no in-between safe space of "not racist." The claim of "not racist" neutrality is a mask for racism.[24]

Within this framework, "racist" ostensibly loses the pejorative meaning with which it is popularly associated. Instead, it is meant to be purely descriptive. That's because calling things "racist" is, in Kendi's view, the way we

reduce racism: "the only way to undo racism is to consistently identify and describe it—and then dismantle it."[25] (See also: Colorblindness.)

But racism is also, on this view, much more than overt bigotry or bias. One guide to teaching teachers about antiracism defines racism as "an institutionalized system of economic, political, social, and cultural relations that ensures that one racial group has and maintains power and privilege over all others in all aspects of life," adding that "in the United States, Whites are automatically considered members of the dominant group, and people of color, including Asian-Pacific American, Blacks, Latinos, and Native Americans, are automatically considered members of the subordinate or dominated group. The individual's relationship to racism is defined by group membership; so too are his or her responsibilities for anti-racism."[26]

More generally, antiracism is taken to mean opposition to white supremacy broadly construed. In the classroom, antiracism can mean the mandatory embrace of critical race theory, culturally responsive teaching, and restorative justice practices—all of which are ostensibly actively antiracist, i.e., working to dismantle the racist systems that their proponents identify as all-pervasive. Antiracism practices are distinguished by an almost compulsive willingness to label behaviors or policies as racist. Proponents say that doing so is key to combating racism, but critics argue that constantly identifying racial difference simply reinforces it.

Colorblindness

Critical pedagogy advocates regularly assert that it is important to talk about race—to consciously identify people with their racial category and to emphasize race in conversations about social institutions, including schools. This attitude is often constructed in opposition to the notion of "colorblindness," the "belief that racial group membership and race-based differences should not be taken into account when decisions are made, impressions are formed, and behaviors are enacted." Colorblindness, opponents and proponents agree, is a strategy for combating racism: "if people or institutions do not even notice race, then they cannot act in a racially biased manner."[27]

Critics of colorblindness argue that it constrains discussions of salient racial issues, putting them out of bounds: "Colorblindness has helped to construe race as an 'impolite' or even morally suspect subject 'politically correct' whites should avoid."[28] (See also: White Fragility.) Against colorblindness, opponents sometimes contrast "multiculturalism, "race-/color-consciousness," or "racial literacy": deliberate identification of racial differences within society, with the goal of disassembling racism thereby.[29] As Kendi puts it, "the only way to undo racism is to consistently identify and describe it—and then dismantle it."[30]

Whether we *ought* to be colorblind bears on a host of socially salient issues, so opponents argue that we ought to consider race in "college-admissions criteria, promotion guidelines, public policy, and legal adjudication."[31] In schools, critical pedagogy advocates argue that colorblindness has contributed to the achievement gap by ignoring racial injustice as an explanation of disparities in schooling outcome, rather than individual failures: "The discourse of color blindness allows school adults to disregard the racial identities of students by solely viewing them as individuals who are divorced from the social, economic, and cultural factors that shape their past and present experiences."[32]

There are challenges, however, to the "color-conscious" alternative. Highlighting racial differences and discussing stereotypes may have the unintended consequence of reinforcing, rather than reducing, those differences and stereotypes.[33] Research has found that efforts to suppress stereotypic thoughts about others may increase them subsequently[34] and that "multiculturalism" increases "race essentialism," i.e., the belief that racial group differences are biologically founded and immutable.[35]

Critical Race Theory

Much of the language identified in this glossary emerges out of a scholarly tradition called "critical race theory" (CRT), a set of ideas that emerged from law school professors but has since spread among education professors and others.

As Gloria Ladson-Billings describes it, CRT was first "a counterlegal scholarship to the positivist and liberal legal discourse of civil rights," criticizing "the slow pace of racial reform in the United States."[36] Some radical scholars, frustrated that the civil rights movement had not ended racial inequality, began to embrace more radical criticisms of the American legal order. The theory, CRT founder Richard Delgado writes, builds on the traditions of "radical feminism" as well as "critical legal studies," a more general legal movement critical of the effects of the civil rights movement.[37]

CRT scholars unified around a few basic propositions: an assumption that racism is "endemic" to American life, a call for a reinterpretation of civil rights law "in light of its ineffectuality," and a challenge to "legal neutrality, objectivity, color-blindness, and meritocracy" as tools of dominant groups and thereby an "insistence on subjectivity."[38] Kimberlé Crenshaw, another major CRT voice, identifies the critical approach as one that strives to identify legal "ideology and discourse as a social artifact which operates to recreate and legitimate American society," meaning that objective norms—legal or, in the case of critical pedagogy, educational—are a "fortifying earthworks" that uphold white supremacy.[39]

Over and above notions of "objectivity" and "truth," CRT places great emphasis on individuals' "stories" as a primary way of understanding society,[40] particularly stories of racism told by nonwhite people, which "challenge the normalization of the White worldview of knowledge."[41] This emphasis proceeds from the belief that "much of reality is socially constructed," that stories give outgroups a "vehicle for psychic self-preservation," and that the exchange of stories can help overcome "ethnocentrism."[42]

Though it began as a legal movement, CRT spread into the K–12 education field with the early work of Ladson-Billings and colleague William F. Tate IV.[43] In that space, CRT advocates focus on what they see as persistent instances of white supremacy, as characterized by phenomena such as "colorblindness, meritocracy, deficit thinking, linguicism, and other forms of subordination." Curriculum, for example, is "a culturally specific artifact designed to maintain a White Supremacist master script." Attempts to specifically help minority students are actually designed to "control."[44]

CRT K–12 scholars have offered various examples of critical race pedagogy, such as the use of "African proverbs" or hip-hop as "counternarratives" that must be made "a key component of school curriculum" because failing to do so "alienate[s]" black students.[45] These scholars also tend to emphasize the need for hiring more minority teachers and focus on funding disparities between majority-minority and majority-white school districts. (See also: Achievement Gap.)

Culturally Responsive Teaching

Geneva Gay, a researcher at the University of Washington, defines culturally responsive teaching as "using the cultural characteristics, experiences, and perspectives of ethnically diverse students as conduits for teaching," which ostensibly facilitates better acquisition and retention of information. Culturally responsive teaching encourages teachers to understand their students through the lens of the culture from which they come, arguing that they "need to know," for example, "which ethnic groups" prioritize "communal living and cooperative problem solving,"; "different ethnic groups' protocols of appropriate ways for children to interact with adults"; and different ways of "gender role socialization in different ethnic groups"—all of which teachers should take into account.[46]

Culturally responsive teaching is sometimes presented as an alternative to a "more traditional," "carrot-and-stick" approach to teaching, which tries to motivate better outcomes through grades, competitive assessments, and the like. Against this model, culturally responsive teaching aims to elicit the child's "true" self, "chang[ing] the concept of motivation from reward and punishment to communication and respect," by engaging with his or her culture.[47] This is meant to help address the achievement gap: "Because culture strongly influences the attitudes, values, and behaviors that students and teachers bring to the instructional process," one analysis puts it, "better teacher preparation is a major factor in solving the problems of underachievement."[48]

Culturally responsive teaching endorses a particular approach to curricular design, indicating that practitioners ought to be "dealing directly with controversy; studying a wide range of ethnic individuals and groups; contextualizing issues within race, class, ethnicity, and gender; and including multiple kinds of knowledge and perspectives."[49] That may appear in the history classroom or the English classroom but also in the STEM fields. A recent publication on "dismantling racism in mathematics instruction," for example, endorsed using "culturally relevant" practices in the classroom such as "us[ing] Ankara fabric to teach mathematical concepts such as tessellations, fractions, area, percentages, etc."[50]

While "traditional" classrooms encourage students to listen quietly and respond to didactic questions, culturally responsive teaching researchers contend that "the communicative styles of most racially and ethnically diverse groups are more active, participatory, dialectic, and multimodal" and encourage the use of "communal communication styles."[51] Such notions naturally overlap with concepts of "white" and "nonwhite" cultural norms (see also: White Supremacy), with many CRT advocates arguing that "direct, precise, deductive, and linear" communication styles are a feature of "white" culture alien to "nonwhite" cultures.[52]

Equity

"Equity" is an influential, if hard to define,[53] term in critical pedagogy and associated circles. In general, it is defined in opposition to "equality." Whereas "equality" is concerned with treating all people the same, "equity" is distinguished by providing to each person according to his or her needs.[54] More succinctly, "equality" is concerned with equivalent opportunity, while equity is concerned with equivalent outcomes. In the context of race, "racial equity is the condition that would be achieved if one's racial identity no longer predicted, in a statistical sense, how one fares."[55]

In an educational context, advocates of critical pedagogy argue that their views promote equity in the classroom by treating students differently and therefore catering to their distinct needs. In order to promote equity in the classroom, one guide proposes:

- Stopping teaching to "call in" comments deemed insensitive: specifically singling out students in the middle of class when they say something out of line with the teacher's views on race, sex, gender, etc.
- "Setting the tone for learning" by having students identify their social backgrounds before class begins and telling them that "this is going to be in the room with us."
- Taking into account students' "backgrounds, identities, and experiences" when teaching, specifically by identifying students' "various sexualities, races, genders, ethnicities" and treating students differently based on those identities. (See also: Culturally Responsive Teaching.)[56]

Implicit Bias

Implicit biases are prejudicial "attitudes, behaviors, and actions" that occur "automatically and unintentionally" but that still affect "judgements, decisions, and behaviors."[57] These are differentiated from explicit biases, which are more overt expressions of prejudice or hate.

Implicit biases are often blamed for the perpetuation of racial inequality in an ostensibly "color-blind" society—black–white gaps persist, and individuals continue to experience discrimination and racism, even as large swaths of American society explicitly condemn those things. Implicit biases are thought to help explain this apparent disparity: even though we may make no explicitly racist comments, deeply ingrained and culturally determined tendencies toward adverse racial judgments still color our actions and thereby sustain inequalities.

In an educational context, critical pedagogy advocates are often concerned with the implicit biases of teachers toward their students. Because teaching often entails snap judgment, implicit biases are thought to contribute to or produce disparate outcomes among students of different races. In the disciplinary context, for example, ambiguous infractions like "disruptive behavior" or "disrespect" are ultimately a matter of judgment, a judgment call that some blame for the disciplinary gap between black and white students. (See: Restorative Justice.) Similarly, implicit bias can be blamed for disparities in positive treatment of students.[58]

Implicit bias is often measured by the "implicit association test" (IAT). The test, first published in 1998,[59] ostensibly tests the test-taker's associations "between concepts (e.g., black people, gay people) and evaluations (e.g., good, bad) or stereotypes (e.g., athletic, clumsy)" by having them rapidly sort concepts into categories and testing how easily they do so.[60] Some individuals encourage educators to take an IAT to begin assessing and addressing their own implicit biases.[61]

As the primary measure—and therefore validator—of implicit bias, IAT has faced sustained criticism. Research indicates that the test does not actually predict discriminatory behaviors.[62] Training programs to alter implicit biases often show weak effects on measures of those bias, which fade out quickly and which have an even smaller effect on explicit biases—all suggesting that promises to alter implicit biases may be empty.[63] As one progressive critic puts it: "Knowing about bias does not automatically result in changes in behaviour by managers and employees."[64]

Meritocracy

Meritocracy is the proposition that "positions and goods be distributed solely in accordance with individual merit," as opposed to other qualifications like family connections, social class, or wealth.[65] As defined by British sociologist Michael Young, the originator of the term, merit refers to "one's IQ plus effort."[66] A meritocratic system, then, is one in which positions—academic admissions, jobs, wealth, etc.—are allocated based on skill.

In the domain of education, meritocracy is often identified by proponents, as well as critics, with test-taking[67]—the SAT but also test-based admissions to selective public high schools like New York City's specialized high schools. The allocation of societal success based on educational attainment—the dream of widespread public education—is another example of meritocracy.

Proponents of critical pedagogy—and CRT more generally—tend to argue that meritocracy is a myth, an ideological justification of the status quo that covers for the fact that goods are allocated in alignment with the principles of white supremacy.[68]

Because racism is considered by CRT proponents to be always and everywhere operative in contemporary American society, a truly meritocratic system is thought to be impossible—some have even argued that simply believing in meritocracy can lead to worse outcomes for black people.[69] Rather, the "myth of meritocracy" dismisses racial achievement gaps as a product of endemic racism.[70]

These critiques extend to the educational system. Standardized testing, for example, is compromised by differences in practical knowledge across cultures, or by "stereotype threat," described as "a psychological phenomenon that depresses the performance of negatively stereotyped groups when performing stereotype-relevant tasks" (i.e., tasks that are in some way linked to or implicate stereotypes).[71] Such criticisms have been leveled against institutions like specialized high schools.[72]

Instead, proponents of critical pedagogy are prone to criticize meritocracy, including in their classrooms. Doing so, three scholars write in the college education context, is essential for helping students overcome their belief in the myth of meritocracy and showing them "why an adherence to meritocracy is, we believe, an anathema to teaching for social justice."[73]

Microaggression

Some critics of the spread of critical pedagogy observe that overt racism—bigoted language or discriminatory policy—is increasingly rare. Arguing against this, advocates of critical pedagogy sometimes point to "microaggressions"—statements or behaviors that ostensibly perpetuate injustice through tiny (thus "micro") actions rather than big gestures.

More precisely, and as defined by a scholarly article that is key to popularizing the concept, microaggressions "are brief and commonplace daily verbal, behavioral, or environmental indignities, whether intentional or unintentional, that communicate hostile, derogatory, or negative racial slights and insults toward people of color. Perpetrators of microaggressions are often unaware that they engage in such communications when they interact with racial/ethnic minorities."[74] The concept has been extended from the domain of race to other "oppressed" groups, e.g., women or LGBT-identified people. Phrases identified as microaggressions often appear innocuous to the average American. Thus, "America is a melting pot" reinforces colorblindness. "I believe the most qualified person should get the job" engages the myth of meritocracy. Another example: asking a Latino/Asian person where he or she is from.[75]

Some statements identified as microaggressions—like mistaking a black or Hispanic person for being a service worker—may historically have been identified simply as rude. But the microaggressions framework argues that these statements are allegedly "linked to numerous negative psychological and medical outcomes over time"[76] and may even drive the achievement gap.[77] Curiously, polling has found that large majorities of black and Hispanic Americans do not find canonical microaggressions like "America is a melting pot" or "I don't notice people's race" offensive.[78]

Columbia University sociologist Musa al-Gharbi notes that "there is virtually no systematic research detailing if and how microaggressions are harmful, for whom, and under what circumstances (indeed, there is not even robust conceptual clarity in the literature as to what constitutes a microaggression)."[79] Scott Lilienfeld, a professor of psychology at Emory University, argued that the constitutive premises behind microaggressions lack a basis in the research literature, as well as a connection to other research, and are not even systematically well defined enough to bear serious scientific investigation.[80]

Restorative Justice

Schools have a host of disciplinary tools for responding to bad behavior, ranging from teacher reprimand and parent meetings to suspension, expulsion, or, in severe cases, arrest. The last practices disproportionately affect black students, who are far more likely than their white peers to be suspended, expelled, or referred to law enforcement,[81] particularly under "zero-tolerance policies," which require certain punishments for certain offenses.[82] This disparity, some argue, is both wrong and contributes to the "school-to-prison pipeline," whereby black and disabled students are filtered out of schools and into the criminal-justice system.[83]

One proposed solution to this supposed problem is the application of "restorative justice" principles to the school discipline context. In a criminal-justice context, "restorative justice" refers to alternative-to-incarceration approaches that strive to repair the harm of a crime through mediated interactions between victim and victimizer.[84]

In the schooling context, "there is confusion about what [restorative justice] is and no consensus about the best way to implement it."[85] However, proposed approaches include individual or community "conferences" in which the injured party can address the harms done; peer mediation or "peer juries" by which students resolve disputes themselves; and the use of "socio-emotional learning" techniques to encourage the healthy management of emotion.[86]

"Abolitionist education" commentator Bettina Love has called for "an end to the school-to-prison pipeline through the decriminalization of schools by removing security guards, metal detectors, and police and with deliberate speed, inserting restorative justice and mindful practices in schools and communities alike. Every child needs a counselor or therapist."[87]

The restorative justice approach is not without drawbacks. Firmer discipline can deter students from committing infractions, as well as indirectly benefit students by removing disruptive peers from the classroom.[88] A randomized controlled trial conducted by the nonpartisan RAND Corporation in Pittsburgh public schools found that restorative practices reduced student suspensions but also caused peers to report that fellow students were less respectful and supportive, and reduced math achievement for middle school students, black students, and students in schools that are predominantly black. It also found that there was no effect on student arrests, disputing the claimed effect on the "school-to-prison pipeline."[89]

That confirms earlier research by University of Georgia economist Josh Kinsler, who found that the net effect of discipline on student performance was positive after the effects of disruptive students were taken into account.[90] Similarly, researchers from the University of Arkansas found a "null to positive effect" of out-of-school suspension on student test scores, indicating, as they put it, "while policymakers may have other reasons to limit exclusionary discipline, we should not expect academic gains to follow."[91]

White Fragility

One of the newer additions to the critical glossary, "white fragility," is a term popularized by professor of education and diversity consultant Robin DiAngelo in her 2018 book of the same title.[92] As summarized in an earlier paper from which her book draws, white fragility names an alleged tendency among white people to respond defensively or aggressively when challenged on their views on race:

> White people in North America live in a social environment that protects and insulates them from race-based stress. This insulated environment of racial protection builds white expectations for racial comfort while at the same time lowering the ability to tolerate racial stress, leading to what I refer to as White Fragility. White Fragility is a state in which even a minimum amount of racial stress becomes intolerable, triggering a range of defensive moves. These moves include the outward display of emotions such as anger, fear, and guilt, and behaviors such as argumentation, silence, and leaving the stress-inducing situation. These behaviors, in turn, function to reinstate white racial equilibrium.[93]

According to DiAngelo, white fragility can play a role in education, helping reinforce white supremacy (see the following entry) by giving white educators and principals an excuse to avoid difficult racial conversations.[94] Other critical pedagogy advocates have identified white fragility with the promotion of a "core" or "traditional foundation" in the curriculum and "resistance to multicultural efforts in schools."[95]

The term has been embraced by leading teachers' unions, including the National Educators Association, which required the teaching of white fragility in its training and staff development in 2019.[96]

Some commentators, however, have been critical of the notion of white fragility. John McWhorter, a linguist, Columbia University professor, and liberal public commentator who is black, has pointed out that when white participants in DiAngelo's diversity seminars react poorly to being called a racist, it is taken as more confirmation

of DiAngelo's thesis. This is an example of the general phenomenon of what technologist Eric S. Raymond calls a "Kafka trap," an argument of the form "Your refusal to acknowledge that you are guilty of {sin, racism, sexism, homophobia, oppression…} confirms that you are guilty of {sin, racism, sexism, homophobia, oppression…}." McWhorter also calls DiAngelo's treatment of black people "condescending," assuming, as it does, that they require others to be "exquisitely sensitive to [their] feelings" to achieve racial harmony and equality.[97]

White Supremacy

When most readers hear the term "white supremacy," they likely think of the most extreme examples: Jim Crow, the Confederacy, the Ku Klux Klan. But the term is applied with a far greater frequency by advocates of critical pedagogy, who see white supremacy as "the water we are swimming in," as one middle school principal put it in the pages of *Education Week*.[98]

That, they claim, is because white supremacy—the belief that white people are systematically superior to nonwhite people—still pervades our culture, including our schools. As Bettina Love puts it, antiracist education must "help educators understand and recognize America and its schools as spaces of Whiteness, White rage, and White supremacy, all of which function to terrorize students of color,"[99] adding that "education from the outset was built on White supremacy, anti-Blackness, and sexism."[100]

That "white supremacist culture" is reflected in a series of ideas that, critical theorists argue, hide white supremacy behind seemingly neutral concepts. One widely cited source on the topic, Tema Okun and Kenneth Jones's essay "White Supremacy Culture," identifies perfectionism, "a sense of urgency," "worship of the written word," "fear of open conflict," individualism, and "objectivity" as among the characteristics of "white supremacy culture."[101] Similarly, in summer 2020, the National Museum of African American History and Culture, a Smithsonian Institution museum, published an information sheet identifying "whiteness" and "white culture" with ideas like "objective, rational, linear thinking," "hard work is the key to success," and "plan[ning] for [the] future" (the sheet was subsequently taken down amid public backlash).[102]

Asked to describe how white supremacy appears in schools, prominent antiracist education experts stated: "Tone policing, tokenization and objectification, over-managing, expectation of being super-people" and white supremacy's appearance "in tests, in the emphasis on skills, in zero-tolerance policies."[103] White supremacy is thought to be the core system perpetuating disparities in outcomes between white and nonwhite children—the achievement gap—meaning that adopting critical pedagogy is considered essential for ensuring equity.

What Can Parents Do?

If you're reading this guide, you might be facing the emergence of critical pedagogy in your child's or children's school. The glossary may give you a better understanding of what advocates of critical pedagogy are about, by defining some of their most used terms. If you've come this far and decided that you'd like to take action, the remainder of this toolkit is focused on helping you think through how to do so.

The following advice is based on conversations with a number of activists, journalists, and others who have spent the past several years pushing back on critical pedagogy in their children's and others' schools. It is not meant to be comprehensive but rather a starting point—a way for you to begin thinking about how you can take an active hand in making your child's school a better place for him or her to learn.

First Steps

What follows are a few principles to keep in mind before taking action.

Proportionality

We are all probably aware of the most controversial instances of critical pedagogy in classrooms: the Buffalo, New York, school district that told students that they must become "activists for antiracism" instead of focusing on their failing test scores,[104] or the California model "ethnic studies" curriculum that speaks approvingly of Aztec human sacrifice,[105] to name just two cases. That these incidents made it into the national news means that they are rarefied examples of critical pedagogy at its most expansive.

By contrast, maybe the problem you are dealing with is a single assignment that your child's teacher has handed out—something that might have been hastily scraped from a seemingly reliable website. You could respond by calling down the school board or launching a boycott—but doing so may induce the board to circle the wagons and force a conflict where a few simple words would have made the problem evaporate.

But at times, you do need to prepare for an extended fight. When resolving any problem—including the problem of dangerous falsehoods in your child's classroom—it's important to make your response proportional to the scale of the issue. Throughout the rest of this section of the guide, we'll cover solutions ranging from a polite conversation to total parent boycott. Remember: start small and think about the scale of the problem before you go nuclear.

The Minority Rule

There is rarely such a thing as a truly popular movement, and the spread of critical pedagogy is no exception. Most diversity initiatives at major schools are spearheaded by administrators, often in a specifically designated department of diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI); social media protests are often instigated by a small group of students or alumni, not a spontaneous and uncoordinated mass action.

The point is not about the legitimacy of these movements but about how they operate. A small group of people who demand something will generally get the compliance of the majority who are indifferent. This is what mathematician, investor, and social critic Nassim Taleb calls the "minority rule": the insight that majorities will follow minorities' preferences if the latter are intransigent and the former are "flexible."[106]

This is a useful principle to understand not only because it allows you to focus on the minority of actors who are driving the change to which you object; it also makes you aware that you and other parents like you can together become an intransigent minority. If you're more stubborn than the most stubborn proponent of critical pedagogy in your school, you may win through intransigence alone.

Effective Persuasion

In every step of the process, it's important to keep in mind *how* you're communicating, which means keeping in mind with *whom* you're communicating. Your fundamental goal is a change at some level, whether it be in your child's classroom or across the whole school. To attain that change, you need to convince someone—a teacher, a principal, a school board—and therefore you need to think about effective persuasion.

In general, being polite and conciliatory is the correct first move—you catch more flies with honey than with vinegar. No one thinks of himself as a bad guy, including a teacher teaching your child something you don't want your child to learn. If you go in guns blazing, you are more likely to elicit a defensive response, which will move you further away from your goal. Do not allow politeness to make you a pushover—your goal should be calm and reasonable but firm.

That said, do not discount the effectiveness of getting angry, particularly if you find that you need to escalate past a one-on-one conversation. Advocates of critical pedagogy have wrung huge changes out of administrations through pressure campaigns built on assertions of "righteous rage" and "justified anger." The squeaky wheel, as it were, gets the grease, and you should not be afraid to match your opponents' level of being demanding—after all, it has been successful for them.

Another insight that can be gleaned from paying attention to critical pedagogy advocates: a story is worth a thousand arguments. The persuasiveness of so-called critical race stories comes from their pathos—anecdotes are a powerful tool for swaying public emotion, and you should actively strive to use them. You can outline why you think critical pedagogy is bad; but actual stories of how these practices are hurting kids are far more effective in changing the minds of administrators—never mind the community at large.

Solving the Problem Yourself

As mentioned, it's important to adapt your response to the scale of the problem. Before you do anything, assess the level at which the problem is happening. Although curricular guidelines may be set at the school district or even the state level, day-to-day decisions about what your children are reading and learning are still mostly in the hands of teachers. So start by consulting with their teachers: Is their use of a critical pedagogy resource a one-off, or is it part of a deliberate learning plan? Are they incorporating a variety of perspectives, or only offering one view? You may find that a simple conversation can get you further than you would have thought.

If the original teacher is recalcitrant, it's time to move up the administrative ladder. In a public school, that might mean the head of the division, the principal, and then the district superintendent's office. Be calm and polite but persistent—administrators should see you as someone who demands to be taken seriously. In a private school, that might mean going to the head of the division, followed by the head of the school.

While you're still prosecuting your issue on an individual level, here are a few tips to keep in mind:

- Document everything. Make sure to save e-mails and take notes after meetings. Consider recording conversations—but be aware that this may be interpreted as hostile before you need to become hostile. If you do record conversations, be aware of the laws surrounding recording in your state.[107]

- Consider whether you want to press for your child to be able to opt out of the objectionable lesson/content. Such opt-outs have long existed—for example, for parents concerned about the content of sex education classes. Rather than asking your teacher/administrator to change the curriculum for everyone else, consider the pros and cons of keeping it away from your own child.

- Don't let yourself be bullied. A major feature of critical pedagogy is the way that it dispatches critics through personal invective and guilt by association—dissenters are tarred as "racists," "white supremacists," and the like. You should recognize that these assertions are nothing more than an attempt to intimidate you; do not let these words have power over you. If you hold firm, the most ardent critical pedagogy advocates will quickly discover that they've run out of ammo.

Getting Organized

Maybe your efforts to address the problem one-on-one have gone nowhere, or maybe the problem was too big for a one-on-one solution. Some schools have implemented large-scale critical pedagogy programs, with the full endorsement of the administration and associated staff. In situations like that, your complaint about one teacher isn't going to cut it. What you need, then, is to move from solving the problem yourself to working in concert with other parents.

In fact, operating as a lone wolf may make it easier for the administration to dismiss your concerns. Be wary of techniques designed to mollify you without addressing the problem: for example, offering you a teacher's aide position, or a favored teacher for your child next year, or bringing in the PTA to outnumber you.

Your first step is to identify other parents who are sympathetic to your concerns and skeptical of the school's new direction. This is easier said than done—in a school that has fully leaned in to critical pedagogy, those who speak out critically may find themselves ostracized. You may need to be the first person to step forward by speaking out publicly, such as at a PTA meeting or over a parent e-mail list. Alternately, if you observe others expressing discontent or being reticent, approach them.

Another approach is to give parents an anonymous forum to vent, and then form connections. At Los Angeles's Harvard-Westlake school, an Instagram page called "Woke at Harvard-Westlake" has documented critical pedagogy excesses over the past year. It includes a public-facing e-mail address and form so that parents and

students can contact its anonymous administrator(s).[108] Such an anonymous venue could highlight absurdities in your school as well as help build connections.

A key reality of establishing a group of parents is that the bigger the group becomes, the easier it gets. That's because another parent you bring in might know two more sympathetic parents. But it's also because the bigger the group becomes, the easier it is to be comfortable affiliating with it—knowing that five other people are on your side is exponentially more comforting than knowing that only one person is.

After you have more than two or three parents on your side, it may make sense to create a central venue for coordination. An e-mail list works well, as does a group chat application like WhatsApp or Discord. For those who are particularly concerned about privacy, encrypted apps like Signal or Keybase may be a better option.

Being aware of other parents' privacy concerns is paramount to organizing a successful group. Particularly in private schools, where enrollment is at the discretion of the administration, parents might fear that dissenting from pedagogical practices will hurt their kids' educational future. Giving parents a variety of options to disclose information about themselves to you might be a useful way to build their confidence and trust—ultimately producing a more cohesive group. Encourage parents to engage anonymously in a text chat, and then encourage an in-person meeting when they seem comfortable doing so.

Responding as a Group

Once you've organized even a small group of parents, you want to think about how to make your voice heard at school. Consider a similar escalation strategy to the one outlined above in "Solving the Problem Yourself"—approach a problematic teacher, and if that proves futile, work your way up. In general, at this stage, you have two goals: the ultimate goal of correcting the problematic behavior; and the instrumental goal of attracting more parents to your cause.

You should consider the medium by which you and your group of parents communicate your displeasure. Parents at the Dalton School in New York, for example, penned an anonymous letter to the administration condemning the school's turn toward critical pedagogy; parents in the Southlake, Texas, public school district pushed through an entirely new school board.[109] But you could also consider asking for a sit-down meeting before moving to that step. Remember the principle of proportionality: only escalate if your less aggressive response is not getting the desired results.

You should consider the trade-offs of anonymity. As mentioned, some parents will be uncomfortable attaching their names to any opposition to the school's "diversity" agenda, particularly if you are in a private school where your child has no formal right to attend. At the same time, anonymity is inherently delegitimizing: the Dalton letter gives no sense of how many or which parents are opposed to your school's critical pedagogy agenda. This gives opponents an opportunity to dismiss you as a small, irrelevant group—or as not confident enough of, or committed enough to, your views to defend them publicly. Be aware that at a certain point, anonymity will no longer be tenable.

Once you have tried direct conversation and accepted the need to go public, many responses become available. You could consider organizing your group to write letters to the editor of your local newspaper (more on this in the next section), attend your local PTA or school board meeting *en masse*, and even organize a real-life protest, as parents did after D.C.-area magnet high school Thomas Jefferson dumped its race-blind admissions test.[110]

If you are a private school parent, now may also be a time to consider talking about annual contributions to the school, one of the few points of leverage that such parents have over their schools' administrations that advocates of critical pedagogy usually do not. A group of parents can inform their school that they will not be giving

annual contributions if divisive material remains in the curriculum. Doing so connects the issue to the school's bottom line and may instigate change.

To the extent possible, it pays to be aware of the diversity of the people presenting criticism of an ideology that has framed itself, however dishonestly, as promoting diversity and inclusion. To the extent that parents from different racial/socioeconomic backgrounds are genuinely represented in your group, their public expression of criticism helps make the case that the group's concerns are not rooted in racism but in a genuine concern that "antiracism" may make discrimination worse, not better.

You also should consider offering a range of ways for parents to get involved, so that even those who don't want to do too much can do something. Make it easy to write a letter to your school board or principal by offering a form outlining the specific problem, alluding to more general objections to critical pedagogy (consult the glossary for detail), and emphasizing your investment as a parent in your child's right to an education that is free from racial and ethnic discrimination. Similarly, if you write a letter to the editor of your local paper (see the next section on working with the media), you can then ask fellow parents to sign it, which is relatively easy for them but helps make their support for your project public.

Offering a Positive Vision

Pushing back against critical pedagogy is a worthwhile and noble project, but it is also important and helpful to be positive. Some people who support (or believe they support) critical pedagogy in schools have strange beliefs about critics, thinking, for example, that skeptical parents do not want their children to ever face hard historical truths, or that they support a whitewashing of American history. That's not the case: critics of critical pedagogy are concerned that it defines America in an exclusively and simplistically negative light, not that it offers any criticisms of America at all.

One solution to emphasize—particularly in history and social studies curricula at the middle- and high-school level—is the importance of presenting a variety of perspectives on an issue and trusting students to sort out right from wrong. Parents and administrators are likely to be far more open to adding thinkers to the curriculum than subtracting them—consider floating the works of moderate (and even left-leaning) academic critics of critical pedagogy like John McWhorter, Glenn Loury, Carol Swain, Erec Smith, Stephanie Deutsch, Peter Boghossian, and others.

A related strategy is to try to offset critical pedagogy's relentlessly negative account of ethnic relations with a more positive, affirmative story. Your student's school can use black history month to learn only about the "white supremacy" allegedly inherent in standardized tests or negative reactions to being called racist, or they can use it to celebrate great black Americans and try to respectfully build a better understanding of the many contributions of black people and black culture to America. Critical pedagogy's fixation on the negative can turn minority students into tokens of oppression—a more positive approach can help them celebrate who they are in school without dividing students into friend and foe.

Lastly, it is important to take seriously individual acts of bias and intolerance in schools. Regardless of critical pedagogy's claims, it's still the case that kids can be and often are cruel to each other—and parents should want an environment that minimizes and condemns bigoted bullying. Adopting critical pedagogy training and "anti-racist statements" actually lets school administrators avoid the much harder work of treating acts of bigotry as a disciplinary problem. If you want to push back on these practices, make clear that you agree that racism should not be tolerated in your school—but critical pedagogy is the wrong way to go about reducing it.

Working with the Media

If your parent-group actions aren't working, or even if they are, you might consider bringing public attention to the problem. Even if your child's school is united behind the idea of critical pedagogy, much of the nation is not.

Bringing your story into the spotlight can apply much needed pressure, highlighting unreasonable behavior in a way that can fix it.

If you've been carefully documenting your activities until this point, those details will be invaluable. Other parents should have been doing so, as well. You may want to organize those details in a common Google Doc or other online file-sharing service.

If your child is enrolled in a public school, you might want to familiarize yourself with your state's freedom of information laws. As government entities, public schools are generally subject to such laws, and administrators can be compelled to release everything from internal documents to the texts of their e-mails. For a guide to your state's public records law, consult a group such as the National Freedom of Information Coalition.[111]

Note that compelling the release of, say, a principal's e-mails is a very aggressive action—so do so only if you're prepared to burn bridges. But if your child is a public school student, freedom of information laws exist to help hold public employees accountable, so don't be afraid to use them. For example, investigative journalist Asra Nomani (whose son attends Virginia's public Thomas Jefferson High School) used her state's freedom of information law to reveal a $20,000 contract (for a one-hour video presentation) between Virginia's Fairfax County Public School district and critical race theorist Ibram Kendi.[112]

Whether you want to publish your personal story, the details of other parents' struggles against the administration, or something that you've uncovered through a public records request, you need to think about the platform on which you do it. Self-publishing allows you to spread your message quickly without relying on others, but it also limits your reach (unless you already have a large social media following). By contrast, working with local—or national—outlets gives you a bigger platform but also reduces your control over the story.

If you'd like to self-publish, a wide variety of platforms are now available that are easy to set up and use. Blogging services like Medium or WordPress allow you to set up a public-facing blog in minutes, while newsletter services like Substack enable you to produce similar output for a select list of subscribers. You might also consider using social media platforms like Twitter and Facebook to get the message out.

You can do only so much with such platforms, however, so you might want to approach the media. A good place to start is local media—your local paper or TV station—which are eager for local stories and, in general, less likely to be ideologically sympathetic to critical pedagogy than many large national outlets.

Before choosing to approach local media, consider whom you want to approach—a local television station, a local paper, etc. Take partisan slant into account—a right-leaning outlet will likely be more sympathetic but may give your opponents the opportunity to tar you as partisan yourself.

If you're not having success with the local media, or if you think that your message needs a broader audience, you might consider a news source with wider reach. A particularly clear-cut story of critical pedagogy–motivated wrongdoing may get traction at a national, left-leaning paper like the *New York Times* or *Washington Post*, but such outlets have evinced sympathy toward the goals of "antiracism," and thus might be less interested than you would hope.

Explicitly right-leaning outlets have the challenge of partisan tilt but are likely to be more sympathetic: consider sites like the Manhattan Institute's *City Journal*, *National Review*, the *Washington Free Beacon*, or the *Daily Signal*. Working with such sites will be more likely to connect you to a journalist interested in your story but may also make it harder for your story to have an impact with other parents skeptical of these outlets. Last, consider particular angles of your story: if, for example, you are dealing with critical pedagogy–inspired antisemitism, a site like *Tablet*, which focuses on Jewish issues, may be interested.

Before you approach anyone in the media, organize the information you want to present—a PDF of the most salacious documents you can share, a list of other parents with whom they can talk, for example. Giving a journalist something to work with makes him or her much more likely to take your story.

When talking to a reporter, be aware of journalistic norms around quoting and attribution.[113] Unless you have explicitly stipulated that the conversation is "off the record," and your interlocutor has agreed, assume that everything that you are saying can and will appear on the front page of your local newspaper tomorrow, and conduct yourself accordingly. Be courteous and avoid personal criticisms of your opponents—your problem is with a failure of teaching, not with the people you may be butting heads with.

The trade-off of going to the media is that while your story will get a wider audience, it also becomes no longer your story to control. The journalist with whom you are working is free to quote you however he or she sees fit and is indeed professionally obligated to get the opinion of the "other side." This doesn't mean that you shouldn't approach the media, but you should be aware that your interlocutor's work product may not perfectly line up with how you imagined it.

While this guide advises speaking to the media only after you've tried internal recourse and sought to build connections to other parents, it's worth noting that a public story may have the effect of jump-starting those connections. Schools trying to push critical pedagogy over and above parents' objections have every reason to keep them in the dark and separated from each other, as many parents have experienced. A story about something crazy happening at your school can change the conversation, giving parents a concrete concern to discuss and coalesce around, and making the airing of thoughts socially permissible in a way that it previously was not.

Taking Legal Action

Critical pedagogy is not merely counterproductive and divisive, critics increasingly argue—it may also be illegal. The Fourteenth Amendment to the U.S. Constitution and the 1964 Civil Rights Act spell out certain rights to not be discriminated against on the basis of race, as well as certain guarantees of the right to free speech, even (in some cases) by students in public schools.[114] Training and activities in public schools (and, potentially, private schools that have accepted federal funding) that divide students by race demean certain students as "oppressors" or inherently evil, or they compel students to profess certain beliefs that may run afoul of their state and federal rights.

These are the grounds for a number of lawsuits designed to fight back against critical pedagogy across the country. Although they are still in the early stages at the time of this guide's publication, they offer a promising approach for protecting students from discrimination, as well as a tool for you to consider when no other option is available.

Interested groups have, for example, sued the Santa Barbara Unified School District, the Democracy Prep Public Schools of Las Vegas, and Virginia's Thomas Jefferson High School.[115] In these cases, plaintiffs have alleged that implicit bias training violates nondiscrimination rules, that compelled "antiracist" speech in the classroom is constitutionally impermissible, and that moves to end merit-based admissions to selective public high schools unconstitutionally discriminate against Asian-Americans.

Whether these arguments will be palatable to the courts remains to be seen. But parents should keep abreast of developments and consider whether their own situation could serve as a test case.

Whom Can I Ask for Help?

This guide is meant to be a starting point for parents looking to fight back against critical pedagogy in their school, but it's far from the only resource. Many national organizations—many brand-new—are interested in fighting various manifestations of critical pedagogy at every level of education, from kindergarten through college. They can help you connect to other parents, give you advice on organizing in your school, offer tips on talking to the media, and even help with lawsuits. Here are a few organizations:

- **Foundation Against Intolerance and Racism** (fairforall.org): a nonpartisan, centrist organization focused on responding to radicalism with a "compassionate anti-racism" dedicated to equal dignity and equality under the law. FAIR runs a membership organization, including local chapters, to help connect people from all parts of society skeptical of "woke" approaches that they term "neo-racism." It can also help connect parents like you to other parents and to professional and legal aid.

- **Parents Defending Education** (defendinged.org): a "national grassroots organization working to reclaim our schools from activists promoting harmful agendas," PDE is a school-focused group working to connect parents and provide resources to respond to critical pedagogy. It can help you find other parents in your local area and offer resources on how to respond effectively to your administration's agenda.

- **Foundation for Individual Rights in Education** (thefire.org): Although this organization has historically focused on repressive speech policing at the college level, FIRE has been expanding its work to K–12 education. Its high school network offers a free-speech curriculum, as well as resources for parents and students concerned about their voices being silenced.

- **Pacific Legal Foundation** (pacificlegal.org): a national nonprofit public-interest law firm focusing on civil rights issues. It has recently taken an interest in critical pedagogy discrimination in public schools, organizing the lawsuit against Thomas Jefferson High School.[116] If you are considering legal action, or if you believe that you have a test case, this organization may be a useful resource.

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