

# Understanding the Difference Between Critical Race Theory (CRT) and Educational Equity • What You Need to Know

People are asking questions about critical race theory (CRT) and public schools. 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 and what it is not:

## What it is

Critical race theory (CRT) is a framework and/or analytical tool primarily used in university-level courses. Originating in the 1970s, CRT was first used as a tool to help law students think critically about the impact of historical and present-day racism on the legal system. In the 1990s, some colleges of education also started incorporating CRT into their coursework to help aspiring school administrators and teachers better understand inequities in the context of schooling.

## What it isn't

Critical race theory (CRT) is **not** part of social studies curriculum and has **never** been part of social studies curriculum in Texas.

**Second**, let's look at required content for Texas social studies instruction. The state's social studies curriculum can be found at [Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills \(TEKS\)](#). It's important to remember that in Texas, curriculum must be adopted by the Texas State Board of Education in consultation with stakeholders—educators, parents, and business representatives—and only after public hearings.

Of course, teaching social studies and history will at times require discussion about historic instances of racism. This, in turn, often prompts students' questions and requests for

additional discussion on how some elements of history continue to play out in our communities. Texas teachers have experience and expertise in managing these conversations.

**And finally**, as media channels and members of the public are confusing some key terms, it's important to note that the terms critical race theory and educational equity are not the same and shouldn't be used interchangeably.

Unlike CRT, which is a tool primarily used in institutions of higher education, **educational equity** is a **K-12 term referring to federal and state policies and requirements**. Specifically, the term 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 achievement data by student groups as a way to address and close achievement gaps.

Additionally, in recent years, the terms **equity work** or **diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI)** have become commonplace in K-12 education as 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 U.S. education policy by upholding important protections outlined in NCLB. At the same time, it granted 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.

**We hope you find this information helpful as questions arise about this topic.**



## Critical Race Theory (CRT)

A discipline and analytical tool primarily used in university-level coursework



## Educational Equity

K-12 National Education Policy