

# current issues in education

## Critical Race Theory

### The Issue

As of August 2021, nearly 20 [states](#) had introduced bills to ban critical race theory (CRT) and discussions about racism in public schools, including Arizona, Arkansas, Kentucky, Louisiana, Maine, Michigan, Missouri, New Hampshire, North Carolina, Ohio, Oklahoma, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, South Carolina, South Dakota, Utah, West Virginia and Wisconsin. Eight states (Arizona, Idaho, Iowa, New Hampshire, Oklahoma, South Carolina, Tennessee, and Texas) have signed bills into law, although only Idaho specifically mentions CRT.

High-profile debates, driven largely by fear and misunderstanding, continue both in state legislatures and local school districts. In many cases, opponents have wrongly equated the complex topic of CRT with social-emotional learning and all diversity, equity, inclusion and anti-racism efforts within K-12 schools.

Despite the ongoing political debate, CRT is not a concept taught in K-12 education. However, a historical understanding of systemic racism is necessary as all educators, including school counselors, work to improve student outcomes, especially for marginalized students.

### Discussion

Systemic racism, oppression and white privilege are real. Both our nation's history and current events are rife with examples to support this reality. The impact of racial disparity in education continues to be a crucial conversation as educators and other stakeholders address the painful truth that all groups of students in the United States have not achieved outcomes at the same level.

### What Is Critical Race Theory?

"Critical Race Theory (CRT) is a theoretical framework that provides education researchers, policy makers and practitioners with critical lenses to deconstruct oppressive policies and practices and to construct more emancipatory systems for racial equity and justice," according to the Oxford Research Encyclopedia. Introduced in the late 1970s and early 1980s and taught at the higher education level, CRT has been interpreted and used in a variety of ways.

CRT manifests in educational policy in suspension rates, special education, testing and placement in honors classes, according to Gloria Ladson-Billings, president of the National Academy of Education and one of the first scholars to apply CRT to education. CRT has become a source of debate at the K-12 level amid discussions around racism and racial justice.

From literacy to graduation rates, significant achievement and opportunity gaps demonstrate the considerable work needed to help students of all backgrounds achieve the best possible outcomes. This work includes creating a welcoming school climate for all students and implementing effective and culturally sustaining education strategies, school counseling programs and administrative leadership. It also includes addressing the procedures and processes that have led to inequities. Engaging in real and honest conversations about racism and historical facts are essential to that work.

## School Counselor Role

The [ASCA National Model](#), ASCA [student](#) and [professional](#) standards and ASCA [position statements](#) clearly articulate the school counselor's role in implementing a comprehensive school counseling program that is culturally sustaining and improves outcomes for ALL students. As a part of that program, school counselors serve as advocates for students from all backgrounds and circumstances as well as leaders and collaborators in reducing systemic barriers that negatively impact student achievement.

The role of the school counselor is further described in multiple position statements, including [The School Counselor and Anti-Racist Practices](#), [The School Counselor and Cultural Diversity](#), [The School Counselor and Equity for All Students](#) and [Standards in Practice, Eliminating Racism and Bias in Schools: The School Counselor's Role](#). Through the school counseling program, school counselors:

- Teach mindsets for success, learning strategies, self-management skills and social skills through specific ASCA Student Standards in classroom, small-group or individual settings.
- Help all students
  - apply academic strategies,
  - manage emotions and apply interpersonal skills, and
  - plan for postsecondary options (higher education, military, work force).
- Analyze data to identify student issues, needs and challenges, and create plans to help all students improve achievement, attendance and discipline.
- Work to identify and overcome barriers and inequities that negatively impact student achievement.
- Collaborate with teachers and other school staff, parents, administrators and community stakeholders to create systemic change, including addressing underlying systemic issues and advocating to change policies and procedures that create inequitable student outcomes.

Through these efforts, school counselors use their awareness, knowledge and skills to permanently close gaps in achievement, attainment, information and opportunities among student population groups.

School counselors, and all educators, have an obligation to end racism and bias. They must examine their own biases, enhance awareness of the impact of racism and bias, and demonstrate culturally sustaining skills to combat racism. School counselors have the power to lead by example, advocate for change and collaborate with others to ensure equitable success for all.

## Advocacy Resources

School counselors who need more information or support on this issue can find the following resources and more at [www.schoolcounselor.org](http://www.schoolcounselor.org).

### ASCA Position Statements

- [School Counselor and Anti-Racist Practices](#): School counselors work toward cultural competence and engage in anti-racist actions by advocating to change racist policies, procedures, practices, guidelines and laws contributing to inequities in students' academic, career and social/emotional development.
- [School Counselor and Cultural Diversity](#): School counselors have a professional and ethical responsibility to expand personal multicultural and social justice advocacy, awareness, knowledge and skills to be an effective, culturally competent school counselor. School counselors work toward cultural competence and cultural humility to provide culturally sustaining school counseling. School counselors demonstrate responsiveness by collaborating with students and stakeholders in support of a school and community climate that embraces cultural diversity and helps to promote all students' academic, career and social/emotional development.
- [School Counselor and Equity for All Students](#): School counselors recognize and distinguish individual and group differences and strive to equally value all students and groups. School counselors are advocates for the equitable treatment of all students in school and the community.

### School Counseling Standards in Practice

- [Eliminating Racism and Bias in Schools: The School Counselor's Role](#): This document describes how all ASCA standards address the school counselor role in recognizing and addressing racism and bias while implementing a comprehensive school counseling program. The document describes how school counselors put these standards into practice.

### More

- [ASCA Anti-Racism Resources webpage](#): ASCA has developed and curated a range of resources to support school counselors in their anti-racism work.