

Understanding the Difference Between Critical Race Theory (CRT) and Education Equity: What You Need to Know

On January 28, 2021, The Virginia Board of Education authorized the Virginia Department of Education (VDOE) proceed with the review and revision process of the History and Social Science Standards of Learning consistent with the schedule adopted by the Board in September 2000. It is anticipated that the Standards revision will be completed before November 2022.”

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 way 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 education.

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 Virginia.

Second, let's look at required content for Virginia social studies instruction. The state's social studies curriculum can be found at the [Virginia Department of Education](#). It's important to remember that in Virginia, curriculum must be adopted by the Virginia State Board of Education in consultation with stakeholders 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.

Virginia 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 US 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 US 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

What About Virginia's New Cultural Competency Training Requirements?

During the 2021 session of the Virginia General Assembly, lawmakers passed [SB 1196/HB 1904](#) which directs school boards to adopt and implement policies that require each teacher and any other school board employee holding a license issued by the Virginia Board of Education (Board) to complete cultural competency training, in accordance with guidance issued by the Board, at least every two years. In addition to the training requirement, this legislation also requires that any person seeking initial licensure or renewal of a license shall complete instruction or training in cultural competency as prescribed by the Board, every person seeking initial licensure or renewal of a license with an endorsement in history and social sciences shall complete instruction in African American history, as prescribed by the Board, and imbeds cultural competency into the teacher, principal, and superintendent evaluation.

This legislation enacted § [22.1-298.7](#) of the Code of Virginia pertaining to Teachers and other licensed school board employees; cultural competency training and specifically states:

1. Each school board shall adopt and implement policies that require each teacher and any other school board employee holding a license issued by the Board to complete cultural competency training, in accordance with guidance issued by the Board, at least every two years.
2. That no later than December 31, 2021, the Board of Education shall issue guidance that establishes minimum standards for the cultural competency training required pursuant to § [22.1-298.7](#) of the Code of Virginia, as created by this act.
3. That each school board employee who is required to complete a cultural competency training pursuant to § [22.1-298.7](#) of the Code of Virginia, as created by this act, shall complete at least one such training no later than the beginning of the 2022–2023 school year.

To provide clarity with the process for implementing the requirements found in SB 1196/HB 1904, the Virginia Department of Education issued the following [Superintendent's Memo on June 17, 2021](#).

