

Is Your School Board Using Critical Race Theory as an Excuse for Failure?

Take a look at your schools.

J. E. Stone, Ed.D.

January 2022

Education Consumers Foundation

www.education-consumers.org

Available online: <https://education-consumers.org/look-at-your-board>

Critical Race Theory (CRT) holds that racial inequities are caused by an invisible but systemic racism. Schools adopt anti-racism measures as a corrective, but are they aiming at the right target? Overwhelming statistical evidence shows that the educational inequalities experienced by both white and minority children are linked to ineffective schooling and social promotion, not racism.

“Are school districts suggesting that their teachers and administrators are racists or are they trying to sidestep the real problem?”

Consider these stunning facts: According to the [National Assessment of Educational Progress](#) (NAEP), two out of three third graders have not yet learned to read at a proficient level. Worse, most never will. Approximately 70% of these children will drop out of school or be socially promoted until they graduate unprepared for college or a career. Given these numbers, it is not surprising that ACT finds only 26% of high school graduates fully prepared for college.

Is your school district a part of this problem? Take 60 seconds and [check for yourself](#). You may be shocked by what you learn.

Introduction.

Critical Race Theory alleges that a systemic racism is responsible for the substandard educational outcomes and lack of opportunity experienced by minorities. It is a half-truth at best. Yes, a large percentage of minority students struggle with basic educational skills, and that deficit does deprive them of opportunities for a lifetime. [Racism, however, does not appear to be the cause.](#)

Prior to the 1970s, inequities in funding, enrollment, facilities, staffing and a wide variety of other policy matters were clearly responsible for racial inequities in schooling outcomes. Since that time, however, there have been dramatic changes in law and policy. Increasingly over the last 30-40 years, the primary drag on minority achievement has been ineffective early schooling.

Here is what happens. Most disadvantaged children, [both white and minority](#), enter school less well prepared for learning than their peers. As a result, they need [reading instruction](#) that will enable them to reach a proficient level of reading by grade three--the point at which schooling shifts from "learning to read" to "reading to learn." Otherwise, they start behind and stay behind.

Instead of receiving the structured, systematic type of instruction that is designed to accelerate learning, disadvantaged children are most often taught by teachers who have little [training](#) in any kind of systematic and tested methodology.

Instead of teaching designed to accelerate achievement growth, they are taught by teachers [trained](#) to treat achievement growth as desirable but not essential!

This [mismatch](#) between training and public policy objectives has been a subject of concern for many years. Today, however, a growing body of [reports](#) are bringing

these differences to light and resulting in [calls](#) for accountability in teacher training.

Bottom line: The differences in white and minority student achievement are not the product of an unconscious discrimination against minorities. They are primarily the result of economically disadvantaged minority children failing to learn foundational skills due to a lack of effective early instruction.

Treating the problem as one of racism is to invite educational malpractice. It would be like giving chemotherapy to a patient with a broken arm on the theory that cancer somehow caused the break. If the patient did not die, they would still have the broken arm.

Instead of theory and catastrophic risk, schools need to face the issue with proven practices: Teacher training aligned with the public's aims and results-focused coaching, supervision, and accountability for early childhood educators.

Why racism appears to be the problem.

That said, it is easy to see why many observers think that racism is the problem. Seventy-five percent of black and brown children are economically disadvantaged and therefore a much higher percentage of black and brown children are going to have reading problems. In contrast, poverty affects less than half of that percentage of white students.

What is more, 45% of poor minority children live in urban neighborhoods with dense populations and exceptionally adverse living conditions. In addition, their schools often have special problems. For example, they struggle to retain teachers.

The aggregate result of these adverse conditions can seem racist on their face. For example, 64% of Charlotte, North Carolina's 12,161 fourth grade students are Black and Hispanic. Of those 7,791 students, 59% live in poverty. By contrast, 27% of Charlotte 4th graders are white and only 14% are poor. Those numbers sum to 4,596 disadvantaged Blacks and Hispanics versus 442 disadvantaged white students.

In spite of similar reading proficiency rates for the two groups—19% and 26% respectively—the reading outcomes for Charlotte seem to suggest racism: The

school system has nearly 12 times as many below-proficient Black and Hispanic 4th graders as it does white students. In fact, these results are almost all due to less-than-effective teaching coupled with urban demographics--not discrimination against minority students.

For an extended analysis of the issue, see J. E. Stone, [Critical Race Theory is an Excuse for Educational Failure](#), August 2021, Education Consumers Foundation.

CRT-based solutions are a distraction.

Whether or not intended as such, CRT-based policies such as anti-racist staff training, anti-racist curricula, reduced expectations for students, and other purported correctives not only distract from the real problem, they subvert the core aims of schooling.

Anti-racism efforts in the schools are no more likely to rectify racial disparities in reading outcomes than 14th century witch burnings stopped the bubonic plague. Schools that are serious about correcting societal inequities will move ahead with better training, better teaching, and better practices, not waste time and money fighting racial bogymen.

Thankfully, the real problems are becoming obvious to everyone, and constructive change is taking place. In widely noted [statements](#), the newly appointed chancellor of the New York City schools, David Banks, identified faulty early reading instruction as the root of the system's failure to bring its black and brown students to a proficient level of reading.

What should parents and taxpayers do if their district adopts CRT?

Step # 1 is that they should inform themselves about the early reading outcomes in [their school district](#). If the data reveals that the district is failing to serve economically disadvantaged students—and most are--parents and taxpayers should challenge the school board to correct the “inequities” of the school district's own making before launching any CRT-based plan.

The questions that the board must answer are:

Before addressing CRT's theory-based allegations, what is the district going to do about its visible and ongoing failure to teach economically disadvantaged white and minority students how to read? Their educational

trajectory leads directly to the disparities decried by Critical Race Theory and the cause is not hypothetical. They start behind their peers and their schools fail to catch them up.

Who is responsible for this educational neglect and for the social promotion that has been covering it up?

Moreover, if the district believes that these outcomes are being driven by racism, who are these racists and what are they doing?¹

Why are we not addressing our existing problems before attacking the hypothetical ones posed by CRT?

Critical to the success of this challenge is public awareness of the district's third-grade reading outcomes. Most people have an [impression](#) of local school quality that is based on information filtered through the school district. Not surprisingly, most have heard about district successes but know little about any less-than-favorable outcomes. Given these circumstances, it is wise to [organize](#) a group of interested parents and undertake an informational campaign before making any public statements. Word of mouth is an excellent way to start!

If you intend to lead such an effort, your first job is to [educate yourself and your immediate group](#) as to the local school performance [facts](#). From that beginning, be prepared to spend time explaining the facts to a broader circle of friends, neighbors, and acquaintances. The larger the number of people who understand the facts and the issue, the more likely you are to gain broad support.

Few members of the public understand that most districts have to socially promote significant numbers of ill-prepared students. The problem is often hidden by inflated grades and the absence of formal policy but it exists nonetheless. Social promotion is said to be a better option than grade retention because it avoids risk to the child's social development. In the absence of

¹ If these questions are answered in very general terms, parents must insist on someone in the local school district taking responsibility. The neglect of disadvantaged children is visible, it has been known for years, effective alternatives have been available, and a formal or informal policy of social promotion has been used to cover it up. Who made these decisions, who implemented them, and who presided over this process? If racism was the motive, who are these racists!

[remediation](#) however, it saddles children with diminished skills and lifelong gaps in their education.

Your success in gaining public support will depend heavily on the ability of your group to highlight the district's immediate, ongoing, and visible problems—as contrasted to the theory-based allegations made by political activists.

Parents objecting to CRT must be prepared to replace the board.

Ineffective schooling and social promotion policies are the real source of most of the inequities agitating society. The question is, what is this school district going to do about its existing problems, not its hypothetical ones?

School-level [reading proficiency charts](#) for virtually any public elementary school are available on the Education Consumers Foundation [website](#). So are guides to organizing a [parent/taxpayer group](#) and ground rules about dealing with school boards (scroll ECF homepage). Easy-to-read bar charts are available by request. Parents can use them to inform themselves and the larger community as they press for changed directions in school policy.

If the board continues to insist on indulging in race-focused policies, parents and taxpayers should seek to elect a new board.

In theory, local schools exist for the benefit of children, parents, and the community. They are authorized and regulated by the state, partially funded by local taxpayers, and nominally governed by an elected local school board.

In reality, local schools are operated by educators and overseen by school boards that are often the [political captive](#) of local educators. Why? Because most parents and taxpayers [know little](#) about the candidates, issues, or even the dates of school board elections, and they typically have little reason to be interested in finding out. The result is that successful school board candidates try to appeal to the few people who do vote, i.e., the educators who work for the schools and their allies. All too often the result is insider control and the quiet advancement of doctrines like CRT.

Educational change in the face of a captive school board requires [engagement](#) in elections. An informed public is the primary prerequisite to that end. **The public cannot support or object to that which they do not know about or understand.**