

# Critical Race Theory is an Excuse for Educational Failure

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The socioeconomic disparities Critical Race Theory cites as evidence of racism are, in fact, primarily the result of public education's failings. Insensitivity to the unique educational needs of disadvantaged children—both white and minority--has resulted in substandard learning outcomes for both. Minority children, however, have suffered greater harm because more of them are economically disadvantaged and educationally delayed at school entry. Some school districts are confronting the problem but many deflect responsibility by blaming racism and quietly practicing social promotion. Parents and communities need to examine their district's performance and ask whether their local schools are making the same mistake. The indispensable step toward a significant reduction in the Nation's socioeconomic disparities is a shift in PreK-3 instruction, not a shift in the public dialogue about race.

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Critical Race Theory (CRT) alleges that the nation's [racial inequities](#) are the product of a social, economic, and political system that is stacked in favor of America's White majority.

Schools and other educational institutions have accepted this controversial premise and asserted that it is their duty to teach future generations how this situation came about and what steps are required to correct it. These include [anti-racist measures](#) that effectively require white students to embrace the CRT perspective or be socially and institutionally ostracized.

The [Education Consumers Foundation's](#) (ECF) response to CRT is not focused on the specifics of CRT's allegations. Instead, it questions whether the [inequities](#) cited by CRT as [evidence of racism](#) are, in fact, the [result of racism](#). Moreover, it makes the case that they are the result of public education's

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[failure to educate](#) economically disadvantaged children.

ECF maintains that the type of instruction provided economically disadvantaged children consigns *both*

*White and minority students* to substandard educational outcomes and ultimately to the social and economic margins. The indispensable step toward a significant reduction in the Nation's socioeconomic disparities is to focus on early instruction, not shift attention to the public dialogue about race.

### How the Inequities Arise

Economically disadvantaged students [in every state](#) are burdened with poor schooling outcomes—outcomes that are [clearly related](#) to the socioeconomic disparities between White and minority Americans.

Nationally, only 16% of *disadvantaged* Black fourth graders and 20% of Hispanics [read at a proficient level](#). Disadvantaged White students, at 34%, are only somewhat better off. By contrast, economically *advantaged* Black, White, and Hispanic 4<sup>th</sup> graders achieve approximately double the [percentages](#) of their disadvantaged classmates.

Disadvantaged children of all races are not well served; but a far greater percentage of Black and Hispanic children, *both advantaged and disadvantaged*, are disabled by their schooling experience. Only 18% of *all* Black 4<sup>th</sup> graders and 23% of all Hispanics are proficient in reading. By contrast, 45% of White students reach that level.

Why? The source of the difference is not entirely clear but it appears to be due to the nature and extent of minority poverty. Seventy-five percent of Black fourth graders and 74% of Hispanics are identified as [economically disadvantaged](#)—as compared to only 32% of white students. Moreover, 15% of Black and 10% of Hispanic students are classified as growing up in [extreme poverty](#) --versus only 5% of Whites.

Bottom line: The initial reading scores of all economically disadvantaged students are [well below those of their advantaged peers](#) and the scores of Black and Hispanic children are the lowest. In order to reach grade level by grade 3, all three groups need instruction that produces [more than one year of achievement-growth per school year](#) during their earliest years of schooling.

Regrettably, both advantaged and disadvantaged students receive instruction that [minimizes](#) the goal of

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achievement gain. Thus, instead of catching up, disadvantaged students typically stagnate or fall further [below grade level](#) and eventually become part

of the economic and educational disparities protested by CRT.

Educators [recognize these issues](#) but view them as an inevitable result of poverty—a perspective that is at odds with public education’s [mission](#) of overcoming the effects of poverty. Public funding for education was justified as a means of ensuring that all students would be able to live as self-sufficient citizens in a free society--regardless of the condition of their birth.

It is the failure of schools to carry out their mission, not systemic racism, that is manifestly responsible for the educational, economic, and racial disparities on which CRT’s allegations are founded.

### Low Public Awareness Has Allowed Schools to Avoid Accountability

So long as parents and taxpayers are [in the dark](#), there is no real accountability for public education’s failure. States test students but schools interpret the findings to the school boards, the media, and the public. School board elections are held, but test results are never debated. Such data is little understood by the public and candidates are loath to alienate the teacher vote by pointing out weaknesses.

As a result, crippling and [costly](#) early outcomes go unnoticed, [social promotion](#) is allowed to flourish, and

socioeconomic disparities are perpetuated.

By deflecting public attention from education's real problems, CRT's allegations facilitate the ongoing inattention and neglect. Instead of a focus on teaching effectiveness, CRT shifts the public conversation to community-wide racism and invites school leaders to strike a virtuous pose by leading reform. From their perspective, agreeing with CRT may be a more comfortable choice than facing their own shortcomings and reckoning with the real problem—especially if parents and taxpayers don't squawk.

### Are Your Local Schools Contributing to the Problem?

At a minimum, parents, policymakers, and the public should look at the [performance of local schools](#) and ask:

1. Have our schools contributed to the creation of the social and economic inequities denounced by CRT?  
*[See your school district here.](#) Charts can be printed, expanded to posters, or converted to [bar graphs](#).*
2. If our schools are adding to the problem, should they not, first and foremost, be held accountable for fulfilling their core mission?

### What Schools Should be Doing

CRT has clearly been successful in highlighting societal inequities, but racism has no immediate relevance to the needed reforms. Meaningful change will require the replacement of ineffective

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current practices with [research-based and data-driven](#) instruction.

The reason that children of poverty are not well served is that the kind of early instruction that would enable them to [grow at an accelerated rate](#) has only recently been [offered by schools](#). Indeed, the teaching practices historically employed by early childhood educators not only fail to stress student achievement, [they minimize its importance](#).

For disadvantaged children, the failure to reach grade-level during their first four or five years of school virtually ensures an unsuccessful school career. Despite this need, most states have not, until recent years, even tested students until

grade three, i.e., four or five years into their school career.

The [Head Start](#) program of the nineteen sixties was an early attempt to address the early learning problem. It remains in place but has proven to be insufficient and ineffective.

More effective alternatives emerged over the years; and some, like Success for All and [Direct Instruction](#), have been around for [decades](#). Both [remain little used](#), however--the result of [disagreement](#) over [pedagogical orthodoxy](#).

Children who can't read at a proficient level by third grade face a 70% chance of dropping out or graduating from high school unprepared for college or the workplace. Millions of students--minority and White--face these long odds. [Only 1/3 of all students are proficient in reading](#) by grade four, and only 26% graduate from high school fully [prepared for college](#) or the workplace.

Significant change in the nation's socioeconomic inequities will require educational leaders to [reduce achievement gaps](#) by holding teachers accountable for [student learning](#) gains during the critical early years of schooling.

Of equal importance, state officials will have to hold [schools of education](#) publicly [accountable](#) for the measured

classroom effectiveness of their graduates, not just their ability to just pass a test of pedagogical knowledge.

Above all, parents and concerned citizens will have to become engaged as

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[consumers](#) of local schooling. Otherwise, they and their school boards will remain [captives](#) of school district public relations initiatives.

Bottom line: Significantly better outcomes for White and minority children are [attainable](#). However, without market forces or compelling public [accountability](#), schools and teacher colleges will continue to be shaped by the often [extremist](#) social, political, and economic voices that fill the vacuum and advance schemes like [Critical Race Theory](#).