

Learn from History Coalition

Minimizing Misinformation About History and Social Studies

A Brief Guide for School Board Members

Inaugural
Coalition Partners:



Introduction

Thank you so much for your leadership and tireless efforts to ensure that students in your community have access to an excellent education in a safe and secure environment.

Your volunteer work as a school board member is demanding and made even harder in many communities by misinformation about history and social studies instruction.

The primary falsehood being spread is that schools are teaching “Critical Race Theory” (or “CRT”), an advanced academic concept taught in some law schools and colleges to explain persistent, stark racial inequities.

The term “CRT” is being distorted and misused. Inaccurate claims about what is being taught are causing parents to pack School Board meetings and, armed with talking points shared on social media, push for resolutions to restrict teaching, curricula, or professional development. Several states have even passed laws banning classroom discussion of “divisive concepts” such as racism and levying steep penalties on districts or educators that do not comply.

This brief guide provides effective immediate steps you can take to minimize distraction and disruption and keep the focus on your students and what they need.

There Is Broad Bipartisan Agreement

Extensive recent survey research confirms a broad bipartisan majority of Americans:

- Want students to learn a thorough, accurate, and fact-based account of American history;
- Trust teachers to thoughtfully teach the hard parts of history;
- Believe racism is widespread and harmful to society and that schools have a responsibility to teach students that racism is wrong;
- Want to reduce political division; and
- Want schools to ensure all students feel they belong and see themselves in the curriculum.

What School Board Members Can Do

Release a Statement to the Community as Soon as Possible

We know how difficult it is to prioritize this outside of the usual board schedule, but a clear statement is crucial to minimize disruption and keep your community focused on student success.

- **Partner with district leadership to prepare and release a joint statement;** include the superintendent, Board leadership, teachers' association leadership, building leaders, parent organization leadership, key community leadership, and district communications staff. Your board may also choose to issue a separate resolution.
- **Issue the joint statement and, if you choose, a board resolution.** Key points to include:
 - **Why you are communicating:** explain the widespread misinformation about schools teaching an academic theory called "Critical Race Theory."
 - **Unequivocally state your school system does not teach students "Critical Race Theory."**
 - **Emphasize that** student well-being and belonging is essential to academic achievement and that **the welfare of students is at the center of all school system decision-making.**
 - **Explain what is taught and what is not taught** by your school system's committed educators:
 - They teach a thorough, accurate, and fact-based history education that aligns with state academic standards [linking to them]; and
 - They teach that racism is wrong and that students should learn to value, recognize and respect the equal humanity and dignity of every person, and to recognize and reject racism.
 - They do not teach white students to feel guilty, students of color to feel oppressed, or any students that they are to blame for actions taken in the past.
 - They strive to build community, not foster division.
 - **Affirm that educators in your district are thoughtful and respectful in how they design lessons** and facilitate thoughtful discussions on difficult but important topics, and that their goal as educators is to help students grow and develop and learn to think for themselves.
 - **Highlight how that helps all students and aligns with the district's broader mission, goals, and values if your district has spelled those out.** Specifically cite and link to relevant documents, including sections of your current Board-approved strategic plan pertaining to equity or other related goals and affirm your commitment and the broad community that exists for those goals.

Click [here](#) for examples of effective statements.

Please send a PDF of your statement to info@learnfromhistory.org.

What School Board Members Can Do (continued)

- Example: “Section 3.1 in our Vision 2025 states that the district will continue to enhance curriculum to represent all learners and is committed to ensure equitable opportunities and outcomes for all students. We are unwavering in that commitment.”
- **Ask for parent and community support and partnership** to pursue the school system’s mission, goals, and values and help educators who are working very hard under difficult circumstances to be able to do their very best for every student.

Widely Disseminate the Statement

- Email and text a link directly to parents/guardians, staff, and external partners;
- Post on your website and social media pages;
- Read the statement at the next School Board meeting;
- Ensure School Board members send it to their constituents with a cover message;
- Principals email it to parents with their own cover message;
- Teachers’ association leaders send it to their members with their own cover message;
- Parent organization leaders send it to their members with their own cover message; and
- Key external stakeholders send it to their networks with their own cover message.

We recommend you not seek media coverage of your statement as media coverage tends to focus on controversy and often elevates misinformation. If contacted by the media, simply refer them back to the statement.

Ensure Your District’s Administrators Are Prepared

- Establish a response team and plan that clarifies roles for the superintendent, admin team, and board.
- Equip principals to communicate with school staff about the possibility of harassment or complaints and how to respond.
- Encourage school leaders to maintain open systems of communication with staff and parents, and to establish procedures for responding to inquiries about curriculum and instruction.
- Review relevant curricula, equity initiatives, and professional learning that might be the target of misinformation and prepare and make publicly available short summaries of each.
- Closely monitor social media and intervene quickly to correct misinformation.
- Prepare for scenarios:
 - Misinformation spreading on social media;
 - Educator harassment;
 - A disruptive school board meeting/push for teacher or curriculum censorship;
 - Individuals or schools targeted by outside groups or listed on hostile websites; and
 - Expansive public records requests.

What School Board Members Can Do (continued)

Reinforce the district’s mission, goals, values, and efforts to equip students to succeed in diverse workplaces, thrive in a diverse society, and create a better future.

- Read your mission statement and values at the beginning of every school board meeting;
- Make your mission statement and values more prominent on the district’s website and social media pages;
- Post your mission statement and values at the entrance to every building;
- Put the mission statement and values in every system-wide communication; and
- Highlights efforts to educate students, either by educators or by students themselves, to oppose racism and recognize and respect the humanity of every person.

Additional Resources

Effective school boards use data and research to develop a vision and goals aligned to their mission. *Eight Characteristics of Effective School Boards* provides guidance on the steps school boards can take that lead to high-performing schools.

<https://www.nsba.org/-/media/NSBA/File/cpe-eight-characteristics-of-effective-school-boards-report-december-2019.pdf>

School equity plans are also the subject of misinformation. *Reimagining School Board Leadership: Action for Equity* is an excellent resource for developing, sustaining and communicating about equity.

[center-for-safe-schools-reimagining-school-board-leadership-guide-2021.pdf \(nsba.org\)](https://www.center-for-safe-schools.org/reimagining-school-board-leadership-guide-2021.pdf)