

Critical Race Theory and Educational Equity: What You Need to Know

Questions about Critical Race Theory and its use in public schools are becoming commonplace in our community. Two common questions being asked are (1) What is Critical Race Theory? and (2) Is it being taught in our schools?

What Is Critical Race Theory?

Critical Race Theory (CRT) is a phrase that is frequently mentioned in the media and in public conversations. CRT might have a certain meaning to one person while someone else might believe it is something entirely different. Critical Race Theory originated in the 1970s as an analytical tool for law students to examine the impact of historical and present-day racism on the legal system and public policies. Currently, CRT is primarily used by higher education in the study of law, psychology, and sociology.

Is Critical Race Theory in the Cherry Hill Public Schools (CHPS) curriculum?

The tenets of CRT are **not** part of any learning standards in New Jersey, nor are they in the CHPS curriculum. The New Jersey Student Learning Standards (NJSLS) are reviewed and revised every five years. The [2020 New Jersey Student Learning Standards webpage](#) provides links to the 2020 NJSLS and information regarding curriculum implementation dates.

These standards provide local school districts with clear and specific benchmarks for student achievement in nine content areas. Developed and reviewed by panels of teachers, administrators, parents, students, and representatives from higher education, business, and the community, the standards are influenced by national standards, research-based practice, and student needs. The standards define a "Thorough and Efficient Education" as guaranteed in 1875 by the New Jersey Constitution. Currently, the standards are designed to prepare our students for college and careers by emphasizing high-level skills needed for tomorrow's world.

The New Jersey Student Learning Standards include [Preschool Teaching and Learning Standards](#), as well as nine K-12 standards for the following content areas:

[21st Century Life and Careers](#)

[Comprehensive Health and Physical Education](#)

[English Language Arts](#)

[Mathematics](#)

[Science](#)

[Social Studies](#)

[Technology](#)

[Visual and Performing Arts](#)

[World Languages](#)

Is Critical Race Theory the same as educational equity?

No. Although various media channels and members of the public sometimes use the terms interchangeably, they mean two different things. 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 federal law established clear requirements for school districts to not only disaggregate student achievement data by race but also to work to close achievement gaps where they exist.

In recent years, the terms **equity work or diversity, equity, and inclusion** have become commonplace in K-12 education as many districts revisit and renew their local efforts to close achievement gaps as required by the federal Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA). When signed into law in 2015, ESSA was intended to further advance equity in U.S. education policy by upholding protections outlined in NCLB, including calling for comprehensive state-developed plans designed to close achievement gaps, improve the quality of instruction, and increase outcomes for all students.

Is Critical Race Theory the Same as Cultural Proficiency/Equity/Character Education (C-PEaCE)?

No. The commitment and goal of [C-PEaCE](#) are to create a school climate in which variety by reason of race, ethnicity, religion, gender, sexual orientation, physical appearance, social/economic class, family structure, physical or developmental abilities are considered assets and resources for personal and academic achievement. C-PEaCE’s purpose is to teach our children and ourselves to live, learn, and work together in a vibrant and diverse world in which mutual respect is the foundation.

We hope you find this information helpful as questions arise about this topic.