

# Toolkit: Communicating about Racial Equity in a Charged Environment in 2022 (Updated Version)



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## Background: *Why prepare for challenging conversations about racial equity?*

All around the U.S. and in the state, conversations are happening around racial and social equity in practice in schools. As mask mandates are lifted, national and local groups are shifting energy and conflict toward banning efforts for inclusion and equity in education. Some of these groups push against any form of diverse perspectives designed to include all students and label them as “controversial” or “unpatriotic” or “discriminatory”, including but not limited to Critical Race Theory (CRT), LGBTQ+, comprehensive sex education, social emotional learning (SEL), mental health, and the Every Student Belongs rule. This quick guide is designed to provide talking points in plain language to support equity and inclusion in education and reduce misinformation, intimidation, and harassment.

Being responsive and setting clear expectations for what students will experience in the classroom can be beneficial to relationships in the school community. Also, it’s crucial that students, educators, and staff feel supported in their work towards equity through tensions that may arise. Above all, the goal is to bridge divides and ensure that every student feels welcome and a sense of belonging at school so they can reach their full potential.

This toolkit is designed to support communications related to equity, including but not limited to the current politically charged moment involving race, gender, and mental health. This is not designed to be a Critical Race Theory 101, but you can find some background information on that topic in “Additional Resources.”

## Effective approaches to challenging conversations

### Start the conversation with boundaries and clarity

- **Invite direct conversation to prevent spread & escalation:** *I’d like to connect with you about your concerns directly. Would you be willing to speak with me one-on-one before you bring your concerns to other groups of people?*
- **Set time, tone, and purpose (in advance if you can):** *I’m looking forward to a constructive conversation during our 30 minutes together. First, I’d like to hear more about your perspective, and I’ll fill you in about how decisions are being made towards the end.*
- **Establish connection:** *I want to get to know you better... and Let’s figure this out together.*
- **Ask for clarity:** *Help me understand better why you’re saying... and Tell me more about your concerns when it comes to...*
- **Use tone and non-verbal cues to your advantage.**

## Continuing and ending the conversation

- **Empathize and ask for fair consideration in return:** *I see how much you care about your child. I hope you can understand that it's my responsibility to show the same level of care for all students in our [school/district]... that's why...*
- **Establish expectations and gain consent to offer clarity:** *Based on what you shared earlier, I believe I can alleviate your concerns by providing you with more information. Would you like to learn more?*
- **Support staff with success stories:** *Consider sharing a story about that educator in action or about a similar classroom activity and how you've seen it work well.*
- **End the conversation with an ask:** *Thank you for your time today. As you continue to think about this issue, I hope you will bring additional questions and concerns to me directly.*

## How to Ground Your Conversations in Story, Experience, and Engagement

All the talking points in the world won't be as effective as your ability to speak to these things:

- **What is your responsibility as a leader?**
  - While it's good to be equipped with facts and prepared to debate, it's best not to try to be an expert on something other than your own experience and deep knowledge.
  - Talk about what you do know, such as what's happening in your district and what you feel you are responsible for as a leader.
- **How are you planning to include others and building a larger leadership base?**
  - Think about how to build a broad coalition to support equity and inclusive education, especially on topics where you expect opposition. School board members, clergy, and staff leaders may be potential collaborators.
- **What is your vision / the vision for your district?**
  - Being future oriented, excited, and hopeful can be a powerful thing, if you feel the time is right.
  - Talk about bringing communities together, especially if there are some people or groups who are emphasizing divides: *Being at school should mean being a part of the community while working together to build on our strength and bridge what has divided us in the past.*
- **What is the plan to arrive at the vision?**
  - Describe the end goal that a lot of folks will be willing to vocally support even if there's a loud and vocal minority: *Our district's goal is to make sure every student has equal opportunities to succeed in school and has access to accurate, comprehensive and relevant curriculum. We are ensuring that each and every student has access to knowledge and skills as well as opportunities to grow, learn and thrive.*

- Share how the district plans to arrive at that goal, for example being vocal about the importance of culturally responsive education: *Our district recognizes the knowledge and unique lived experiences of the students in our classrooms. We are committed to strengthening high-quality, culturally-sustaining and revitalizing instruction, leadership, and pathways to graduation and post-secondary transitions.*
- **What are some key turning points and experiences you can share?**
  - It's harder to debate a story than a philosophical stance. Describe what really happens in the classroom and alleviating fears of "worst case scenarios."
  - Being real with people about pain points but talking about what is possible now and in the future: *It's important to acknowledge the long and painful history of race and education in our state. Students are ready for systems and institutions to change for the better, and that's why our district is making sure racial equity is central.*
  - This works well if you're also expressing openness to hearing the stories and concerns of others too.
- **What is the experience of people most impacted that you've engaged with?**
  - Do the engagement work and share what you're hearing
  - Supporting teachers and students: *We trust educators to reinforce equity in the classroom, and we trust students to share and learn about what's happening in the world around them.*
  - It is difficult to disagree with someone who says: *I've talked to students, and I'm hearing that they want...*

## Scenario Recommendations for Advancing Racial Equity

### School districts' responsibilities for advancing racial equity in Oregon

- [Every Student Belongs](#)
- [Bullying, Harassment, & Intimidation](#)
- [Civil Rights](#)
- [Student Success Act](#)
- [Human Sexuality Education Law](#)

### Responding to board who is pushing back against racial equity work:

1. Ensure that your board members receive training on their role and the relevant rules that govern their work. Work with the [Oregon School Boards Association](#) to encourage board members to attend both individual and full-group training opportunities early in their terms.
  - a. Make sure board members understand and can use parliamentary procedure and [Robert's rules of order](#).
  - b. Make sure board members are aware of and complying with Oregon's [public meeting laws and public records laws](#), including the strict rules around executive sessions and

serial communications. Failure to adhere to these laws could have serious consequences for you, your board, and your school district.

2. Don't approach controversial or divisive situations solo. Consult with people in your district as well as external partners as the situation develops, including COSA and OSBA, for support.
  - a. Part of the role of superintendent is communicating with district stakeholders; consider ensuring that community leaders are aware of pending decisions and their opportunity to provide public comment and written feedback to the board, as it is the board's responsibility to listen to the entire school community.
  - b. Keep lines of communication open and continuous with board members and community when difficulties arise.
  - c. As superintendent, you may already meet regularly with each board member. Consider speaking to board members who are supportive of racial equity work about how to move forward.
  - d. Beyond consultations and keeping lines of communication open for support, think about how to build a broad coalition to support equity and inclusive education, especially on topics where you expect opposition. Early support from local community leaders, elected officials, statewide leaders, etc, can help blunt opposition and leave fewer openings for bigotry or hate.
3. Work with board members towards a shared rationale about how the district is supporting students, in addition to following the law.

**Responding to parents who are concerned about racial topics in the classroom:**

1. Invite direct conversation: "I'd like to connect with you about your concerns directly. Would you be willing to speak with me one-on-one before you bring your concerns to other groups of people?" (ex. Facebook, news media, parent groups)
2. Ask: "What are you most concerned about?" and keep asking curious questions to unpack their concerns.
3. Empathize: "I see how much you care about your child. I hope you can understand that it's my responsibility to show the same level of care for all students in our [school/district] so it's important that I can listen and hear concerns from many different people. I appreciate you giving me a chance to do that by hearing your concerns. I will do my best to resolve the situation, and I believe we can figure it out together."
4. Establish expectations: "Have you seen our district's strategy/plan? I'd love to share it with you and explain exactly how racial equity fits into that and into our curriculum. Based on what you shared earlier, I believe I can alleviate your concerns by providing you with more information. Would you like to learn more?"
5. Show support for educators of color if they are receiving criticism. Consider sharing a story about that educator in action or about a similar classroom activity and how you've seen it work well.
6. End the conversation with an ask, such as: "I respect that you may still have concerns, but would you be willing to see how the semester goes? It might surprise you." or "I'm glad we've come to an agreement. If you speak to other parents, would you be willing to share some of what we talked about so their concerns can be alleviated too?"

## **5 Responses for Challenging Situations**

1. Racism still exists in our society today, and is a system that harms Black people, Indigenous people, Latinx people, Asian and Pacific Islander people, and folks of color around the world. It also decreases the quality of life for everyone, including people who are white.
2. Critical Race Theory helps people describe and understand how racial inequity is baked into all of our social and political structures. Preparing students to engage in the larger world beyond our district requires talking about the ways in which race relates to power, and systems.
3. We don't teach kids that they are responsible for the past, but we do want to make sure they have a stake in the future.
4. Parents and teachers in our community feel our students need to be set up for success with accurate, honest curriculum, books, and conversations throughout their education. These conversations are necessary in the midst of intense political discord.
5. We strive to provide a truthful and understanding environment that includes each and every student as well as their backgrounds and experiences, so that they can learn freely and develop the important life skills they need to be a part of shaping the future.
6. [Transparency/parental involvement/family engagement] is crucial to our district's success. And when those words are used as a way to ban books and restrict the free flow of ideas and conversations in our children's classrooms, then deeper discussions need to happen with students at the center.

### **Responding to media:**

1. Before responding, always vet the person thoroughly. Every person comes with some form of bias, so it's important to find out if they are operating in good faith, as there have been some misleading situations over the past year.
2. Respond in a way that is supportive to educators and staff, particularly staff of color.
3. Start with values and commitment to making sure all students receive an equitable, high quality education.
4. Don't get too caught up in details and past mistakes. Emphasize solutions and future plans.
5. Don't assume anything is "off the record" unless you get explicit agreement from the reporter beforehand. Any part of a conversation, even before or after an interview, is on the record unless the reporter agrees in advance that it isn't.
6. It's ok to talk about racial equity. Racial equity is a standard and central for the Oregon Department of Education and it is not optional to implement and reinforce. Media that sensationalize equity and stir up fear will do so no matter what you say. But your supporters and people who are on the fence need to know you are prepared to be vocal about doing the right thing.
7. Seek support. Get media training, digital privacy support, PR support, and messaging guidance as needed.

### **Assuming some positive community support, what can schools do to harness that energy?**

1. You can get started now on establishing community groups seeking to further equity work in your district. In fact, **starting September 15, 2022, school districts are required to establish an [educational equity advisory committee](#)**. The start date in 2022 doesn't mean you can't jumpstart a committee in advance of that date, and it may serve your district well to be prepared and have a committee in place in advance of that date.
2. This is an opportunity not just to build community support for equity work, but to build support across communities, on the state level, in different sectors that have an investment in strong and inclusive democratic institutions.
3. Plan your response to organized opposition to equity in education in advance. Before a specific announcement is made, or event is held, think in advance about what groups might do and make a plan to respond in a way that is values-based and emphasizes the importance of equity and inclusion in education.
4. Hold a restorative conversation with school community members to discuss dreams and fears across races, genders, and identities.
5. Don't be afraid to build support along the way! This toolkit contains planning materials for outreach and engagement.

**Anticipate what comes next:**

1. What fades on a national level may take more time to dissipate at a local level.
2. After fears are stoked, anticipate public records requests.
3. Educators may remain under pressure if they feel a sense of vigilance from family members around these issues, which puts stress on them during an already stressful time.


# Sample Messages Related to Equity


*Instructions: Evaluate where your audience/conversation partner is on the spectrum of emotion surrounding the issue of racial equity in education. Then, use corresponding messages in the tables below to invite them to shift to a more positive emotion.*


**Remember to start with shared values.** What are the values that you might share with people you're inviting? Review this [list of values](#) and identify the ones that feel relevant to you and the people you're in conversation with, such as *interdependence, loyalty, fairness, responsibility, and clarity.*


<b>OPPOSITION:</b>		VIOLENCE		CONTEMPT		AVERSION
<b>TRANSITION:</b>		DISCOMFORT		SADNESS		AMBIVALENCE
<b>SUPPORT:</b>		ACCEPTANCE		AFFIRMATION		ACTIVISM

## Goal Setting

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**“What we can agree on...”**  
*Goal: Move from outright violence and contempt or fear to mild aversion and discomfort.*
- 


**“Here’s what’s really happening in our classroom...”**  
*Goal: Move from aversion and discomfort towards ambivalence and acceptance.*
- 


**“Our district is advancing equity because/by...”**  
*Goal: Move from ambivalence and acceptance to affirmation and activism.*
- 

**“To really move the needle, we need more vocal supporters like you...”**  
*Goal: Move from affirmation to vocal support and activism.*

## General / Centering Youth and Community

- 

We all want to live in communities where we know we can depend on each other, no matter what we look like or where we come from.
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As [leadership role], my responsibility is to support our district and bridge divides in order to ensure a calm, coordinated, and welcoming school environment so that teaching and learning can continue as planned.
- 

When students see themselves and each other in the curriculum, they have better relationships with



their classmates, the classroom environment is calmer, and the school climate as a whole is improved.

We want to create communities where we care and are cared for by each other, no matter what we look like or where we come from.

Being at school should mean being a part of the community while working together to build on our strength and bridge divides.

## Racial Equity / Culturally Responsive Curriculum

Above all, [our/my] goal is to bridge divides and ensure that every student feels welcome and a sense of belonging at school — so they can reach their full potential.

Talking about race and different cultures isn't about blame; it's about understanding each other.

We don't teach kids that they are responsible for the past, but we do want to make sure they have a stake in the future.

Teachers who talk about culture and race can give students mirrors that reflect their identity, and windows into the world to connect with other cultures.

Instead of censoring free thought and discussion, we're going to provide a fact-based, understanding environment that includes each and every student, so that they can learn freely and develop the important life skills they need to be a part of shaping the future.

Learning about different histories, races, and cultures helps us build connections across our differences. Educators [or teachers in our district] are experts at connecting curriculum to students' experiences, perspectives, histories & cultures.

Including all peoples in our materials shows every student that everyone belongs and is welcome in our schools and communities.

Have you seen our district's [strategy/plan]? I'd love to share it with you and explain exactly how racial equity fits into that and into our curriculum in service to the larger plan.

Our district recognizes the knowledge and unique lived experiences of the students in our classrooms. We are committed to providing culturally relevant and sustaining curriculum and experiences so that students are affirmed and validated for each of their unique histories and identities.

It's important to acknowledge the long and painful history of race and education in our state. Students are ready for systems and institutions to change for the better, and that's why our district is making sure racial equity is central.

## Social Emotional Learning (SEL)

*Derived from CASEL talking points and FrameWorks Institute SEAD framing guidance.*

We are greater than any fear politicians and pundits can stir up, and we [can turn to each other/can practice turning to each other] with trust and support for a great school year ahead.

When we see value in the basics of education, it can be hard to feel supportive of what seems new. Just because “social-emotional learning” is being highlighted in the media doesn’t mean it’s new. It’s what well-prepared teachers do so their students can succeed.

When teachers really see their students, they can focus on identifying and building on a student’s existing strengths for their academic success and overall development. The label of social-emotional learning is a way of having best practices for how teachers go about this.

It makes sense that social, emotional, and academic skills are interrelated. Teachers know from experience that a child can’t focus on academic skills alone because they aren’t learning in a vacuum. SEL supports positive developmental and learning outcomes.

Young people spend a significant portion of their early life in school. They aren’t just learning the basics, they are experiencing emotions and learning social skills too. Our school staff is trained and prepared to support young people as they develop and grow.

When schools, families, and community partners work together to prioritize the social and emotional experiences young people have at school, we can make sure all students have rich opportunities to learn and practice important skills that help them collaborate, solve problems, and succeed in school, college, career and life.

The ability to focus, manage emotions, and stay engaged plays an incredibly important role in students’ ability to learn. Students who can plan and organize tasks and cope with challenges are better equipped to master content knowledge and academic skills.

When young people in our community get ready to go out into the bigger world, they are going to need basic skills, but they’ll also need social skills and the ability to handle their emotions in order to develop strong relationships and reach their full potential.

We provide a high-quality education for all students that can support the priorities and goals that matter to them and to their families, such as college and career success, civic engagement, and wellness. The way we think about the social and emotional part of learning is driven by engagement with families and tailored to the local priorities, cultures, and needs.

When your kids are in school, we want them to get the very best of what education has to offer - that goes beyond the basics of classroom instruction. We want the learning environment to also support your kids’ ability to feel engaged, motivated, and a sense of belonging. That’s what social-emotional learning is really about - making sure the social and the emotional experiences young people have while learning contribute to their healthy development.

Social-emotional learning must be embedded throughout the formal education spaces we are responsible for. It can’t be an add-on, afterthought, or alternative. That means we build social and emotional skills into the entire learning experience both in targeted and integrated ways.

## Gender and Sexuality Education

All around the state, students, families, and teachers are under a tremendous amount of stress. Let’s give teachers our trust as they do their jobs by creating care, connection, and curiosity that students need in order to learn. If you’re worried about something, you can come to talk to us about it.

Hot-button political language doesn't change the fact that parents and teachers in our community feel our students need to be set up for success with accurate, honest curriculum, books, and conversations throughout their education. That includes health education.

When we can openly discuss identity, gender, and sexual orientation, then we are able to promote instead of damage student mental health together while also preventing violence and bullying in our schools.

Let's trust students to decide who they want to talk to and why about their developing minds and identities. Our educators ensure privacy...

Our district is committed to not just acknowledging, but affirming the unique lived experiences and identities of the students in our classrooms. Students thrive when they are supported and validated.

Accurate, inclusive, and comprehensive health education helps to create a welcoming school climate that also ensures young people are able to develop and make decisions with all the information they need to thrive.

[Transparency/parental involvement/family engagement/parent choice] is crucial to our district's success. But when those words are used as a way to ban books, restrict the free flow of ideas and conversations in our children's classrooms, or discriminate against or exclude members of our community - then deeper discussions need to happen with students at the center.

## Inviting Conversations

*Invite direct conversation:* "I'd like to connect with you about your concerns directly. Would you be willing to speak with me one-on-one before you bring your concerns to other groups of people?"

*Empathize:* "I see how much you care about your child. I hope you can understand that it's my responsibility to show the same level of care for all students in our [school/district] so it's important that I can listen and hear concerns from many different people."

*Ask:* "What concerns you about [making sure every student has a strong understanding of culture and race as part of their education]?"

*Ask:* If you speak to other [parents/community members], would you be willing to share some of what we talked about so their concerns can be alleviated?

*Attribution:* Some messages derived from [Partnership for the Future of Learning](#)

## 5 talking points about equity - with formal and plain language examples

Formal	Plain Language
Our district's goal is to make sure every student has equal opportunities to succeed in school and has access to accurate, comprehensive and	When school is a place where students understand the world around them (the good parts and the hard parts) they can both celebrate

<p>relevant curriculum. We are ensuring that each and every student has access to knowledge and skills as well as opportunities to grow, learn and thrive.</p>	<p>successes and avoid mistakes.</p> <p>Students learn a lot more than just academics at school. Schools are a place where children also learn how to interact with others outside of their family and those that may be different from them. The relationships they build here are crucial towards their ability to go out into the world and succeed.</p>
<p>It's important students see themselves, their families, and their communities represented in curricula across all subject matter. When young people see themselves in the curriculum, they're more engaged, they feel a sense of belonging, and they're more able to learn.</p>	<p>Talking about race and different cultures isn't about blame; it's about understanding each other.</p> <p>Learning about different histories, races, and cultures gives students mirrors that reflect their own identities and windows into the world.</p> <p>Including all peoples in our materials shows every student that everyone belongs and is welcome in our schools and communities.</p>
<p>We trust educators to reinforce equity in the classroom, and we trust students to share and learn about what's happening in the world around them.</p>	<p>Teaching about the cultures of a wide range of students isn't something to fear - it's hope and love in action.</p> <p>Young people want to be able to talk about what's happening in the world around them, including who has power and why.</p>
<p>Being at school should mean belonging to a connected community while working together to build on our strength and bridge what has divided us in the past.</p>	<p>We all want to live in communities where we know we can depend on each other, no matter what we look like or where we come from.</p>
<p><a href="#">Research</a> shows that students who see positive representations of themselves in their curriculum have improved educational outcomes. For students of color as well as White students, culturally responsive education decreases dropout rates and suspensions, increases student participation, confidence, academic achievement and graduation rates. (Also see this <a href="#">factsheet</a>)</p>	<p>When kids see themselves and others in materials, all kids stay in school longer and more successfully reach their goals. They do better.</p>

**Sample Letter to School Community about Equity**

Subject: What does “equity” mean to [district name]?

To [our school community/school board],

In the past weeks and months, we have faced extraordinary challenges together. We’ve worked hard to build on the strengths of our district while meeting the needs of young people during a global pandemic. Oregon’s education professionals, including school board members, have pulled off heroic efforts to provide care, connection, and continuity of learning for our students.

Families and caregivers are essential partners, and our district is committed to making sure you have every opportunity to give input, participate, and learn more about the education we’re providing to your children.

In addition to the global pandemic there’s a lot happening in the cultural and political world around us. We want to recognize that there’s a lot of hot button language that can lead to tensions in our school community; one of those words is “equity.” Equity is a key part of the work our district does, so we want to make sure you know exactly what we mean when we use that word. Equity simply means *[making sure every student and every person that enters our school buildings experiences a sense of belonging and has access to high-quality education that addresses barriers to learning]*. We have phenomenal teachers and trust them to bring equity in the classroom with care for all of their students. Ultimately our hope is that students feel competent and prepared to discover and discuss the world around them.

Every student benefits when we pay attention to the experiences of students of color, students experiencing disability, tribal members, emerging multilingual students, students navigating poverty, students experiencing homelessness, foster care, and students with non-dominant gender identities and sexual orientations. Holding racial equity with special consideration is crucial in our district. Our demographics have shifted in recent years [describe]. To understand fully what racial equity means for our district, here’s how we’re ensuring that each and every student can reach their full potential. We are committed to:

- Implementing programs to enroll all students and regularly engage families, especially those who have not had access or have not been attending - no matter their race or language spoken at home;
- Strengthening high-quality instruction, leadership, and pathways to graduation and post-secondary transitions, including ensuring that the cultures of our students and families are included in the curriculum;
- Creating access to well-rounded education by centering student learning that builds on strengths, addresses cultural needs, provides active engagement, and is developmentally appropriate;
- Providing mental, social, & emotional health supports for students and staff with culturally responsive trauma-informed care and a strengths-focused multi-tiered system of support;

- Safeguarding student opportunity in recognition of impact of the pandemic on students and families; and
- Serving students in transition from one community to another or to a new school (kindergarten, 6th, & 9th grades) so they feel a sense of support and belonging in order to overcome any fear and isolation.

Our district is committed to affording every student a full academic learning experience without restriction as they continue to regain their learning stride. We are proceeding with understanding, grace, and patience, as we adjust back to in-person learning and invite you to journey with us. If questions or concerns arise, we are here and happy to meet with you.

Consider participating in school activities [link to volunteering and participation options] and events to get a better sense of what’s happening and to support your children on their learning journey.

Thank you for being a part of this community,  
[signoff]

## CRT Talking Points and Board Resolution Messaging

### 5 Messages About Critical Race Theory

1. Ask: When you say "Critical Race Theory" I'm curious what you're referring to specifically in our curriculum. Are you willing to tell me more and also hear more from me about what's really happening in our classrooms?
2. Critical Race Theory is mainly used in higher education and is not a required part of any curriculum used in our district. However, some people are using the label of “Critical Race Theory” to refer to anything related to race, or equity (see messaging about racial equity above).
3. Critical Race Theory helps people describe how racial inequity is baked into all of our social and political structures - it's about institutions and laws, not blaming individuals or examining interpersonal dynamics.
4. Indoctrination through Critical Race Theory just isn't happening. What is happening: Young people are curious and are already talking about issues related to race and other identities. We are working to equip students with the tools they need to think, talk, and engage with issues of race, racism, and inequity.
5. Share: When I was growing up, I learned stories about American history that I found out later in life were untrue or incomplete. I wish I knew sooner that.. [Example, such as the Christopher Columbus and Thanksgiving narratives]. This is important because...
6. We recognize that there are attempts to ban anti-racism as part of curriculum because of a belief that talking about race and inequities will make students less patriotic. However, when students

understand the fullness of this country’s history, the good and the painful parts, it means they have the knowledge to participate and lead the way into the future — to shape what happens next in U.S. history.

### Guidance for conversations about CRT/Culturally Responsive Curriculum

- DO Advance a positive vision of educational opportunity that centers race. ([Example Recommendation](#))
- DO lead with an aspirational appeal to shared values, not a stark negative evaluation of the status quo.
- DO explain “how it happens” before talking about “who it happens to more often”.
- DO frame the responsibility for the problem, and the benefits of solving it, as a shared concern.
- DO invoke common values that apply to all at the top of a communications, and subsequently explain how these values are derailed by racial bias and inequity.
- DO invoke the deeply embedded American values of **Ingenuity and Interdependence** with respect to solving tough problems
- DO remind people of our common belief that everyone deserves to be in an educational environment in which they can succeed and how failures in the system hurt everyone.
- DO communicate in a practical tone that emphasizes our shared fate
- DON’T focus on the triumphant individual or other mechanisms that exceptionalize
- DON’T focus on problems and disparities to the exclusion of solutions
- DON’T engage in a rhetorical debate around victims vs victors
- DON’T use edu-speak and policy jargon.

### Clarifications about Anti-CRT Messaging and Resolutions

Messaging Opposed to CRT	Clarification
<p>Overarching anti-CRT stance <a href="#">as presented in this Heritage Foundation report</a> - “Critical race theory is a grave threat to the American way of life.”</p>	<p>The fact that there is no singular “American way of life” is what makes the U.S. strong and free. To make the most of that strength of our society, we need to build a stronger understanding about the many cultures present in the U.S. and beyond. Why would we want to deny young people access to information about the world around them?</p> <p>Teaching honest, accurate history is an open door to having a society that reflects values of interdependence, freedom, and collective responsibility. Students need to learn the full picture of U.S. history, even when it doesn’t live up to the values we believe in.</p> <p>The U.S. is both founded on ideals of liberty, freedom and equality, <i>and</i> has been built on slavery, exploitation,</p>

	<p>genocide, and exclusion. If we want our future to be different, we have to deal with the past openly and honestly.</p>
<p>Critical Race Theory (CRT) is a divisive ideology that assigns moral fault to individuals solely on the basis of an individual's race and, therefore, is itself a racist ideology that inflames divisions on the basis of sex, race, ethnicity, religion, color, national origin, or other criteria.</p>	<p>The goal of unpacking how racial oppression shows up in our world and society is to eliminate it from both. To eliminate it, we must understand it. That means having honest conversations and accurate information about the past, present, and future in order to get past divides that have been so inflamed over the past year.</p> <p>If we want to have more unity in the long term, we can't avoid topics that have divided us. We need to talk about them, learn from what hasn't worked, and prepare young people to build a better future.</p>
<p>CRT assigns generational guilt and racial guilt for conduct and policies that are long in the past.</p>	<p>Most people agree that racism still exists in our society today, and many people feel like race relations are getting worse. It's just not realistic to say racism only exists in conduct and policies in the past.</p> <p>Learning about different histories, races, and cultures gives students mirrors that reflect their own identities. Students also need windows into the world to see their peers in their full humanity. Our schools need to be welcoming places for learning, not guilt and shame.</p>
<p>CRT violates the fundamental principle of equal protection under the law.</p>	<p>Talking about racism feels risky to some people, but not talking about it is much riskier. We have policies to prevent discrimination in our district because bias, discrimination, and racism are real.</p>
<p>CRT claims that racism is ordinary, the usual way society does business.</p>	<p>Yes, it's a theory that helps us understand the fact that racism is ordinary and everywhere. The more comfortable we are acknowledging that racism is real and pervasive, the more we can move past the debate as to whether racism exists and towards actual solutions and different paths that are better for everyone.</p>
<p>CRT claims that "interest convergence" or "material determinism", according to which the incentive to move away from racist policies depends primarily on the self-interest of the oppressor class, i.e. "whites."</p> <p>CRT claims that "differential racialization", according to which the</p>	<p>These concepts are all about how race and power show up in the world around us. Young people want to be able to talk about what's happening in the world around them, including who has power and why. If we're not talking about how race relates to power in our classrooms, then we're not preparing students to go out into the bigger world beyond our district, where those conversations are bound to happen.</p>



<p>"dominant society racializes different minority groups at different times, in response to different needs such as the labor market."</p>	
<p>CRT claims that "minority status ... brings with it a presumed competence to speak about race and racism," a concept often used to discredit opposing arguments on the basis of the opposing person's race.</p>	<p>No one wants to be seen as self-interested. We all want to feel listened to, heard, and understood. We want our experiences and opinions to count for something. That's why we must listen to all the different perspectives in our school community.</p>
<p>CRT claims that an individual, by virtue of his or her race or sex, is inherently racist and/or sexist, whether consciously or unconsciously.</p> <p>CRT claims that individuals are either a member of the oppressor class or the oppressed class because of race or sex.</p> <p>CRT claims that an individual is inherently morally or otherwise superior to another individual because of race or sex.</p>	<p>We want our schools to celebrate diversity among students by providing a learning environment that makes each student feel valued and seen. Teachers in our district aren't shaming students, they're opening up conversations for students to discuss their experiences and perspectives. That's what's really happening in our classrooms.</p> <p>In our schools, we teach our students to ask curious questions rather than making assumptions. We ask them to really listen and hear before responding and reacting. We expect students to work together and respect each other.</p>
<p>CRT / Culturally Responsive Education takes the focus off the U.S. and makes students less patriotic.</p>	<p>Teaching about the cultures of a wide range of students isn't something to fear - it's hope and love in action. For our curriculum to prepare students well, we need to explore different cultures at different times and across different subjects. Young people are ingenious, curious, and capable of learning about different races, cultures, and histories in the classroom.</p>
<p>Schools are indoctrinating students; students belong to parents, not schools and communities</p>	<p>A child's relationship with their family is of the highest importance, and a family's relationship with the school and teachers contributes to their child's academic success.</p> <p>It is impossible to separate politics from education when human rights have become politics. It's important for schools to express support for children who have been harmed by hatred, bias, and racism.</p> <p>It's not possible to restrict learning to textbooks and memorization of facts and figures. Schools are a place where children also learn how to interact with others outside of their family and those that may be different from</p>

	<p>them. The relationships they build here are crucial towards their ability to go out into the world and succeed.</p>
<p>CRT claims that meritocracy or traits such as, but not limited to, a hard work ethic or the scientific method are racist or sexist or were created by members of a particular race to oppress members of another race</p>	<p>It's a good thing to want people to have the same chances in life — that's what equity is all about. But factors like where we are born, how much money we have, and what race and gender we are change the opportunities that are available to us, and that's not fair. Critical Race Theory helps us ask questions about why this happens.</p> <p>In reality, people of color encounter hardships every day that white people do not. It is our collective responsibility to acknowledge, talk about, and change this reality so that every young person can reach their full potential.</p>
<p>CRT claims that the advent of slavery in the territory that is now the United States constituted the true founding of the United States, or the preservation of slavery was a material motive for independence from England</p>	<p>There's a big national debate right now about the years 1619 or 1776. A lot of people fear that if we go back to the hard parts of history, it will cause young people to be less patriotic. I'd rather our students receive historically accurate information so they can participate in what the U.S. can be, now and in the future.</p>

More on [Common Misconceptions about CRT](#)

See examples of anti-CRT board resolutions here:

- [S.2221 - END CRT Act](#)
- [Paso Robles Resolution](#)
- [Lakeland Resolution](#)

# Clarifying Talking Points about Every Student Belongs

Note: Research shows that cognitive bias means “repeated information is often perceived as more truthful than new information.” That means it’s important to **avoid mythbusting** because it further validates misinformation.

**Key Messages:**

1. Every Student Belongs (ESB) was initiated by students in Oregon in response to being confronted by nooses, confederate flags, and neo-nazi symboism in their schools. These hate symbols caused emotional and physical distress that kept them and others from accessing their education.
2. Disruption of activities and implicit or explicit threats of violence at school or the creation of unsafe school climates resulting from the display of these symbols harms every student and staff member.
3. Prohibiting these symbols in school environments benefits everyone, not just protected groups of students.
4. ESB is not a standalone rule. It doesn’t apply to all bias incidents and bullying. There are other policies addressing any number of issues that exist in schools. These policies are designed to work hand-in-hand.
5. We will not back down from prohibiting bullying, harassment, violence, and hatred in our schools. We are committed to building school environments that ensure safety and belonging.
6. ESB creates an opportunity for us to unite around the idea that every student is important and valued. Let’s talk about how we can do this through healing, understanding, compassion and conversation rather than cutting off conversation and banning books and curriculum.

**Starting Points for Responses:**

Misleading Statement	Clarification
ESB guidelines focusing on bias incidents (particularly based on race, origin, gender identity, religion or disability) do not address what schools are required to do under federal civil rights laws.	Every Student Belongs is not a standalone rule, but builds on and connects with existing <a href="#">policies</a> that address bullying, harassment, intimidation, cyberbullying, and federal civil rights law.
ESB does not apply to white, cisgender, nondisabled students who are the subject of bias incidents, and therefore is inherently biased against such students.	ESB is for more than protected groups of students — it is designed to ensure that schools are safe learning environments so that students of every race, gender, and ability will benefit from their educational experience.
ESB doesn’t solve issues related to bullying of students who go on to be isolated and/or commit	Safe, welcoming schools confront bullying and harassment, and these acts are regulated by

<p>school shootings.</p>	<p>existing rules that remain in place. <a href="#">ODE's School Safety and Prevention System</a> is a good place to find more information.</p>
<p>ESB and other efforts designed to confront discrimination and racism have no place in education because they are divisive, and cause backlash and retaliation.</p>	<p>Oregon has a responsibility to ensure that every student has access to a safe and respectful learning environment. Students have charged us to ensure that their school environments are safe and respectful — starting with prohibiting hate symbols from our schools to live up to that responsibility.</p> <p>This also requires utilizing positive, educational, and restorative measures to increase understanding, create spaces for dialogue, and promote cross-cultural and racial understanding.</p>
<p>ESB makes it more difficult to handle complaints about other symbols and speech, such as Blue Lives Matter, Black Lives Matter, PRIDE and more.</p>	<p>Our responsibility is to ensure the civil and human rights of every student by creating the conditions for safe, welcoming school environments.</p> <p>School is a great place to learn how to distinguish between symbols of love and dignity vs. hate and exclusion. ESB guidance recommends education and conversation that allows this discernment to happen.</p>

## Tips for Media Requests

- Vet Thoroughly: Before responding, always vet the person thoroughly. Don't assume they are unbiased or operating in good faith, as there have been many incidents where the reverse has been true.
- If you accept the interview, then it's time to prepare. Before any interview, think about the most important points you want to make. Your goal in any interaction with a reporter should be to convey your key points/messages.
- In an interview, you are not talking to the reporter: you're talking to the audience that media outlet reaches. To reach that audience, you must stick to your messages. Think through your three key talking points and find creative ways to repeat them. Don't feel the need to provide a direct answer to every question a reporter asks. What do you want them/your audience to know? If you feel like you're repeating yourself...you're doing it right!
- Start with values and commitment to making sure all students receive an equitable, high quality

education.

- A personal story can help make your messaging memorable, have lasting impact, and demonstrate real-world experience and authority on an issue. Weave yours into your messaging.
- Don't get too caught up in details and past mistakes. Emphasize solutions and future plans. Respond in a way that is supportive to educators and staff, particularly staff of color. Media that sensationalize equity and stir up fear will do so no matter what you say. It's important to stay calm and on message.
- Know what NOT to say. Don't go "off the record" - any part of a conversation, even before or after an interview, can be on the record.
  - Note that we have examples of recorded district activities being brought to the news, or even people recording phone calls. On this topic, you may end up on the record, even outside of an interview setting, without knowing it - in any number of professional situations.
  - Reporters are trained to listen and even take lengthy pauses between questions, so it's important to stop talking when you have delivered your message.
  - Never say "no comment." - It doesn't advance your messages and can make you look deceptive/like you're hiding something.
  - If you don't know the answer to a question, it's okay to say, "Let me get back to you on that."
- Avoid traps: Don't adopt your frames you are not in agreement with. Try not to repeat back language from the reporter's question, especially when answering in the negative (ie. "No, accepting this funding doesn't signal our approval of..")
- Seek support as needed, such as further media training, digital privacy support, PR support, and messaging guidance as needed.
- Prepare the final thing you'd like to say. Even if you repeat yourself, the audience will remember the last thing you said better than something in the middle of a segment.

## Bridging Techniques

If a question takes you off your chosen message, bridge back to it with phrases like:

1. Let me tell you what the real issue is...
2. I don't know about that, but what I can say is...
3. That may be up for debate right now, but what isn't up for debate is...
4. I can tell you from my own experience...
5. I can't speak to that, but I can tell you that...
6. I've been [teaching/working in education] for X years and what I've seen is...
7. That's not quite right. The fact of the matter is...
8. That's not what the pushback around Critical Race Theory is truly about. It's about...
9. Our only agenda is improving education and equity for each and every student.
10. It's important to understand that at the heart of the issue is...

## Preparing Your Top 3 Messages for Media

- Who am I talking to (Who is my real audience)?
- What do I want to say (What are my top three messages)? A good message is a short, compelling roadmap that does three things:
  - Defines the problem you're trying to solve
  - Outlines your broad vision for a solution
  - Offers specific actions your audiences can take to solve the problem
- What's the toughest question I might be asked? How do I want to respond?

## School District Communications & Engagement Planning Worksheet

*Modify this worksheet to fit your needs and community; keep or delete prompts and example text based on what's most helpful to you; and fill out whatever you can as a starting point for a more detailed plan of action.*

### Pre-Step 1: Planning for and Preventing Crisis

It's a good idea to meet with your core staff at least annually to prepare for potential crises. Discuss and write down what you envision might be possible, what you might do to prevent the issue from happening (such as working on school climate and healing activities within your school community), how you'll respond if situations occur, what communication will be, who will lead, and how you might move through short-, mid-, and long-term responses. This planning doesn't ensure that crises won't occur, and it's typically not any one person's fault that causes a major crisis, but it's beneficial to feel prepared.

### Pre-Step 2: Assess Starting Conditions

Use these starting condition questions, modified from the [ODE Decision Tree tool](#).

1. **What is your interior condition?** What is your team's condition? What is the condition of those who are involved? Are you calm and steady, full of turmoil, reacting?
2. **What kind of a situation is this?** Examples: urgent, complex, urgent and complex, foundational, situational, short-term/long-term, etc.
3. **What is your timeline for when you need to act or respond?** What other parameters will support your process? What does harm reduction look like in this state of urgency?

### Pre-Step 3: Investigate

Before planning and taking any action, follow these steps and others that make sense depending on the situation.

1. **Gather and verify information:** Determine the accuracy, completeness, and magnitude of the information you have received. What needs further investigation before proceeding? Was information obtained from more than one person’s perspective?
2. **Notify people who need to know what’s happening** prior to your public response and before wider engagement begins. Begin with legal counsel and others for guidance and support. Do this in a way that can ensure privacy, such as by phone or in person if the situation is very delicate.
3. **Prepare a document** with information, details, questions, and process undertaken in case you need a clear report and to avoid confusion on your team.

**Step 1. Assess the Situation Before Taking Action**

Consideration	What do you know so far?
<i>What did your thorough investigation reveal and what important details emerged? What needs more investigation? Do you have all possible information before taking action?</i>	
<i>What do you know about your school community’s likely response to this situation? What is the likelihood of escalation?</i>	
<i>What is at stake or at risk depending on the approach you take and decisions you make?</i>	
<i>How will people be impacted? Who is likely to be affected most based on how your school district reacts to this issue?</i>	Try to break this out for different groups, such as students who are closest to the issue, community relationships, etc.
<i>Who else do you need to talk to to get all possible information and perspectives relevant to the unfolding situation?</i>	
<i>What is there that can be gained or strengthened depending on the action you take?</i>	
<i>What is in your control?</i>	
<i>What is outside of your control?</i>	

**Step 2: List 3 Desired Results**

This step helps you work backwards from desired results towards shaping your plan and approach.

Goals	
1	Ex. What will happen with those most affected or at risk?
2	Ex. What will happen for the school community?
3	Ex. What would success look, sound, and feel like?

### Step 3: Plan Engagement

To reach your goals, you'll likely need to engage specific people and groups as part of planning, decision making, and even de-escalation. Who are they, what kind of relationship do you have with them, and what will you ask them to do? Add rows as needed

Group or person	Relationship status	Request
	Ex. strong, tentative, needs building	

### Step 4: Decide on Approach

Having analyzed risks, strengths, relationships, and what's in your control, what steps can you and your team take to reach the desired results? This can be used to create a more robust work plan.

What needs to happen?	Who is responsible?	By when?
<i>Ex. How will coordination and decision making happen? (Try out Oregon's <a href="#">Decision Making Tool</a>)</i>		
<i>Ex. Who do you need to engage in conversation?</i>		
<i>Ex. What resources or supports need to be in place?</i>		
<i>Add more rows as needed</i>		

### Step 5: Create Communication Strategy

Who needs what form of communication? What do they need to hear? What action do you want them to take (or avoid)?

Audience	Communication Method	Call to Action



Parents, families & caregivers		
School board		
Staff		
Students		
Others?		

### Step 6: Refine Key Messages

For each audience, what do you want them to know? This could be a place to write down stories and examples to ground the message as well.

Audience	Key Message
Parents, families & caregivers	
School board	
Staff	
Students	
Others?	

**Thoughts and reflections:**

**Next steps:**



This worksheet has been modified using a document created by the [Partnership for the Future of Learning](#) that is licensed under their [Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 4.0 International License](#).

## Additional Resources

*The resources below are for your interest and knowledge about current cultural, academic, and educational dialog from multiple perspectives, and unless they were created by ODE or COSA, they serve as references rather than recommendations. Comment on this doc if you have additional resources to share.*

[ODE Mental Health Toolkit](#)

[ODE Community Engagement Toolkit](#)

[ODE Decision Making Tool](#)

[Equity in a Divided Community](#) (WSSDA WASA)

[EJ-ROC's Organizing Toolbox: Tips for Building a Strong Parent Base](#) (NYU Metro Center)

[Truth in Our Classrooms Bridges Divides](#) (Partnership for the Future of Learning)

[Strategy against Critical Race Theory](#) (Citizens for Renewing America)

[Racial Justice in Education: Key Terms and Definitions](#)

[Talking About Racial Equity in Education](#)

[Making the Case for Equitable and Just Public Education](#)

We Make the Future [Messaging Guide](#)