

## STATEMENT IN OPPOSITION TO PROPOSED BAN ON TEACHING CRITICAL RACE THEORY IN PENNSYLVANIA PUBLIC SCHOOLS

As civil rights, youth, and education advocacy organizations across Pennsylvania, we write in strong opposition to [HB 1532](#) and all similar efforts that perpetuate racism and sexism. Our schools bear a responsibility to teach our children accurate history and dismantle biases. The bill prohibits our teachers from accurately teaching history, improperly bans anti-bias training, and would make culturally relevant teaching nearly impossible. We strongly oppose efforts by several Pennsylvania state lawmakers to prohibit the teaching, funding, or dissemination of so-called “divisive” concepts commonly known as “critical race theory” or CRT. The bill completely mischaracterizes CRT. The bill, entitled *Teaching Racial and Universal Equality (TRUE) Act*, would strictly prohibit all Pennsylvania school districts, public postsecondary institutions, and state or local government entities from teaching CRT. Shockingly, the co-sponsorship memo even references Dr. Martin Luther King as supporting their position: “Critical race theory further divides us by making the immutable traits of race and gender a prime factor in how we view others - exactly the opposite of Dr. King's dream.” Proponents of the ban also falsely allege that CRT teachings “interfere with our constitutional duty to support and maintain a thorough and efficient system of public education to serve the needs of the Commonwealth.”

Nothing could be further from the truth. “Critical race theory” is a highly regarded academic concept and form of analysis developed in the 1970s and '80s by legal scholars including [Derrick Bell and Kimberlé Crenshaw](#). CRT suggests that our nation’s history of race and racism is embedded in law and public policy and continues to play a role in shaping outcomes for Black Americans and other people of color; therefore, it must be taken into account when these issues are discussed.

We condemn legislative attempts to prohibit students from learning about racism and the impact of racial, sex, and gender inequality on policies and structures across our nation. In our nation, our state, our communities, and our schools, we must deepen our learning about racism and unlearn white supremacy. Critical race theory is an important part of developing culturally responsive curricula that accurately describe our history, including how centuries of racism have informed our laws, economic and political policies, and structures. This work is long overdue and must start in our schools. At a bare minimum, racial justice requires that we understand the history of racism and the normalization of white supremacy. These efforts are essential to education's role as "the very foundation of good citizenship." *Brown v. Board of Education*, 347 U.S. 483 (1954).

Learning about critical race theory is also an important strategy to ensuring and cultivating a safe and welcoming school environment for all students. It is well documented that school-based racist incidents have escalated in recent years, as reflected in U.S. Department of Justice data.<sup>1</sup> Local reporting in Pennsylvania has disclosed alarming incidents of racial bullying that have harmed children of color in our schools.<sup>2</sup> The Pennsylvania Human Relations Commission has advised that educating children about racism is essential to addressing such

---

<sup>1</sup> *Hate in Schools, An In Depth Look*, Education Week <https://www.edweek.org/ew/projects/hate-in-schools.html>. In addition, the Southern Poverty Law Center identified 3,265 hate incidents in the fall of 2018 alone, with more than two-thirds of the 2,776 responding educators reporting having witnessed a hate or bias incident in their schools during that first quarter of that school year. *Hate At School 2019*, Southern Poverty Law Center, available at [https://www.splcenter.org/sites/default/files/tt\\_2019\\_hate\\_at\\_school\\_report\\_final\\_0.pdf](https://www.splcenter.org/sites/default/files/tt_2019_hate_at_school_report_final_0.pdf). Based on a review of 472 verified accounts, most incidents that took place in schools between January 2015 and December 2017 targeted Black and Latinx students, as well as students who are Jewish or Muslim.

<sup>2</sup> Diversity and Inclusion in the School District of Haverford Township, 2018, available at <https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5a858efeace8645cabb72cde/t/5adc5d012b6a2829b4c3e7db/1524391803879/H-CAN-Diversity-Inclusion-Report-SDHT-4-19-18.pdf>.

escalating trends: “One of the first steps to take to help advocate for racial justice is to become educated about racism, what it is, where it comes from, and how to combat it.”<sup>3</sup>

Moreover, racial disproportionality in school exclusions and discipline practices continues to be a persistent problem in our schools. For example, Black students have the greatest likelihood of receiving out-of-school suspensions and are arrested at four times the rate of White students. Black girls are five times more likely to be arrested in schools than White girls. In addition, students with disabilities, who make up 16.9% of PA public school students, receive out of school suspensions at twice the rate of other students, and are arrested at 2.5 times the rate of all students.<sup>4</sup> The disparate impact of such exclusionary practices on students of color, students with disabilities, and youth who identify as LGBTQ was the subject of a recent report by the Pennsylvania Advisory Committee to the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, which underscores the need for educators, students, and school staff to learn more about racism, sexism, bias, and its impact.<sup>5</sup>

We support and stand with the many school districts across Pennsylvania and nationally which have vowed to confront and [teach about the role of systemic racial discrimination](#) in our laws, policies, and structures, including in our public schools. Many are doing so in response to protests across the world challenging the brutal killings of innocent Black persons. Teaching about historical and current racism and providing a more inclusive curriculum are not only

---

<sup>3</sup> PHRC, *Advocating for Social Change Eradicating Racism*, available at <https://www.phrc.pa.gov/Documents/PHRC%20Advocating%20for%20Social%20Change.pdf>.

<sup>4</sup> U.S. Dep’t of Educ., *Civil Rights Data Collection (CRDC) for 2013 and 2015*. <https://ocrdata.ed.gov/>.

<sup>5</sup> *Disparate and Punitive Impact of Exclusionary Practices on Students of Color, Students with Disabilities and LGBTQ Students in Pennsylvania Public Schools: A Report of the Pennsylvania Advisory Committee to the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights* (April 2021), available at <https://www.usccr.gov/files/2021/04-09-Pennsylvania-Public-Schools.pdf>.

necessary reforms to achieve racial justice but are critical to ensuring that all students receive a quality education.

We will continue to oppose national, statewide, and local assaults on anti-racism and anti-sexism education efforts. We encourage you to learn more about CRT and to join us in this fight. Thus far, four state legislatures (Idaho, Iowa, Oklahoma, and Tennessee) have passed bills to censor what students are taught about racism, sexism, bias, and discrimination. We cannot add Pennsylvania to this list. We will continue to stand with students and against racism. We will continue to support efforts to ensure that students and teachers are informed about racism, sexism, and gender justice that include evidence-based trainings on these issues and on how to create supportive, inclusive environments free of bias. We will continue to support schools to nurture and challenge our next generation of civic participants to understand, combat, and dismantle racism and engage in the critical work of unlearning white supremacy. **We oppose HB 1532.**

Signed,

A+ Schools  
ACLAMO Family Centers  
ADL – Philadelphia  
Arcadia University  
Arts Education Collaborative  
Asian Americans United  
Bend the Arc: Jewish Action Pittsburgh  
Big Brothers Big Sisters Independence Region  
Black on Black Education  
Black Women for a Better Education  
Brightbeam Network  
Center for Black Educator Development  
Centro de Cultura, Arte, Trabajo y Educacion (CCATE)  
Children’s Literacy Initiative  
Community College of Philadelphia  
Department of Educational Studies, Swarthmore College

Diversity in Leadership Institute  
Education Law Center  
Education Voters  
HIAS Pennsylvania  
Juntos  
Juvenile Law Center  
Latino Community Center  
Local Task Force 3  
Make the Road PA  
Natural Inclination LLC  
One Pennsylvania  
Pennsylvania Budget and Policy Center  
Pennsylvania Education Scholars  
Pennsylvania Immigration and Citizenship Coalition  
Pennsylvania Youth Congress  
Philadelphia Student Union  
Philly Children's Movement  
Public Citizens for Children and Youth  
Public Interest Law Center  
Remake Learning  
Rustin Urban Community Change Axis at West Chester University  
Teach for America – Greater Philadelphia  
Teach Plus Pennsylvania  
The Equity Leadership Group  
The Philadelphia School  
The Pittsburgh Project  
Trying Together  
University Community Collaborative  
VietLead  
Women's Law Project  
Youth United for Change