

OVERVIEW

As the debate about what can be taught in schools grows louder, education advocates of all stripes must come together – as a coordinated and broad tent – in order to protect the inclusive, honest, and culturally responsive education our kids deserve.

New national research has provided valuable insights into how anti-equity messaging is winning right now, but more strategic, intentional messaging can reverse that trend. The research tells us that Americans agree on more than we might assume: that children should feel valued in classrooms, that an education should prepare students for a bright future, and that schools should celebrate diversity.



**Building
Equitable
Learning
Environments**
Network

As we continue to advocate for an education that serves all students, here are some key things to keep in mind:

- This assault isn't *really* about critical race theory → don't get sucked into a debate about what "CRT" is or isn't.
- We need to increase the volume on our side → together teachers, parents, and advocates need to speak up about the importance of a culturally-relevant education.
- We're changing the *words*, not the *work* → Research shows that while people overwhelmingly support the concepts behind an equitable education, they don't necessarily understand what "equity" means, and in some cases have come to have a negative interpretation. The conversation around education is constantly changing, and in order for this work to continue we must use language that will be easily understood and accepted.

We understand that advocates for equity are navigating different circumstances and contexts – some of which are very polarized or politicized – in order to move this work forward.

The following guidance and talking points are intended to give advocates, educators, and family and caregivers the tools needed to have open conversations about the importance of equitable learning environments in this moment.

MESSAGING GUIDANCE

FIGHT ON THE RIGHT FRONTS:

Best Practices

Polling found that while voters strongly support culturally responsive education, anti-equity messaging was winning and causing perceived cultural misalignment; those who have heard "a lot" about laws banning the teaching of "CRT" and anti-racism are the strongest supporters of laws to censor what schools teach.

<i>Instead of focusing our communications on the threat posed by right-wing politicians and activists...</i>	Find ways to inoculate against concerns that left-wing teachers and officials are pushing their political agenda onto students.
<i>Instead of allowing the other side to own patriotism and</i>	Emphasize teaching that shows the progress the United States has made throughout its history and

<i>pride in their country...</i>	the work that's still left to do.
<i>Instead of focusing on teachers as spokespeople and proof points of harm...</i>	Lift up the voices of parents and highlight what children stand to gain.
<i>Instead of feeding into cynicism by focusing only on problems...</i>	Lead with shared values and highlight successes to demonstrate what's possible.
<i>Instead of assuming that others have the same definition of education jargon (such as equity, SEL, and others)...</i>	Use plain language.
<i>Instead of relying only on pleas to morality or justice...</i>	Lift up skills like empathy, curiosity, and preparation for success beyond high school.
<i>Instead of getting trapped in a debate about racism and exclusion...</i>	Highlight the importance of students feeling valued, accepted, and celebrated for who they are.

LANGUAGE NUANCES:

	<u>More effective</u>	<u>Less effective</u>
Talk about true history	These laws prevent students from getting the TRUE history of our country – the good and the bad.	These laws prevent students from getting the FULL history of our country – the good and the bad.
Deploy credible examples that are universally lauded by most parents, including POC	These laws are being used to stop children from learning about historical figures like Ruby Bridges and Martin Luther King, Jr. These laws are being used to ban books by Pulitzer Prize-winning authors like Toni Morrison.	These laws can force teachers to show support for “both sides” of events like the Holocaust. These laws censor classroom discussions about current events, like the murder of George Floyd or family separation at the U.S.-Mexico border.
Talk about what students need to learn , not what they need to see	Helping students understand the contributions and struggles of different groups of people and communities.	Ensuring that students see people who look like them or share their identity reflected in the curriculum.

Talk about diversity in broad terms	Updating instructional materials to feature a broad range of diverse people, places and perspectives	"...especially from groups that have been discriminated against in the past in the curriculum."
Keep language straightforward – avoid jargon	Creating classrooms where students feel accepted and valued regardless of race, gender identity, religion, or anything else.	Creating more of a sense of belonging at school for students of color.

TALKING POINTS

GENERAL TALKING POINTS:

Discussing Equity

Every child comes to the classroom with different backgrounds and experiences, so every school should be able to support students based on their individual needs. Only when we provide students the right resources and support can they reach their full potential.

Painting an Inclusive Picture

Every child, no matter their circumstances or geographic location, deserves a quality education.

The Value of an Education

Every child deserves a quality education that not only teaches them basic skills like reading, writing, and math, but equips them with the skills they need to succeed beyond school, empathize with others, be active citizens and community members, and realize their full potential.

The Value of Centering Student Experience

Students are more engaged as learners and leaders when their school experience is shaped by their interests, needs and perspectives. Every aspect of school, from design, funding and decision-making should center how students learn and experience school.

Advancing Equity in Our Schools

In order to be prepared for the world beyond the classroom, students must learn the true history of our country – the good and the bad. America has made a lot of progress when it comes to treating people fairly, but restricting education to prevent students from learning about figures like Martin Luther King Jr., or from reading Pulitzer Prize winning authors like Toni Morrison, benefits no one, least of all our students.

WHEN ADVOCATING FOR CULTURALLY RELEVANT EDUCATION:

Align with parents

- *"Parents and schools should work side-by-side to give students the tools, skills, and resources they need to..."*

Talk about skills

- *"...prepare students to be good citizens, good members of their community, and good leaders."*
- *"...learn how those different from themselves feel, how to better understand inequality in society today, and develop skills to address these problems."*

Don't cede patriotism

By learning the true history of our nation...

- "...kids can see how far we've come and the work we still have to do."
- "...kids can be proud of the progress we've made and can help to build a more perfect union."

Invoke specific Culturally Relevant Education priorities

That means:

- "Help students understand the contributions and struggles of different groups of people and communities."
- "Update instructional materials to feature a broad range of diverse peoples, places, and perspectives."
- "Train teachers and administrators to ensure they encourage all students to reach their full potential, regardless of race or background."

IF ENGAGING IN A DIRECT DEBATE:

Invoke the importance of free speech

Reinforce the universal values that people of all political persuasions are able to get behind by highlighting that:

- "Our country's strength comes from the free flow of ideas and speech."

If time allows, hammer home the point by mentioning that:

- "These laws force teachers to whitewash history and focus only on the country's proud moments."

Provide specifics on what these laws "ban" – and link the harm to kids

Getting specific makes your position more tangible, and centering students makes it more immediately relevant to whoever you're speaking to. This may be the most important talking point to get out there when time is short:

- "Our students need a true understanding of US history – good and bad."
- "These laws are being used to ban books and lessons about historical figures like Ruby Bridges and Martin Luther King, Jr."
- "These laws make it illegal for teachers and students to discuss racism and inequality, which prevents students from learning about important events like the Tulsa Massacre of Black Wall Street."

When possible, pivot to a positive vision for education

This simple message is shown to be positively received across the political spectrum:

- "We need to teach children the skills to recognize racism, interact with people who are different from them, and lead a diverse country and world."

ADDRESSING TOUGH QUESTIONS

When you're having conversations about education, you may encounter tough or antagonistic questions. If you're at a loss, try using the ATMS below to refocus the conversation on what's really important: our students.

A – Address

OPTIONAL: You can answer questions in a single word or phrase, such as "Yes," "No," "Maybe," "Perhaps," "That's unclear," "Absolutely," or "Absolutely not."

T – Transition

Transition or bridge from their question back to your message or the point you want to get across. Example of transitions include:

- + "That may be the case, but..."
- + "That's a good point, but the main consideration is..."
- + "We all agree with that, but what's at issue is..."
- + "That's not my area of expertise, but I can tell you..."

M – Message

State your message and buttress it with any supporting statistics, data points or anecdotes.

S – Sell

Sell your message by inserting a closing call to action.