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CRT Response Packet

Letter Templates for Teachers, Principals,

& District Leaders

Provided by participants of Solidarity 4 Ed Leaders

September 2021

**Response Letters for Schools Facing Public Outcry about**

**Critical Race Theory**

Teachers and school leaders may have found themselves wondering how to respond to ill-informed accusations that their schools are teaching critical race theory (CRT). This packet of draft letters offers those educators a set of templates they might use to keep the lines of communication open, while responding substantively to the false claims and fears that have gone viral.

The packet contains several versions of the same basic letter, all of which can be easily modified to fit a particular writer’s needs:

* Classroom version for teachers.
* School version for principals.
* District version for superintendents and school boards.
* Talking points for an author to use in composing their own letter.

This packet was created by educational leaders—teacher leaders, principals, community activists, and professors of educational leadership—from across the country. We meet in a virtual community of practice called **Solidarity 4 Ed Leaders** (S4EL) on Thursdays 8:00-9:00p Eastern time on Zoom.

S4EL comes together to provide mutual aid and support for those who recognize that the pandemic and the movement for racial justice mean that returning to the pre-2020 status quo is not a viable option. S4EL is a workshop, not a webinar, at which concerned and committed educators give help and get help to meet this vital moment. Anyone interested in learning more can visit <http://solidarity4edleaders.com>, where they will find a crowd-sourced list of resources, a schedule of upcoming topics, and a portal to register for the weekly sessions.

For more information or feedback, contact Dr. Josh Bornstein at [bornsteinj@fdu.edu](mailto:bornsteinj@fdu.edu) .

**Classroom Letter on Critical Race Theory**

The following draft may help you compose a letter from the teacher to the families of a class. Please feel free to modify, add, or delete as you see fit.

Dear Families,

As I prepare for the start of the new school year, I feel it is urgent to respond to the local (national) public statements to ban the teaching of critical race theory in classrooms.  Education is a cornerstone of democracy, and this conversation is a great example of the messiness and promise of democracy. We should discuss these matters, and we should model for our children that we can do so with honor, integrity, and the ability to disagree agreeably. In this letter, I would like to lay out what critical race theory is and is not, and especially how that distinction impacts education in our school.

To be clear, critical race theory (CRT) is studied by master’s and doctoral students who want to understand why systemic racialized inequities persist in our society.  We do not teach it at a K-12 level because it is not appropriate for students that age. However, this year in X Grade we do learn about our community/state/nation. When inequity is part of that story, we may very well study and discuss it.

However, let me also be clear that CRT is not about blaming individuals and making them feel guilty. In our classroom, when we talk about topics such as inequity, our focus will always be on what we can do to make our school, community, state, and country “a more perfect union,” as the Preamble to the U.S. Constitution encourages us to do. Yes, we will need to have an accurate picture of where we’ve been in order to plan where we want to go. But the way to get there is not to by putting each other down.

Furthermore, we do our best to teach here in a way that provides every student “mirrors and windows” about their culture(s) For mirrors, we want every student to see their own heritage reflected in our books, materials, lesson topics, (even in word problems!). For windows, we want every student also to be able to recognize the common humanity among the many kinds of people who make up our community and nation. As a teacher, I know that it’s my job to make it very clear to students that they will learn best by using both mirrors and windows.

For example, one of our school's core values is that each student is uniquely and wonderfully made. Our school strives to make sure every student feels seen and heard and like they can be authentic in school. In order to make sure students feel valued we ask questions like: “Do you feel respected and valued as part of our school community? Do you feel like you can be authentic at school?” We use the answers to those questions to help make informed decisions and determine if any students are being left out of the school community.

Another of our most important goals at this school is to guide our students to become citizens in a democracy. Democracy can be muddled and sometimes argumentative, with the goal of finding solutions that work for the majority and respect the rights and dignity of all. We can disagree agreeably. If we’ve lately seen adults around us who cannot do so, then frankly it’s all the more important that we coach our students to do better.

You are part of that intricate discussion, too. Please don’t hesitate to reach out to me with the questions and concerns that you may have. I promise to listen, to respond respectfully and honestly, to agree where I can, and to disagree agreeably where I cannot. I trust that you will too, because we know that we are both important role models in your children’s lives.

I am looking forward to this year with your children and with you. I have recently been thinking of what Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. said about education: “The function of education is to teach one to think intensively and to think critically.  Intelligence plus character – that is the goal of true education.”  Let’s reach for that together.

Best,

[TEACHER’S NAME]

**School Letter on Critical Race Theory**

The following draft may help you compose a letter from the principal to the families of your school. Please feel free to modify, add, or delete as you see fit.

Dear Families,

As we prepare for the start of the new school year, I feel it is urgent to respond to the local (national) public statements to ban the teaching of critical race theory in classrooms.  Education is a cornerstone of democracy, and this conversation is a great example of the messiness and promise of democracy. We should discuss these matters, and we should model for our children that we can do so with honor, integrity, and the ability to disagree agreeably. In this letter, I would like to lay out what critical race theory is and is not, and especially how that distinction impacts education at [SCHOOL NAME].

To be clear, critical race theory (CRT) is studied by master’s and doctoral students who want to understand why systemic racialized inequities persist in our society.  We do not teach it at a K-12 level because it is not appropriate for students that age. However, at [SCHOOL NAME] we do learn about our community/state/nation. When inequity is part of that story, we may very well study and discuss it.

However, let me also be clear that CRT is not about blaming individuals and making them feel guilty. In our school, when we talk about topics such as inequity, our focus will always be on what we can do to make our school, community, state, and country “a more perfect union,” as the Preamble to the U.S. Constitution encourages us to do. Yes, we will need to have an accurate picture of where we’ve been in order to plan where we want to go. But the way to get there is not to by putting each other down.

Furthermore, we do our best to teach here in a way that provides every student “mirrors and windows” about their culture(s) For mirrors, we want every student to see their own heritage reflected in our books, materials, lesson topics, (even in word problems!). For windows, we want every student also to be able to recognize the common humanity among the many kinds of people who make up our community and nation. As a principal, I know that it’s my job to make it very clear to students and teachers that the best teaching and learning by use both mirrors and windows.

For example, one of our school's core values is that each student is uniquely and wonderfully made. Our school strives to make sure every student feels seen and heard and like they can be authentic in school. In order to make sure students feel valued we ask questions like: “Do you feel respected and valued as part of our school community? Do you feel like you can be authentic at school?” We use the answers to those questions to help make informed decisions and determine if any students are being left out of the school community.

Another of our most important goals at [SCHOOL NAME] is to guide our students to become citizens in a democracy. Democracy can be muddled and sometimes argumentative, with the goal of finding solutions that work for the majority and respect the rights and dignity of all. We can disagree agreeably. If we’ve lately seen adults around us who cannot do so, then frankly it’s all the more important that we coach our students to do better.

You are part of that intricate discussion, too. Please don’t hesitate to reach out to me with the questions and concerns that you may have. I promise to listen, to respond respectfully and honestly, to agree where I can, and to disagree agreeably where I cannot. I trust that you will too, because we know that we are both important role models in your children’s lives.

I am looking forward to this year with your children and with you. I have recently been thinking of what Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. said about education: “The function of education is to teach one to think intensively and to think critically.  Intelligence plus character – that is the goal of true education.”  Let’s reach for that together.

Best,

[PRINCIPAL’s NAME]

**District Letter on Critical Race Theory**

The following draft may help you compose a letter from district leadership to the entire community. Please feel free to modify, add, or delete as you see fit.

Dear Families,

As we prepare for the start of the new school year, we feel it is urgent to respond to the local (national) public statements to ban the teaching of critical race theory in classrooms.  Education is a cornerstone of democracy, and this conversation is a great example of the messiness and promise of democracy. We should discuss these matters, and we should model for our children that we can do so with honor, integrity, and the ability to disagree agreeably. In this letter, we would like to lay out what critical race theory is and is not, and especially how that distinction impacts education in [DISTRICT NAME] schools.

To be clear, critical race theory (CRT) is studied by master’s and doctoral students who want to understand why systemic racialized inequities persist in our society.  We do not teach it at a K-12 level because it is not appropriate for students that age. However, in [DISTRICT NAME] we do learn about our community/state/nation. When inequity is part of that story, we may very well study and discuss it.

However, let us also be clear that CRT is not about blaming individuals and making them feel guilty. In our district, when we talk about topics such as inequity, our focus will always be on what we can do to make our school, community, state, and country “a more perfect union,” as the Preamble to the U.S. Constitution encourages us to do. Yes, we will need to have an accurate picture of where we’ve been in order to plan where we want to go. But the way to get there is not to by putting each other down.

Furthermore, we do our best to teach here in a way that provides every student “mirrors and windows” about their culture(s) For mirrors, we want every student to see their own heritage reflected in our books, materials, lesson topics, (even in word problems!). For windows, we want every student also to be able to recognize the common humanity among the many kinds of people who make up our community and nation. As district leaders, we know that it is our job to make it very clear to students and teachers that the best teaching and learning by use both mirrors and windows.

For example, one of our district’s core values is that each student is uniquely and wonderfully made. Our schools strive to make sure every student feels seen and heard and like they can be authentic at school. In order to make sure students feel valued we ask questions like: “Do you feel respected and valued as part of our school community? Do you feel like you can be authentic at school?” We use the answers to those questions to help make informed decisions and determine if any students are being left out of the school community.

Another of our most important goals at [DISTRICT NAME] schools is to guide our students to become citizens in a democracy. Democracy can be muddled and sometimes argumentative, with the goal of finding solutions that work for the majority and respect the rights and dignity of all. We can disagree agreeably. If we’ve lately seen adults around us who cannot do so, then frankly it’s all the more important that we coach our students to do better.

You are part of that intricate discussion, too. Please don’t hesitate to reach out to us with the questions and concerns that you may have. We promise to listen, to respond respectfully and honestly, to agree where we can, and to disagree agreeably where we cannot. We trust that you will too, because we know that we are both important role models in your children’s lives.

We are looking forward to this year with your children and with you. We have recently been thinking of what Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. said about education: “The function of education is to teach one to think intensively and to think critically.  Intelligence plus character – that is the goal of true education.”  Let’s reach for that together.

Best,

[SUPERINTENDENT’S NAME]

[SCHOOL BOARD MEMBERS]

**Bullet Points on Critical Race Theory**

The following bullet points may help you compose your own letter. They form the backbone of the three drafts above. Please feel free to modify, add, or delete as you see fit.

* The controversy around CRT is normal in a democracy, where we can debate and disagree agreeably.
* CRT is theory for master’s and doctoral students.
* CRT explores the systemic inequities that persist in communities, states, and the nation.
* Key terms “systemic racism” explained in connection to CRT.
  + **Race is a social construct**, meaning that society constructs false boundaries and meanings for racial identities that are not rooted in biological foundations.
  + **Racial superiority** is deeply embedded in social systems and institutions.
  + **Racism is pervasive** in society; it is not isolated to a few “bad apples.”
* CRT is not about assigning blaming or shaming individuals.
* Our curriculum this year may explore issues of inequity.
* We try to understand our past so that we can build toward a better future.
* Our curriculum offers “mirrors and windows” on the many cultures of our community, state, and nation.
  + Mirrors are opportunities for students to see their own heritage in school topics and materials.
  + Windows are opportunities for students to see the common humanity among all of us.
* Our mission is to develop students as citizens in a democracy.