

MESSAGING GUIDANCE

Honesty in Education

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As some segments of our country publicly acknowledge and increasingly reckon with the ways our laws, practices, and institutions harm Black, Indigenous, and other people of color, the right has resorted to its usual dog whistle strategy of distraction and division. In this most recent round, they have latched onto the phrase “critical race theory” as a catch-all for their anxieties about losing power and dominance. Like with “political correctness” in the ‘90s and “cancel culture” today, they have made school and college campuses a primary battleground, stoking fears about how and what we teach our kids so they can undermine trust in and funding for schools and teachers.

KEY DIRECTIVES:

1. Seize the moral high ground and engage on our terms. With attention on education, let’s talk about the teaching and curricula we support and desire.
 2. Ascribe motivations to the opposition. Instead of unwittingly repeating the opposition in order to dispel their claims (e.g. “we are not teaching grade schoolers about XYZ”), talk about *why* they’re attacking curricula and teachers.
 3. Bring this back - always - to what we want as opposed to leaving us on defense against their attacks. Don’t volunteer the term “critical race theory,” an academic concept the right has co-opted as an all-purpose dog whistle, but when asked directly about it, define critical race theory on our terms as the honest, up-to-date education students deserve.
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SAMPLE NARRATIVES:

Sample Narrative 1: For K-12 Educators, Advocates and Allies

No matter our color, background or zip code, we want our kids to have an education that imparts honesty about who we are, integrity in how we treat others, and courage to do what's right. But the same lawmakers who have denied our classrooms resources and demanded sacrifices of our teachers are now stoking fears about our schools, trying to dictate what teachers say and block kids from learning our shared stories of confronting injustice to build a more perfect union. They push for outdated and inaccurate lessons, redlining the realities of our history in order to justify the harms of our present. What a good teacher knows is we can't just avoid or lie our way through our challenges; we must find age-appropriate ways to tell hard truths about our country's past and present in order to prepare our kids to create a better future. Joining together, we can demand that our schools have the resources to meet every child's needs with well-trained and supported teachers and a curriculum that helps them reckon with and reshape our nation.

Sample Narrative 2: For Parents

Whether we're Black or white, Latino or Asian, Native or newcomer, we want our kids to have an education that encourages them to dig deeper into who we are, where we came from and what we're capable of being. But the same lawmakers who have blocked funding for our classrooms are now trying to turn us against our schools. They're spreading lies about the lessons on our history, culture and political system that our teachers deliver as part of an accurate and holistic 21st Century curriculum, hoping to divide us so we don't join together to demand all that our schools need. As parents, we know that our children must have the tools and guidance to honestly face and understand our past and present in order to create a better future.

Sample Narrative 3: Connecting to the Big Lie

No matter our color or background, most of us believe in handling challenges with integrity, focusing on solutions, and reckoning with our past so we can create a better future. But certain politicians are trying to teach our kids to confront problems the only way *they* know how: lying about it. The same grifters who have peddled lies about our election want to force our teachers to peddle lies about our history, hoping to keep us divided and distracted so they can take away our freedom to vote and deny us the resources our schools, families and communities actually need. By joining together, we can make this a country where every child has an honest education that sets them up for success and every one of us has a say about the leaders we elect to make key decisions that affect our lives.

Sample Narrative 4: Quick Hit

As any teacher or parent knows, school is a place where children develop their understanding of the world and their ability to make meaningful change in it. But certain politicians are trying to make our kids' classrooms into battlegrounds, spreading lies about the lessons they teach so they can strip schools of the funding our kids deserve. By joining together we can reject this division and make schools a place where every child, Black, white and brown, can learn, grow, and thrive.

RESPONDING TO NONSENSE:

They say: Why are you teaching children that all white people are racist?

We say: First off, I'm so thrilled you're taking such a deep interest in how and what our kids are taught, a conversation that I feel is long overdue. What I know most Americans believe is that we respect our kids - whatever their color or background - to be able to learn hard truths and handle honest history. I believe in children's potential to meet new challenges and have an honest reckoning, and when we try to white out our history, we are doing them and our future a disservice. My loyalty is to children and who and what they can become.

They say: Critical race theory is [Marxist indoctrination, racist against whites, counter-genocide]

We DON'T say: Critical race theory is not [*thing opposition has said.*]

We say: Critical race theory is an understanding that who we are, the laws we have in place, the histories that have been handed down to us, have been shaped by race. It's taught in law school and graduate school to adults. In our public schools, our kids deserve age-appropriate and accurate history lessons, helping them become the critical thinkers we need to make this a more just, prosperous and equitable country.