



FAQs and Misconceptions about Equity in Education in WCASD

What is Equity and how does it look in the WCASD?

“Equity” has become a politically charged term. When we talk about educational equity, the WCASD has defined that as working to remove barriers so that **ALL** students succeed. This requires us to evaluate why certain groups of students are not learning as much as others.

School districts have been providing equity for decades. For example, by teaching special education students in different ways (e.g. providing additional time and support to master the lesson or complete a test) we have been helping to provide equity to this group of students. Additionally, low-income students and students of color have not historically performed as well as white, more affluent students. Equity is looking at how we can address those gaps. Can we provide breakfast so students aren't distracted by hunger? Can we evaluate whether we are encouraging students of color to consider higher level classes at the same rate that we are encouraging white students to take them?

What is Critical Race Theory and are children being taught this in school?

Critical Race Theory is a concept/academic theory that is more than 40 years old. Its main theory is that racism is imbedded in our legal systems and policies, and isn't just a product of any one individual's bias or prejudice. Some components of Critical Race Theory are controversial, and concerns about whether it's being taught in schools have swept the country during the 2020-21 school year.

*The WCASD does **not** have a course or a unit of study titled “Critical Race Theory” and does **not** teach Critical Race Theory.* This is not part of the PA Curriculum and we follow the state standards.

Critical Race Theory should not be confused with the fact that race and other identifiers have had a historical impact in our country. For example, history can't be taught without mentioning how gender identity, ethnicity, race, religion, ability/disability, and/or social systems have impacted our citizens (e.g. American Revolution, Civil War, Women's Suffrage, American Disabilities Act.) **The National Council for the Social Studies** (established in 1921) endorses the teaching of these issues.

Misconception: White students are being made to feel guilty about their skin color, and all races of students are being taught to blame or judge.

This is simply untrue. Our goal is for every student to feel and be included, have a sense of belonging, dignity, and access to all of the WCASD offerings regardless of their skin color, religious beliefs, gender identity, or ability/disability. Our goal is to teach basic respect and human dignity.

Misconception: The District's work related to diversity, equity and inclusion are part of a transition to Socialism/Marxism/Communism or part of a plan to eliminate individuality.

The District does not endorse a political party. We do not want everyone to be “the same” in any way. Our district celebrates and values the diversity of our students, staff, and community. We know that

children will achieve at different levels and choose different paths. We are not in any way trying to eliminate individuality. We just want to ensure we are providing every student with the tools needed to achieve their personal best. (For example, if a student is left-handed, we should provide left-handed scissors or they won't be able to cut paper as effectively as right-handed students using traditional scissors.)

Misconception: The District's equity work has lowered the bar for our students.

Our goal is to raise the bar for all students - not "dumb down" curriculum so that everyone can master it. The WCASD has been engaged in Equity work since 2004. Before and throughout that time, the District has been consistently ranked as one of the top school districts in Pennsylvania and the nation.

Notable 2021 Statistics:

17 National Merit Finalists

Niche

- 27 out of 500 school districts (top 5%)
- 1 of 34 districts rated as A+

School Digger

- 44 out of 610 Public & Charter Schools in PA (top 7%)

US News & World Report - All three WCASD High Schools are ranked among the top schools in the nation and state with the following rankings out of 711 high schools in PA.

- East High School - 36 (score of 93.89)
- Rustin High School - 50 (score of 91.79)
- Henderson High School - 59 (score of 90.32)

Philadelphia Business Journal

- Rated 29 out of 500 districts for academic achievement for the last decade.

Myth: The Achievement Gap exists because certain students simply don't work as hard as others.

The Achievement or Opportunity Gap is the difference between what's known as historically **underperforming** subgroups of children, and historically **performing** subgroups of children. For example, Black and Latino children typically don't perform as well on tests when compared to white children. Research has shown that these gaps exist because there are unequal and inadequate educational opportunities - not inherent differences in capability or work ethic. There are studies from the past 50 years confirming the root cause of the Achievement or Opportunity Gap from NAEP

(National Association for Educational Progress), the Trends in International Mathematics and Science Survey (TIMSS), and the Program for International Student Assessment (PISA).

The West Chester Area School District has implemented programs to address the achievement gap such as establishing a full-day kindergarten program for all children. We have encouraged more children of color, and low-income children to take higher level course work, and provided supports to help those students succeed in those classes.

Myth: If the district focuses on supports for minority students, white students will lose out.

This is simply untrue. We operate with the mission of inspiring and educating all children to achieve their personal best. The words “personal best” also mean “individual best,” and we treat all students as individuals. If a student is struggling, we remove the barriers and provide support to help that student succeed. If a student is academically accelerating, we provide greater challenges to help that student achieve a personal best.

Our district has been recognized for its high achievement. For example, the College Board has recognized our school district as an AP Scholars District for seven out of the last eight years. This is calculated by enrolling more students in Advanced Placement courses each year, and maintaining an 80% pass rate on the national AP exams. Also, we have expanded our dual enrollment offerings with West Chester University allowing students to take college level courses while in high school. These course credits transfer into most colleges and universities. While we have seen more students of color enroll in these courses, we haven’t reached equitable levels yet.

Is Equity, Social Emotional Learning (SEL), Culturally Responsive Teaching (CRT), Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI), and Trauma Informed Care the same as Critical Race Theory (CRT)?

No. These terms have been confused by many, and they are not the same. The table below explains the differences with these terms:

Equity	Making sure barriers are removed for all students to succeed and making sure no student is left out of the educational experience. <i>WCASD supports Equity and we are always looking for ways to remove barriers from learning for all students.</i>
Social Emotional Learning (SEL)	Focuses on the whole child in five areas of self-awareness, self-management, social-awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making. <i>In 2021-22, each of our schools will be writing a plan to address social and emotional needs for all children. This is part of our post-pandemic plan.</i>

Trauma-Informed Care	<p>Trauma-informed care shifts the focus from <i>“What’s wrong with you?”</i> to <i>“What happened to you?”</i> It is a process to identify what may be troubling a student, socially and emotionally, and finding ways to address the problem.</p> <p><i>In 2019-20 all staff in the WCASD completed state-mandated training on the warning signs of trauma.</i></p>
Critical Race Theory (CRT)	<p>Its main theory is that racism is imbedded in our legal systems and policies, and isn’t just a product of any one individual’s bias or prejudice.</p> <p><i>WCASD does not teach this theory in any of our courses, nor is it part of the PA state standards.</i></p>
Culturally Responsive Teaching (CRT)	<p>Culturally Responsive Teaching centers upon four premises:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Awareness of culture and varied backgrounds. 2. Student involvement in their own learning. 3. Information Processing and social/emotional functions of the brain. 4. School/Classroom Community building for a greater sense of belonging. <p><i>WCASD is very diverse and there are more than 30 different languages spoken in our district. We instruct teachers about different cultures and ways to make all children feel welcomed in the classroom. For example, in some cultures, it is not proper for young children to make eye contact with adults. This is not a sign of being rude, but simply a sign about a different culture.</i></p>
Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI)	<p>Diversity is the presence of differences that may include race, gender, religion, sexual orientation, ethnicity, nationality, socioeconomic status, language, (dis)ability, age, religious commitment, or political perspective.</p> <p>Equity means Making sure barriers are removed for all students to succeed and making sure no student is left out of the educational experience.</p> <p>Inclusion has two different meanings. One, it is the process of including special needs children into the regular education classroom for access to the regular education curriculum. It also means to include all students socially, and emotionally to be part of an environment where they feel welcomed and comfortable.</p> <p><i>In WCASD, we work very hard to include all special needs children in the Least Restrictive Environment (a term used to provide services to children in settings with as many of their peers as possible). For example, including a child with special learning needs in the regular classroom along with proper supports for success is less restrictive than pulling that child out for individual instruction in another room. We also offer more than 40 different clubs and activities in our schools for students to feel connected based on their own interests.</i></p>