

Helping Your Community Understand What Your  
Schools Do and Don't Teach

## What Is Critical Race Theory?

Critical Race Theory is a legal framework that originated in the 1970s intending to challenge legal scholarship to consider the historical and present impact and causes of structural inequality and racism. CRT is an academic lens primarily used at the doctoral level and is not a defined curriculum or something outlined in the Kansas State Board of Education's education standards. It is distinctly different from the guiding tenets of educational equity with which it is regularly confused.

---

## What Is Educational Equity?

Educational equity is defined differently by various groups. Instead of being an academic lens for collegiate students like CRT, educational equity is an important K-12 term rooted in state and federal policies. Since the early 2000s, schools, state and national education associations, and governmental entities have worked to ensure that all students have an opportunity to learn and succeed.

Educational equity and the local policies that it influences aim to create an educational system that better serves each student in Kansas and across the nation.

---

## How Can I Respond to CRT Questions?

Start by reinforcing what tools are used by the school district to achieve the goals of educational equity and fulfill the history and social studies standards required for accreditation. It's important to remind people that local boards of education establish curriculum policy and that local policy is distinct from state accreditation standards. Simply put, the state standards identify the knowledge and skills that the State Board of Education believes students should graduate high school possessing and the locally developed curriculum identifies the specific ways that an individual district will achieve those goals. The following pages recommend strategies and policies to better inform community members about what is and what is not being taught in local schools by increasing transparency and communication around curriculum development and implementation.

### How Curriculum is Set

In the state of Kansas, curriculum choices are completely controlled by the locally elected board of education. Based on input from district staff, parents, and other important stakeholders, the board is tasked with establishing and approving a curriculum. The State Department of Education and Kansas State Board of Education do set curriculum standards but clarify the roles of all parties:

*Kansas Curricular Standards provide information on what students should know and be able to do at different grade levels. Kansas curricular standards are guidelines school districts can use to develop their curriculum. They are not the curriculum. In Kansas, each school district develops its own curriculum and teachers decide on how they will provide instruction to ensure student learning [...] The assessed curricular standards are English Language Arts, English Language Proficiency, Mathematics, Science and Social Studies. -KSDE Curricular Standards*

Districts should establish practices and policies that create transparency in the decision-making process that sets and oversees local curriculum. This guide makes policy and communication recommendations for any district looking to increase their local understanding of how the curriculum is set and why it is designed the way it is.

Recently, questions have been raised about the presence and role of Critical Race Theory in public education. Creating processes around curriculum establishment and communication offers a constructive way to have a dialogue on this and other subjects as they arise.

---

### Policies and Procedures for Curriculum

Every school district handles the establishment of curriculum differently. Establishing a curriculum committee made up of representatives from various stakeholder groups can fulfill local goals of increased transparency and community understanding of how the curriculum is set and what a district does and does not include in instruction. Many districts already use a curriculum committee or similar group to make recommendations to the board of education. If your district doesn't have a group like this or is looking to review policy on an existing curriculum committee, consider these key features.

- Include important stakeholders within your community. Curriculum committees regularly include parents, teaching staff, a board member or board appointee, business leaders, civic leaders, and representatives of other groups who should have a voice.

# Creating Curriculum Transparency

## Including Stakeholder Voices in Curriculum Decisions

- Consider drawing members from existing site councils or district leadership teams. These people are already invested in your district's success and can bring important perspectives into the conversation.
- The group should focus on establishing a curriculum that aligns with the standards outlined by the State Department of Education.
- Any curriculum committee should consider a broad offering of potential curriculum and choose the best solution for their local students and population.
- The board always reserves the right to accept or reject the recommendations or make adjustments as they deem necessary.

KASB recommended policy BBC: Board Committees, and IC: Educational Program outline policies and procedures for establishing special board-appointed committees and the development of district curricular offerings. As policy BBC points out, board sub-committees may be assigned temporarily and may have up to three board members on them. The board appoints all members of the committee after members have considered recommendations from the superintendent and other administrative staff members. An advisory committee can be dissolved at any time and must be renewed annually.

A curriculum advisory committee is certainly not required, but it can be a beneficial tool to increase transparency around curriculum development. In an ideal process, a curriculum committee makes recommendations to the board of education. The board then adopts, revises, or rejects those recommendations and works with the district's administrative staff to identify communication strategies and goals. Hence, the community understands their schools' curriculum and the goals that the curriculum seeks to achieve. In the next section, we'll look at some best practices in curriculum communication.

### Curriculum Committee

Reviews curriculum recommendations from site-councils and members of the community and makes a recommendation to the board of education based on which curricular offerings will best achieve the educational goals of the district and the state.



### Board of Education

Appoints the curriculum committee and adopts, revises, or rejects their recommendations on curriculum. Following adoption of a curriculum, the board offers oversight and accountability in the communication of curricular offerings.

### Communicating Your Curriculum

Once your district has established a curriculum, it's important to think through how it will be communicated to students, teachers, parents, and other members of the community. The board of education should lean on its administrative staff to develop and execute a communications plan. In each district, a different person will be responsible for this role. Most school districts lean on the skill set of an administrator to create community communications while others have a communications staff member or team. Whoever it is in your district should be given the autonomy to lead a curriculum communication project. The board's role is to ask questions and hold people responsible for the project accountable to the expressed goals and expectations.

As a communication plan is developed for the district, consider the following best practices and goals.

- KASB recommended policy IC: Education Program identifies a few policy recommendations about posting and communication of curricular offerings. They include:
  - Building an outline of each curricular offering and the learning objectives that should be developed. When the board approves an outline, it shall become part of policies and rules by reference.
  - District educational goals and curriculum objectives for the basic education program should be on file in the district office and available for inspection upon request.
- Beyond policy recommendations, districts should find ways to share curricular offerings and educational goals with their stakeholders. There will undoubtedly be open board conversation around the curriculum. Instead of relying on that as a primary communication channel, consider:
  - Sending an email to all parents/guardians with an outline of the curriculum.
  - Working with your local newspaper or media groups to publish a story about the district's curriculum and educational goals.
  - Using social media to highlight ways that your curriculum will achieve the educational goals of your district.
- As communication takes place, it will be important to talk about how your district established its curriculum and educational goals. What groups were involved in the process? How did it work? What guidelines and objectives were you following? How will the established curriculum help our students succeed? Preempting these questions in communication will increase transparency and trust.

# Creating Curriculum Transparency

Including Stakeholder Voices in Curriculum Decisions

## Visualizing the Process - Curriculum Establishment

### Board of Education

The board of education determines that a curriculum committee should be established to review and develop the curricular offerings of the district. Cycles of curriculum review should be determined by the board.



### Curriculum Committee

Based on input from various stakeholders and to build a curriculum that will achieve local and state educational outcomes and goals, the curriculum committee creates a recommendation for the board of education.



### Board of Education

Reviews the recommendations of the curriculum committee and approves, revises, or rejects them based on their ability to achieve local and state educational outcomes and goals. Once a curriculum is approved, the board establishes communication goals and allows district staff to communicate the curriculum to the community and its stakeholders.



### Communication

District staff develops and executes a communication plan that shares the curriculum and educational goals of the districts.



### Implementation

District staff and building leadership teams develop the tools and resources necessary for implementing the curriculum.



### Accountability

Following communication and implementation of the curriculum, the board should create accountability by reviewing how well the curriculum was communicated to community members and whether or not students were effectively taught the curriculum.

### Challenges to Curriculum and Instructional Materials

After a district builds a curriculum and communicates it to key stakeholders throughout the community, plans for dealing with challenges to the curriculum or the instructional materials built around it need to be established. District staff and the board of education need to know how each party will respond to community concerns.

Just as there are policies and best practices for increasing transparency and communication around curricular development and offerings, there are effective ways to handle challenges and reviews of a curriculum and associated instructional materials. The first step any time a district receives a question or complaint about the curriculum or instructional materials is to clarify that they are developed by subject matter experts and the people who use the tools and resources to achieve the district's educational goals.

Districts can also establish a review committee to process concerns and make recommendations to the board of education based on concerns raised by community members and stakeholders. KASB recommended policy IF: Textbooks, Instructional Materials, and Media Centers and KN: Complaints outline unique but parallel policy recommendations for selecting instructional materials and establishing a review committee for general or specific complaints. Complaints should always be handled first by the principal. If resolutions can not be found, they should be moved to the superintendent. If the parties fail to find a resolution when meeting with the superintendent, it is appropriate to send the complaint to the board, who can forward all appropriate materials to the review committee.

When a board established a review committee, KASB policy IF recommends it be composed of the building principal, the media specialist, two subject area specialists, and two community members. The committee's role is to evaluate the material as a whole, weigh both arguments' strengths and weaknesses, and form an opinion that it shares in a written report to the board and complainant. If the complainant is dissatisfied with the committee's report, they can request an appeal before the board. The board then holds a hearing and makes a final decision on the matter.

Remember, the board determines the curriculum, educational goals, and instructional materials of your district. The goal is to create a system that allows every student to succeed while equipping teachers and staff with the resources they need to effectively give students a mastery of state and local educational standards.

### Visualizing the Process - Curriculum Challenges

#### Complainant

A complainant brings concerns about the district's curriculum or instructional materials forward.



#### Building Principal

The principal of the building affected by the complaint has a meeting with the complainant. If the two parties can not resolve the situation, the process moves to the next step.



#### Superintendent

If the complainant and building principal can not come to a resolution, the complainant then has a meeting with the superintendent. The principal should pass on all relevant materials to the superintendent. If the parties can not reach a resolution, the process moves to the next step.



#### Board of Education

The board of education can choose to take up any complaint shared with them by the superintendent. At the board's discretion, a review committee can be established.



#### Review Committee

Once given all pertinent materials, the review committee examines the evidence and gives a written report with a recommendation for resolving the complaint within 30 days.



#### Appeal

If the complainant is not satisfied, they can appeal the decision and have a hearing in front of the board of education. The board will then make a final decision on the matter.



#### No Appeal

Consider the matter concluded pending board approval of the review committee's recommendation.