About Critical Race Theory

Critical race theory, or CRT, is an academic concept that is more than 40 years old but has become a highly debated topic in the media and public arena this year, especially in the K-12 space as numerous state legislatures are debating bills seeking to ban its use in the classroom. The concept will likely continue to be a topic of much conversation and debate in the coming months as a new school year begins, legislatures return from summer recess, and our country enters the 2021 election season.

People approach critical race theory from many different angles depending on their lived experience, and there are significant disagreements even among experts about its precise definition, how it intersects with teaching and learning in K-12, and how its tenets should inform K-12 policy and practice. There are also claims that the theory advocates discriminating against white people and making white children feel bad in order to achieve equity.

The core idea of critical race theory is that race is a social construct and racism is not merely the product of individual bias or prejudice, but also something embedded in legal systems and policies. It 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. The basic tenets of CRT emerged out of a framework for legal analysis in the late 1970s and early 1980s, and the concept is taught in law school and graduate school to adults. In addition to law, CRT has been taught and applied in fields including sociology, humanities, social sciences, political science and teacher education. In the field of education, CRT was introduced in 1995.