



# **A CONCERNED CITIZEN'S GUIDE TO ENGAGING WITH PUBLIC SCHOOLS**

by Meg Kilgannon

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# A CONCERNED CITIZEN'S GUIDE TO ENGAGING WITH PUBLIC SCHOOLS

By Meg Kilgannon

It is hardly news to anyone that our nation's schools are struggling. Academic underperformance has been an issue for decades. And now there is the very real sense that America's schoolchildren are being taught to hate their country, their parents, and even themselves. Why is this happening, and what can be done about it?

A predominant reason why our nation's schools are failing is that they are currently controlled by only one kind of thinking—progressive. If you think that's an overstatement, consider the near-total domination of progressive intellectual orthodoxy in Silicon Valley and the practical ramifications that flow from it. That same hyper-awareness of current progressive social justice issues extends across America's college campuses, and those campuses churn out the next generation of teachers, principals, and administrators. This results in America's children being a captive audience for some of the most experimental and progressive ideologies of our time.

The popular culture that allows corporations to bully states and elected officials controls our public schools. In the face of such hostility, Christians have resorted to starting their own schools or homeschooling their children. FRC has long advocated for

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homeschooling as an option for parents who are concerned about what children learn in school and how that impacts not only their faith but their ability to lead productive lives and form healthy families. In addition, we encourage churches to start schools to give parents options beyond the public school system. Parochial schools are often a great resource, but it should be noted that leaving the public system entirely leaves the assets (buildings, jobs, budgets) for those hostile to Christian values. When we remove ourselves entirely from the conversation, our worldview perspective is diminished or absent from the system. This is a great loss.

The numbers are staggering: 50.8 million public school students nationwide; at least \$700 billion in regular budgeted spending on K-12 public schools<sup>1</sup> (with the taxpayer tab continuing to grow every year); more than 98,000 public schools nationwide. There are approximately 13,400<sup>2</sup> school boards charged with managing the significant infrastructure of our nation's public schools, including buildings, buses, personnel, and property. Public schools are sometimes the largest employers in a county or region.

These numbers are well known to the educational industrial complex that controls our nation's public (and even private) schools. The National Education Association, American Federation of Teachers, National Association of School Boards, Chiefs for Change, Southern Poverty Law Center (SPLC), and the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) are just a few of the national organizations that have been injecting progressive ideology into classrooms for decades. Add to that crowd the new and very radical actors 1619 Project, Black Lives Matter at School, AntiRacist Future, and many others that seem to blossom overnight, and it's easy to imagine that progressive orthodoxy is well enforced and reinforced.

Schools are typically enclaves of progressive orthodoxy, even in the most affluent, conservative communities. This orthodox thinking makes it very difficult for education officials to recognize just how dangerous the latest academic trends can

be. Many people running our nation's public schools sincerely believe that a young child has the capacity to decide if his or her life would be easier living as the opposite sex. They sincerely believe that to end systemic racism (in the systems they run and



have run for decades), it's necessary to separate children into categories like "oppressor" vs. "oppressed" or "white" vs. "people of color." Parent-driven efforts in state legislatures to fight the medical transition of children or ban divisive concepts like Critical Race Theory (CRT) are fought hammer and tong by the educational industrial complex. Our tax dollars are used to fund the worst kinds of progressive, anti-Christian curricula, teacher training, and textbooks—all right under our noses.

Like it or not, if you have children, there is one school in your neighborhood to which they are automatically assigned, which feeds into one middle school and then into one high school. Your witness in those spaces is desperately needed. While church

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attendance is in decline, school attendance remains mandatory. You probably realize that many families in your community build their social lives and networks around their public schools the way Christians build their lives around their church communities.

We know what kind of values our churches offer. Are you aware of the values offered by your local public school? People who live in conservative communities often have a false sense of security when it comes to their local government. We know and go to church with the teachers; we elect the school board and town council; everything is probably fine, right?

Wrong!

As communities struggle to recover from the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, the hidden (and not-so-hidden) agenda of your local public school may be more evident. Because many public schools went virtual during the pandemic and students viewed their lessons from home, a growing number of American parents now understand that their children are being subjected to a very different kind of education than they themselves received.

## **WHAT CAN WE DO?**

It is more important than ever that parents and concerned citizens engage in oversight of public (and private) schools. Over time, conservatives have ceded control of education to progressives. We have ignored the issues with the content of education in favor of focusing on the issues related to financing education. School choice is an important and necessary component of school reform. But if the educational infrastructure moves too far to the left, even private schools will feel the impact. The exodus from private schools in New York City demonstrates that even those who have the means for “school choice” are far from safe from extremist progressive ideological content.<sup>3</sup>

As a practical matter, when textbook materials are online or your children have computer-based assignments, be sure to have your child log in with you on the child’s account for your review.



Do not be content to review things from your parent portal. All the content may not be available there. Often schools will use a resource like Blackboard or Schoology as a platform accessible to parents, while individual teachers find it more convenient to use online documents in other platforms and/or use resources in other formats or apps. Make sure your child shares all this information with you so you have a complete picture of the material your child is seeing.

As parents monitor their children's education, here are some things to look for:

## **CIVICS AND HISTORY**

Curricula should honor America's founding documents, our nation's founders, and the important rights guaranteed by the First Amendment, including religious freedom. Civics education should be meaningful and substantive, not the project-based "action civics" that allows teachers to use students as political protestors on a range of progressive political interests.<sup>4</sup> History lessons must be kept free of political bias as much as possible, and where controversies exist, both sides of the story must be presented. Textbooks based on revisionist history must be rejected and replaced. Programs and resources like the Southern Poverty Law Center's Teaching Tolerance/Learning for Justice,<sup>5</sup> the *New York Times*,<sup>6</sup> and Pulitzer Center's 1619 Project,<sup>7</sup> Black Lives Matter at School,<sup>8</sup> and the Zinn Project<sup>9</sup> are far too ideological to be used as resources in public schools.



Parents must be diligent in reviewing the materials used in their children's classrooms. School administrators and teachers are accustomed to thinking of progressive material as being standard, so parental input is critically important. Programs like 1776 Unites<sup>10</sup> (a project of the Woodson Center), the Hillsdale 1776 Curriculum,<sup>11</sup> and the Bill of Rights Institute<sup>12</sup> provide resources that educate students about the promise of America without ignoring difficult topics.

## **COMPREHENSIVE SEXUALITY EDUCATION (CSE)**

Most parents assume (or hope) sex education will involve age-appropriate information about how the human body works, an explanation of the reproductive system, and the importance of marriage as the healthiest context for sexual activity. Although

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Comprehensive Sexuality Education (CSE) instruction includes most of the topics covered by "traditional" sex-ed programs, it typically does not include meaningful abstinence education (sometimes referred to as Sexual Risk Avoidance education, or SRA). Meanwhile, it does feature sexually explicit materials and

visuals. That's because the ultimate goal of CSE isn't merely sex education, it is changing the sexual norms of society.<sup>13</sup>

Even more disturbing, CSE is a "rights-based" approach to sexuality education and promotes sexual rights to children at the expense of their sexual health. The idea that children have sexual rights endangers them. Children are incapable of consenting to sexual activity with other children or adults. Contrary to the idea that humans are sexual from birth, children experience an innocent sexual latency period until puberty. Parents who rightly wish to honor this innocence must be keenly aware that many forces in society do not share this goal, with sometimes little distinction between pornography and some kinds of sexuality education. It is important for parents to be the people children turn to with questions about human sexuality and God's plan for it.



Many groups are actively promoting CSE to schools. One such group is SIECUS (formerly known as the Sexuality Information and Education Council of the United States, now rebranded as simply "SIECUS: Sex Ed for Social Change"<sup>14</sup>). SIECUS President & CEO Christine Harley has vowed:

From now on, you will rarely see our name without our tagline, because it is more than a phrase. It is a promise. We are working toward a world where all people can experience and enjoy sexual and reproductive freedom as they define it for themselves. By advancing sex ed for social change, we know that we can make that world a reality.

Advocates for Youth (whose tagline is “Young. Powerful. Taking Over.”<sup>15</sup>) boasts that:

Young people understand that reproductive and sexual health and rights are inextricably tied to social justice and the fight for liberation. Join thousands of youth activists and adult allies as we build a better and more equitable world.

Planned Parenthood is also involved in sex education in schools in some states. According to their website, “Planned Parenthood education staff reach 1.5 million individuals each year, and 64% of those individuals are middle school and high school aged youth.”<sup>16</sup> Planned Parenthood is first and foremost an abortion business, but they include sex education and prescribing hormone therapies for “transgender” youth as part of their “services.”

School programs that offer condoms to children or focus on a “right to pleasure” are based on CSE. As an alternative to these programs, the nonprofit organization Ascend offers sex education programs that focus on risk avoidance rather than sexual rights and risk reduction.<sup>17</sup> New K-12 standards offered by the Medical Institute for Sexual Health are another healthy resource available to schools and curriculum designers.<sup>18</sup>

A key component of CSE is **Critical Gender/Queer Theory**. Queer Theory subverts “heteronormative” human sexuality and recognizes a broad spectrum of sexuality, sexual orientation, and gender identity.<sup>19</sup> Gender identity posits that biological sex is a “social construct” while gender is an inherent sense of the “true self.” These ideas reject the scientific biological realities of the sexes, as well as God’s creation of the human person as male or female (Gen. 1:27), His design for marital union, and the blessings of children that flow from it.

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*Critical Gender/Queer Theory seeks to abolish all norms of human behavior. This means rejecting concepts like “right” and “wrong.”*

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Critical Gender Theory or Queer Theory is the philosophical underpinning of concepts like gender identity. Queer Theory teaches children that it is possible to be born in the wrong body. It is an attack on God's creation of the human person as male or female. Queer Theory seeks to abolish all norms of human behavior. This means rejecting concepts like "right" and "wrong." Queer Theory adherents believe in freeing reproduction from biological function and natural marriage. They reject the physical or bodily reality of biological sex in favor of a brain-based "internal sense of gender."

As extreme as these ideas might seem to everyday American parents, the gender ideology established by Queer Theory is familiar to academics. Professors and administrators in higher education must be conversant in Queer Theory's tenets and applications. Even if not actively advancing the gender movement on campus and off, higher education officials must never question gender ideology.

For example, this progressive attitude toward gender can be seen by parents who may be otherwise unaware of Queer Theory when public schools begin to advance policies to protect or accommodate gender-nonconforming students. These policies usually call for the acceptance of boys and girls using the same facilities for dressing and hygiene, compel the use of chosen pronouns and names, access to opposite-sex sports teams, and the maintenance of separate records for parents who are kept in the dark about their child's transgender status.



Parents, not schools, must direct the treatment of children experiencing gender dysphoria (or other mental health conditions). Regarding issues related to gender dysphoria, no medical intervention should take place without parental consent, and some interventions should not take place at all.<sup>20</sup>

Teaching children that it is possible to be born in “the wrong body” or have a “boy brain in a girl body” is dangerous and harms the parent/child relationship. Children experiencing gender dysphoria (or any other mental health condition) need counseling directed by the parent rather than the school. Until parents confirm school policy in this area, it’s possible that your school could use an alternative name for your child while at school or on school documentation.<sup>21</sup> Make sure you know what is happening in your school and with each teacher who interacts with your children.

## **CRITICAL RACE THEORY (CRT)**

Without question, racism is real and sinful. Living in a fallen world, we too often fail to love our neighbors as Christ commanded (Mark 12:28-31). Everyone is made in God’s image and therefore possesses inherent dignity and value (Gen. 1:26). A biblical worldview helps us see people the way God does and provides a real antidote for the scourge of racism. An alternative and increasingly promoted worldview within education circles, Critical Race Theory (CRT), teaches us (and our children) to focus on physical characteristics or “identities” rather than people’s intrinsic dignity. Based on the philosophical abandonment of absolute truth in favor of competing race-based narratives, CRT-based programs can lead to the segregation of students by race in classrooms or faculty in professional development. It is racist and divisive.

Founding CRT academics Richard Delgado and Jean Stefancic explain in *Critical Race Theory: An Introduction*:

Unlike traditional civil rights discourse, which stresses incrementalism and step-by-step progress, critical race theory questions the very foundations of the liberal order,

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*Critical Race Theory focuses on physical characteristics or “identities” rather than people’s intrinsic dignity.*

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including equality theory, legal reasoning, Enlightenment rationalism, and neutral principles of constitutional law. . . . [C]ritical race scholars are discontented with liberalism as a framework for addressing America’s racial problems.<sup>22</sup>

They continue:

Although CRT began as a movement in the law, it has rapidly spread beyond that discipline. Today, many scholars in the field of education consider themselves critical race theorists who use CRT’s ideas to understand issues of school discipline and hierarchy, tracking, affirmative action, high-stakes testing, controversies over curriculum and history, bilingual and multicultural education, alternative and charter schools.

Parents’ concerns about CRT are well-founded. Even when education officials deny teaching CRT in their schools, evidence of the ideology can be found in “action civics”; revisionist history (as taught through programs like Learning for Justice, 1619 Project, and others); and Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI).



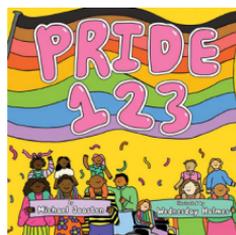
## DIVERSITY, EQUITY, AND INCLUSION (DEI)

Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) is a practical application of Critical Race Theory. DEI positions or offices are well established in colleges and universities,<sup>23</sup> and many school districts have adopted the practice of employing a Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Officer or other ranking official. Employees in this role or office will advance diversity initiatives in hiring or review the school system's practices to achieve "equity." In addition to sponsoring outreach events to promote DEI, these officials will also investigate "bias incidents" or create "bias response teams" to act on claims of injustice.<sup>24</sup>

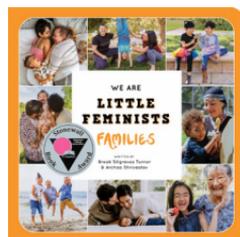
Libraries are also engaged in DEI. The American Library Association compiles recommended books on its Rainbow Book Lists<sup>25</sup> and offers an exhaustive Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Strategic Plan.<sup>26</sup> The plan is enforced by a scorecard used to rate libraries on their commitment to transformation.<sup>27</sup> Parents of young children are often shocked to learn about the controversial and sexual topics addressed in picture books in their local public and school libraries.

The following are examples of Rainbow Book List titles and their accompanying descriptions:

- **Michael Joosten and Wednesday Holmes (Illustrator). *Pride 1 2 3*. 2020. 22p. Simon & Schuster: Little Simon. Ages 1 to 5. Board book/Counting and Numbers.** Bright primary colors and diverse figures illustrate this rhyming, counting board book about a Pride parade.

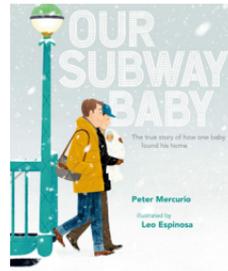


- **Little Feminist. *We Are Little Feminists: Families*. 2020. 14p. Little Feminist. Ages 0 to 5. Board book.** This board book showcases pictures of real-life families of all different genders, ethnicities, and identities. Includes simple accompanying

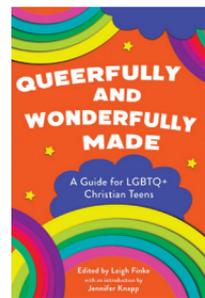


text that helps build vocabulary and highlight the importance of family connection.

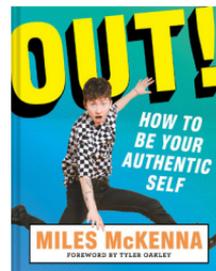
- **Peter Mercurio and Leo Espinosa (Illustrator). *Our Subway Baby*. 2020. 40p. Penguin Random House. Ages 4 to 8. Adoption Non-fiction.** Loving illustrations help tell the story of how an infant abandoned in a NYC subway station was adopted by the man who found him and his partner.



- ***Queerfully and Wonderfully Made: A Guide for LGBTQ+ Christian Teens*. 2020. 260p. Beaming Books. Ages 12 to 18. Inspirational.** This affirming nonfiction book sets out to answer the questions that many young LGBTQ+ Christians may have about how their identity intersects with their religion. It features information from LGBTQ+ professionals and testimonies from young adult queer Christians.



- **Miles McKenna. *Out!: How to be Your Authentic Self*. 2020. 224p. Abrams/Amulet. Ages 13 and up. Self-Help.** YouTube star and activist Miles McKenna draws from his own experiences, publicly documenting his transition to create an inclusive guide to finding validation, inspiration, and support for LGBTQ+ teens exploring their own identities.



- **Hannah Abigail Clarke. *The Scapegracers*. 2020. 400p. Workman/Erewhon Books. Ages 14 and up. Contemporary Fantasy.** An outcast teenage lesbian forms a coven with the popular girls at school, and together they cast curses and try to elude witch hunters.



## STEM, SCIENCE, BIOLOGY, AND MATHEMATICS

The problems of critical analysis are not limited to the social sciences. The hard sciences are affected as well. The scientific method (the time-honored practice of testing theories via experimentation and observation) has been accused of being racist or oppressive by critical theorists.<sup>28</sup> Even mathematics is being attacked for requiring “correct” answers.<sup>29</sup>

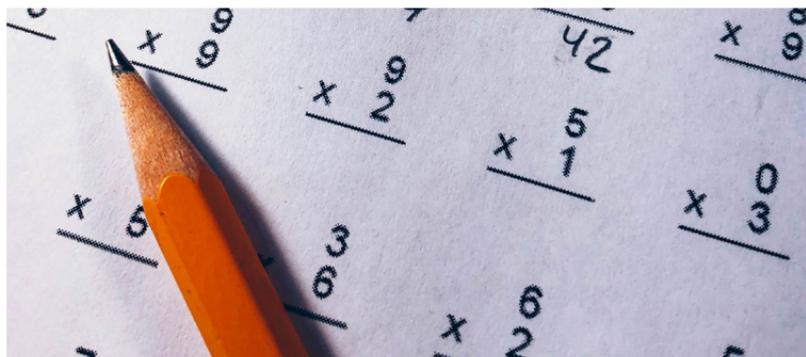
An example of ideology impacting the teaching of mathematics is available in *Critical Race Theory in Mathematics Education*, edited by Julius Davis and Christopher C. Jett. As the book is described:

*Critical Race Theory in Mathematics Education* brings together scholarship that uses critical race theory (CRT) to provide a comprehensive understanding of race, racism, social justice, and experiential knowledge of African Americans’ mathematics education. CRT has gained traction within the educational research sphere, and this book extends and applies this framework to chronicle the paths of mathematics educators who advance and use CRT. This edited collection brings together scholarship that addresses the racial challenges thrust [sic] upon Black learners and the gatekeeping nature of the discipline of mathematics. Across the ten chapters, scholars expand the uses of CRT in mathematics education and share insights with stakeholders regarding the racialized experiences of mathematics students and educators. Collectively, the volume explains how researchers, practitioners, and policymakers can use CRT to examine issues of race, racism, and other forms of oppression in mathematics education for Black children and adults.<sup>30</sup>

Implying that children of a particular background or skin color are not as capable or able to perform in math or science is harmful to students and society. Performance gaps on test scores

must be remediated and reduced. But to address such problems through only a racial lens will exacerbate problems rather than solve them.

We need to reaffirm that truth exists and can be known.



Scientific truth will never conflict with our Christian faith.

## **CONCLUSION**

When we find ourselves at the place where education professionals sincerely believe and defend such concepts as Critical Race Theory and Queer Theory, and believe they have a moral obligation to teach those concepts to children for the good of society, it is long past time for parents and concerned citizens to act.

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Pray about this and prepare to engage. Discuss these issues with your family and friends. Be unafraid to share the solutions to these problems that Christ's love and the gospels offer. Meet each of your children's teachers and make sure your children talk to you about their assignments and school activities. Attend local

school board meetings and take notes. Run for your local school board so that common sense can prevail over the one-sided thinking in place now. We live in the greatest nation on earth, the beacon of hope for the world. Let's make America's school systems as exceptional as our nation. Our children, entrusted to us by God, deserve our very best.

## **RESOURCES**

- The SPLC's Teaching Tolerance: What Parents, Teachers, and Administrators Need to Know ([frc.org/teachingtolerance](http://frc.org/teachingtolerance))
- Sex Education in Public Schools: Sexualization of Children and LGBT Indoctrination ([frc.org/sexeducation](http://frc.org/sexeducation))
- How to Respond to the LGBT Movement ([frc.org/lgbt](http://frc.org/lgbt))
- Why Every Church Should Start a Christian School ([frc.org/christianschool](http://frc.org/christianschool))
- School Board Boot Camp videos ([frcaction.org/get.cfm?i=WX21G03](http://frcaction.org/get.cfm?i=WX21G03))
- New Discourses Social Justice Encyclopedia ([newdiscourses.com](http://newdiscourses.com))
- Medical Institute for Sexual Health ([medinstitute.org](http://medinstitute.org))
- Ascend ([weascend.org](http://weascend.org))
- Heritage Foundation's Summit on Protecting Children from Sexualization ([heritage.org/marriage-and-family/event/summit-protecting-children-sexualization](http://heritage.org/marriage-and-family/event/summit-protecting-children-sexualization))



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Meg combines her expertise in education policy with her skills as a coalition builder to promote excellence and accountability in America's public schools. She spearheaded dynamic change in her community by organizing parent groups to lobby school board members on important issues. Her leadership on these issues inspired the Virginia Family Foundation to name Meg as their Citizen of the Year in 2019.

Meg is married with four children and is an active member of her parish. A graduate of Washington & Lee University, she enjoys time with family, hiking, fly fishing, and reading.

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Family Research Council is a nonprofit research and educational organization dedicated to articulating and advancing a family-centered philosophy of public life.

FRC seeks to inform the news media, the academic community, business leaders, and the general public about family issues that affect the nation from a biblical worldview.

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Our nation's schools are struggling. Academic underperformance has been an issue for decades. And now there is the very real sense that America's schoolchildren are being taught to hate their country, their parents, and even themselves.

If you have children, there is one school in your neighborhood to which they are automatically assigned, which feeds into one middle school and then into one high school. Your witness in those spaces is desperately needed. While church attendance is in decline, school attendance remains mandatory. You probably realize that many families in your community build their social lives and networks around their public schools the way Christians build our lives around our church communities.

We know what kind of values our churches offer. Are you aware of the values offered by your local public school? This publication offers an overview of the issues and influences facing our public schools and suggests the only and best remedy is the constructive engagement of concerned citizens and parents. We live in the greatest nation on earth, the beacon of hope for the world. We can make America's school systems as exceptional as our nation. Our children, entrusted to us by God, deserve our very best.



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