



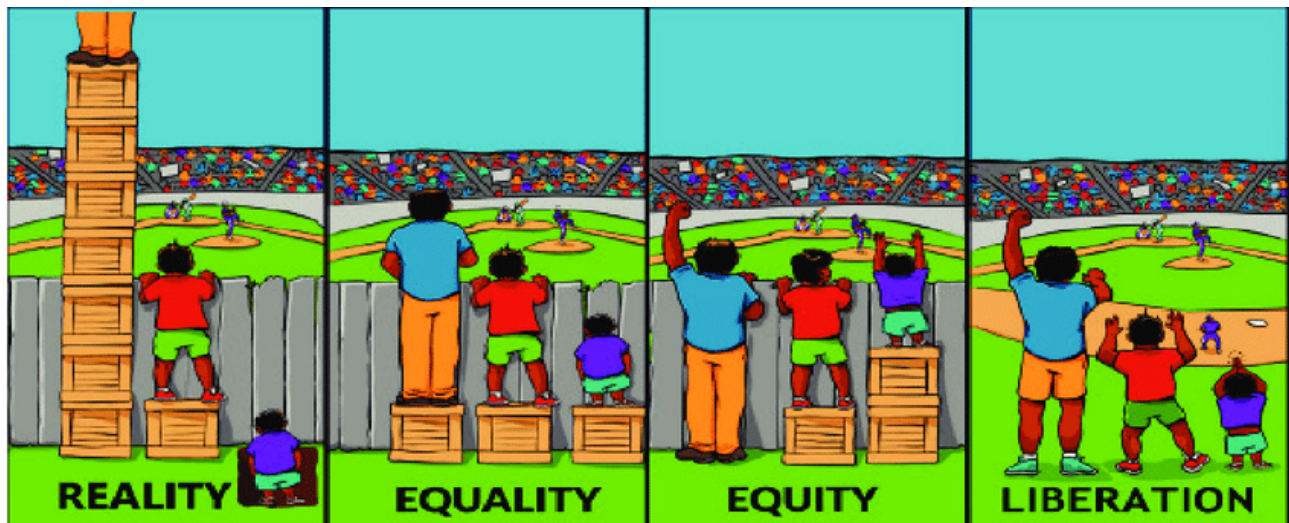
Diversity, Equity and Inclusion in Education

Position Paper

Written by Educational Issues Committee

Approved by Board of Directors

March 3, 2022



Artwork by Angus Maguire, <http://beclouded.net>

**Maya Angelou, American poet and writer, stated:
“History, despite its wrenching pain, cannot be unlived,
but if faced with courage, need not be lived again.”**

This position paper serves as a statement of support from the League of Women Voters of Manatee County to the School Board of Manatee County. The League of Women Voters practices inquiry, advocacy and action. The purpose of this paper is to provide a rationale for teaching inclusive history, as well as other curricula that reflects everyone’s lived experiences. It examines positions of those who would deny all children full and inclusive teaching and learning.

The Manatee School Board creates policy to guide the district staff, school leaders, and teachers to sustain teaching and learning. We believe this policy requires the school board to see *diversity as a strength, equity as a moral obligation, and inclusion as a worthy goal*. To this end we expect that history be taught truthfully and to accurately represent the lived experiences of all children in our community. When everyone knows everyone’s comprehensive history, we are all able to move forward together.

We as citizens are ethically accountable to our students. Gone are the days in which it was acceptable for teachers to present unquestioned information for students to memorize as fact. The job of twenty-first century educators is to teach students how to think critically about the deluge of information at their fingertips. Therefore, students must be taught with veracity and openness.

Traditionally, history and civics curricula in the United States have been presented from a single perspective - while the lived experiences and perspectives of BIPOC (Black, Indigenous and People of Color) and women have most often been missing, or highlighted during one “special” week or month during the year. More voices in our community and country are pointing out this inequity, and educators are striving to utilize social studies curricula that includes the contributions and cultures of all Americans. Yet comprehensive, unabridged social studies education is under attack in our schools.

Learning complete and truthful history is a civic duty. Knowing the country’s strengths and weaknesses will enhance the country’s future growth and prosperity. Education of future generations is the most important function of our government to ensure its stability. Rule 6A- 10.081, Florida Administrative Code, Principles of Professional Conduct for the Education Profession in Florida, states: “The educator values the worth and dignity of every person, the pursuit of truth, devotion to excellence, the acquisition of knowledge, and the nurture of democratic citizenship. Essential to the achievement of these standards are the freedom to learn and to teach and the guarantee of equal opportunity for all.” www.fl.doe.org/teaching/professional-practices/code-of-ethics-principles-of-professio.shtml Attention to diversity, equity, and inclusion is imperative if the district is to guarantee equal opportunity for all students.

As community members with background knowledge and experience in education and civic responsibility, the League of Women Voters Manatee has a vested interest in supporting the Manatee

School Board, teachers, and ultimately students, in establishing an environment in which all voices and lived experiences are present and valued in the classroom.

The student population of the Manatee School District reflects our community's population. Based upon the 2021 data from the Florida Department of Education, 54% of the Manatee school district's student population of 49,181 are economically disadvantaged. Among the overall student population, 36% are Hispanic or Latino, 13% are Black/African-American, 44% are White, and 7% are identified as Other. In addition, 19% of our students are English Language Learners (ELL).

For Manatee County to provide the highest quality of life for all citizens, everyone's children must be successfully engaged in rigorous and relevant learning. This includes teaching full and honest history, with instruction in critical thinking skills to enhance each student's capacity to discern, compare, contrast, and make informed decisions. These skills enrich basic and advanced competencies in reading, writing, and mathematics; technology and engineering; social, biological, and physical sciences; history, economics, civics, psychology, geography, and sociology; and the arts and music. Teaching history in this manner opens opportunities to apply what is learned in a variety of coursework and career preparation options.

Florida State Standards provide clear expectations for what students need to know and be able to do in all academic areas. Florida's "Next Generation Social Studies Standards, 2021" mandate teachers approach historical events from a variety of perspectives. <https://www.fldoe.org/core/fileparse.php/18736/urlty/SR-SocialStudies.pdf> Teachers use inquiry skills to teach the required content. By using the inquiry skills required by the state, teachers do not indoctrinate students nor intend to make students feel guilty; they encourage students to look at all perspectives of events, and analyze writers' points of view and frames of reference. Healthy discussions in the classroom enable all sides of an event to be presented and prepare students to draw their own conclusions. Students are not assessed on their opinion but on how well they are able to support it using facts.

An Example

Students need to know that in pre-Columbus America there were between 5-15,000,000 Indigenous Americans and by the late 19th century there were approximately 238,000. They died from war, disease, and starvation. In 1860, there were approximately 4,000,000 slaves and 5,000 free black persons in America. And, during WWII, there were 110,000 Japanese-Americans placed in internment camps; two-thirds of them were American citizens. These are facts. Teachers encourage students to look at the facts and the cultural and political situations which permitted them to exist. In addition, teachers help students to look at the past in its own time frame and try to understand why disparities in the treatment of certain ethnic groups existed, why certain groups were not included, and what degree of equity was attained post these periods. Examining these types of events and time periods also includes studying the people who were trying to improve our great county – sometimes they were the same ones who enabled the events to occur. Most importantly, understanding *why* the men and women did what they did gives students a wider picture of how our country developed – and what we learned along the way. Education isn't simply about memorizing that Hitler killed six million Jews, but about understanding why millions of ordinary Germans did not protest. Real education is learning how to spot the signs of history repeating itself. Looking at past events, whether perceived to be positive, benign or horrific, helps with future problem solving.

Public education today is under attack. While LWV Manatee agrees that parents and guardians should, and must, be involved in their children's education, we do not support parents who want to dictate what should and should not be taught to all children. Opponents of teaching about diversity, equity, and inclusion claim the academic lens is anti-white and anti-American. These opponents maintain that discussing such topics makes children feel guilty and does not teach them that our democracy and country are great.

The movement to curtail teaching race history is powerful and funded with large sums of money that often come from known and unknown sources from other areas of the country. These same groups seek to censor books that contain content about transgender issues and race. Young people have access to the full internet, Tik Tok, Facebook, Instagram, etc.; books are not the enemy. To maintain balance with information accessed via the internet, students should be reading literature in Language Arts classes under the guidance of teachers that is reflective of the lived experiences of all children. There is a process in place that permits individual parents to request alternative reading. However, censorship is a slippery slope and can lead to a lack of information and subsequent development of apathy, ignorance, conformism, and general stagnation. Teachers should not be in constant fear of being challenged for what they are teaching.

In the last year, concern has been raised about the teaching in K-12 schools of the graduate level academic field called Critical Race Theory (CRT), an inquiry into systemic racial inequities. For example, fear is expressed that if white students learn that America has a history that includes enslavement of blacks or genocide of indigenous peoples, they will feel shame, sadness, and discomfort.

Critical Race Theory is not, nor has it ever been, taught in K-12 schools. Derived from a graduate level academic framework for legal analysis in the late 1970s, Critical Race Theory is the idea that race is a social construct, and that racism is not merely the product of individual bias or prejudice, but also can be embedded in legal systems and policies. Critical Race Theory is a legal theory that considers how laws that appear to be neutral function in a way that entrenches racial division. Critical Race Theory is only addressed at the university graduate level to explain phenomena supported by data.

Efforts are underway to misinform the public that CRT is being included in K-12 curricula and to encourage citizens to run for local school boards on this platform. Citizens are directed to follow a tool kit published by the Center for Renewing America entitled, "Combatting Critical Race Theory in Your Community: An A to Z Guide on How to Combat Critical Race Theory and Reclaim Your Local School Board." <https://citizensrenewingamerica.com/issues/combating-critical-race-theory-in-your-community/> This organization was founded in 2019 by Russell Vought. There are large sums of dark money behind people who want at least to influence school boards and at worst take them over. (e.g., funds for this purpose are reportedly provided by the Koch organization <https://www.masspoliticsprofs.org/2021/04/12/koch-connections-and-sham-grassroots-of-parents-defending-education/>)

As this Position Paper is being written, Florida's current 2022 legislative session, CS/HB 7 and SB148, currently championed by Florida's Governor, prohibits any school or private business from engaging in instruction or training that makes anyone feel discomfort, guilt, anguish, or any other form of psychological distress on account of their race. Media stories about the proposed legislation report that CRT creates division and makes students feel bad about being white.

Engendering fear over a topic that is not taught in our public K-12 schools is casting a chilling effect on teaching and learning in Florida. Efforts to pass legislation to stop something that isn't happening in the first place compromises the integrity of the current teaching and learning environment. This manufactured criticism of Critical Race Theory is clear evidence that misunderstandings and systemic biases exist.

Making a claim that learning the truth creates divisions and a sense of guilt and shame among some children is disingenuous. What happened in the past informs how to make a better world in the future. Encountering the grim parts of our country's history may prompt the learner to understand how to avoid repeating it. Anyone may feel uncomfortable when confronted with how beliefs and actions, past or present, were filled with unintended or intended bias. The awareness of bias and how these beliefs might impact others, can lead to empathy and positive actions and outcomes.

Teachers are expected to teach in such a way that students achieve the standards. The curriculum progresses across grade levels for the strands of Civics and Government, Holocaust Education, Financial Literacy, American History, World History, Humanities, Psychology, Geography, Economics, and Sociology. Each strand has a clear set of standards for each grade level with appropriate developmental benchmarks for learning and accountability for applying the knowledge gained.

Embedded throughout the Florida State Standards are expectations for students to learn and practice critical thinking skills, to learn to compare and contrast, to study primary and secondary source documents, to learn and deploy investigation skills, to develop successful study skills, and to increase their intellectual capacity. CPalms is an online toolbox of information, vetted resources, and interactive tools that helps educators effectively implement the standards. It is the State of Florida's official source for standards information and course descriptions. To see the grade level, strands, and standards that speak to these skills go to <https://www.cpalms.org>.

Some with financial and political ambitions for power have used CRT as a "dog whistle" to encourage those who are misinformed to engage in a mythical fight designed to undermine public schools and cripple teaching and learning. Public schools are charged with serving all students and designed to meet the needs of everyone's children. To accomplish this mission, teaching and learning in Manatee County's public schools must include history that is rooted in facts and must not be disrupted.

To ensure a community that flourishes and recognizes the worth of every citizen, the Manatee School District must provide the necessary teaching and learning that results in the success of all children as critical thinkers, life-long learners, and contributing citizens. To this end, we must teach factual, inclusive history in our schools.

The goal of public education is to create well-informed citizens; therefore, the discussion of historical racism impacting Blacks, Hispanic/Latina(o), Indigenous people, women, and the LGBTQ+ community must take place in the classroom. This is the only way young people will learn to think critically about our history and the only way to create a united America for future generations. The history of our great republic will not be tarnished, but expanded.