



Advocating for Teaching Honest History

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Introduction

To achieve the vision of a just society, young people need the tools to build a multiracial and inclusive democracy. Learning honest history—history that is accurate, comprehensive and inclusive of perspectives beyond traditional, dominant narratives—helps students to understand the forces that shape our world and to make connections between the past and the present. In today’s political environment, with numerous states censoring teaching accurate history and critical learning about race and racism as well as gender and identity, fighting for young people’s rights to research-based practices and inclusive education is essential.


Because educators play a crucial role in helping children develop an understanding of the world, schools have been, and continue to be, one of the battlegrounds for justice. While some politicians and other powerful people seek to erase truths from history and limit discussions that include historically underrepresented communities, surveys and research have consistently shown that the majority of parents and caregivers in the U.S. support honest and inclusive education—including teaching about difficult topics such as the history and impact of slavery and the ongoing effects of racism.

At Learning for Justice, we aim to support educators in facilitating these critical conversations with students. While some argue that unpleasant facts about our nation’s past have no place in schools, most people agree that students deserve to know the truth. We can’t build a just future on a foundation of false narratives. By confronting our history directly, students learn to recognize and celebrate legacies of justice and to understand and analyze legacies of injustice. In doing so, they can take

informed action as they become global citizens and future leaders. Equipped with accurate historical knowledge, today’s young people can uphold their civic responsibility by continuing to build on historical rights and avoiding and correcting historical wrongs.

Honest and inclusive history education is fundamental to ensuring that students learn from our past, understand how it influences the present and work together to build a better future. Honest history is not something to shy away from nor to avoid teaching for fear of backlash. It is critical that honest histories are communicated with families, caregivers and community members to increase their impact throughout the school community. Developing relationships and open communication can build strong bridges to ensuring that honest history is not just accepted but is ingrained in curricula.

We hope this guide will help educators realize the power they hold to work toward the honest history education that our young people deserve. Together with students, families, colleagues and community supporters, educators can advocate for honest, accurate and fully funded education that meets every child’s needs and provides the training, curricula and resources educators need to reckon with our past and transform our future.



“History is not the past. It is the present. We carry our history with us. We are our history.”

James Baldwin

The resources and information in this guide are promising practices that are strongly encouraged where allowed by law. This guide, however, does not constitute legal advice. Unfortunately, even though the Constitution protects students’ right to learn, many states have sought to restrict those rights and censor materials in ways that may impact educators’ ability to use these resources. Consult your union or a licensed attorney in your jurisdiction about any applicable laws and how they may affect your ability to have these classroom discussions. Parents and caregivers may be powerful allies in ensuring truthful histories continue to be taught—even if that teaching occurs outside of classrooms until ambiguous and confusing censorship laws are struck down as unconstitutional.

Areas of Influence for Educators

This guide is divided into sections based on educators' areas of influence. The ability to influence various spheres in education is based on the power educators hold at different levels of the school ecosystem. Classroom teachers have more direct influence at the classroom level with students. Their influence is often less direct at the district level with administrators and school board members. This guide is organized with these power dynamics in mind to help educators navigate the content and choose their areas of focus.

In the diagram, starting from the center and moving outward, the color-coded spheres illustrate areas in the order in which educators have influence. Pink spheres are classroom level, blue spheres are school and district level, and purple spheres are at policy and legislative levels.

The people in the spheres include:

Pink Spheres (Classroom Level):

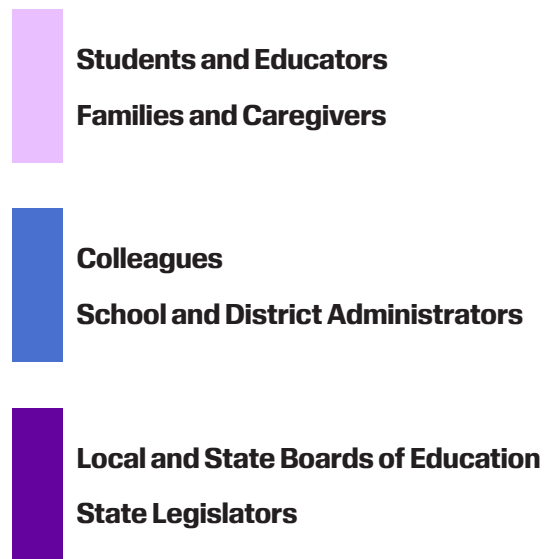
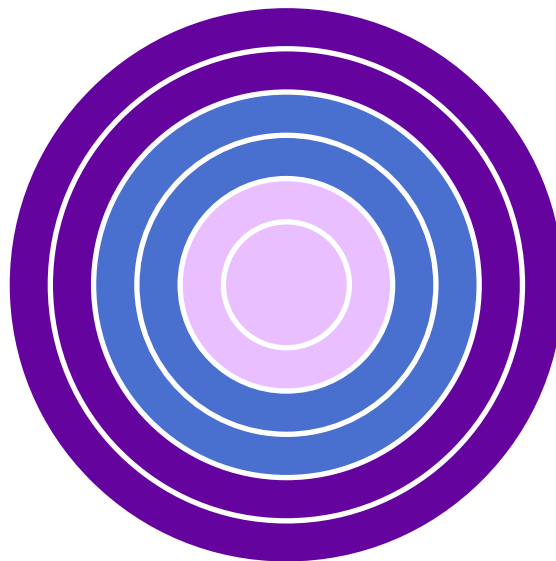
- Students and educators
- Families and caregivers

Blue Spheres (School and District Level):

- Colleagues
- School and district administrators

Purple Spheres (Legislative Level):

- Local and state boards of education
- State legislators



In the Classroom



Overview

Educators have an opportunity to be powerful advocates for inclusive education by teaching honest history in their classrooms. School, district and state education policies that guide curricula—and, in some states, attempt to censor what is taught—have caused confusion and concern. However, educators may have more power than they realize. Ideally, educators can implement a curriculum that encourages students to grapple with complex and often conflicting stories, employing pedagogy that has students draw their own conclusions. Educators can also create a classroom culture that provides diverse perspectives on challenging topics.

In this section, educators will find tools to teach honest history in their classrooms. In selecting tools, educators should balance their professional and personal safety with students' needs and safety, ensuring that students' identities are affirmed and fully embraced. Educators can support students in learning a more complete history, how the past influences the present, and how they can work together to build a better future.

Tool 1: Create a welcoming classroom.

A welcoming classroom is the foundation of a community that grapples with honest history. When all students feel accepted, educators can dive into challenging topics with students. Teachers should be thoughtful and intentional about how they build relationships with and among students. At the beginning of the year, co-create classroom agreements to help ensure students' identities and values are respected in the classroom culture. Consider how you physically set up your classroom to honor and include the diverse identities and experiences of your students. Use restorative justice practices to ensure that responses to breaches in the classroom agreements are focused on healing, not punishment.

Learn more about creating a welcoming classroom with the following resources from Learning for Justice:

Tool 1:
Create a welcoming classroom.

Tool 2:
Use primary sources.

Tool 3:
Diversify the texts and perspectives in curricula.

Tool 4:
Use an inquiry-based approach to teaching.

Tool 5:
Teach students to read the world critically.

Tool 6:
Consult policies, course mandates and professional organizations.


Tool 7:
Continue to learn how to teach honest history.

- [*Let's Talk! Facilitating Critical Conversations With Students*](#)
- [*Critical Practices for Social Justice Education*](#)
- [*Speak Up at School*](#)

Tool 2: Use primary sources.

Primary sources are an important tool in teaching honest history because they offer students opportunities to learn the perspectives of people involved in and affected by historical events. Primary sources also importantly offer the opportunity to ask: "Whose perspectives are not represented? Who is controlling the narrative and who is not, and what implications does that have?"

Before selecting a primary source for students, educators should think critically about the primary source, considering the context, the author and the author's purpose. Primary



Vanessa Gutierrez, an elementary teacher in Maryland, shares that the goal of inquiry design models is to “transform [students] into ‘historical thinkers.’ ... Every moment that we continue to teach a dominant version of history, another generation will carry an incomplete narrative with them. Our responsibility is to teach history in a way that includes various perspectives. That way, children grow up to become adults who think critically about how the past impacts the present, informing how they take action to create a more just future.”

sources reflect views of particular writers at particular times and are not all factual. For example, many written primary sources do not include the perspectives of communities that have been historically marginalized. If your chosen primary sources reflect a dominant perspective, consider identifying other sources that could be introduced, such as oral traditions, archaeological records, art or music. You can also help students critically read primary sources by asking them to consider whose perspectives are represented and whose perspectives are missing.

The LFI [student texts library](#) contains historical documents, essays, poems, short videos, artwork and more. The text library is free to use and offers

a helpful starting point for educators seeking to diversify their texts.

Tool 3: Diversify the texts and perspectives in curricula.

One important role of an educator is to curate the texts and perspectives in curricula to challenge dominant narratives around historical events and provide students with critical viewpoints. It is essential for educators to approach text selection in ways that prioritize critical literacy and cultural responsiveness in addition to complexity. Students need to see themselves reflected in curricula as well as learn about diverse perspectives and experiences different from their own.

LFI resources for diversifying curricula include the webinar *Diversifying Classroom Texts* and “[Critical Engagement With Materials](#)” from *Critical Practices for Social Justice Education*.

Tool 4: Use an inquiry-based approach to teaching.

Inquiry-based teaching is an important pedagogical approach that helps students critically examine historical topics. Teachers can plan and facilitate, for example, inquiry design models requiring that students analyze divergent perspectives by using a variety of

The LFI Teaching Hard History podcast episode “Using the WPA Slave Narratives” (Season 2, Episode 11) provides an excellent discussion about the use of one rich primary source that exemplifies the importance of critical analysis.

The Federal Writers’ Project interviewed over 3,000 formerly enslaved individuals. On its surface, this would seem like an invaluable resource for educators who want to teach about American slavery using primary sources from the perspective of the people enslaved. Upon reading many of these interviews, however, educators and students might be shocked to find people who were formerly enslaved recorded as speaking positively about their experience. A better understanding of the context of these primary sources reveals that the conditions of the interview likely influenced

those responses. The interviewers, who were mostly white women, wrote a rendition, rather than a transcript, of the formerly enslaved peoples’ testimonies. Some of the interviewers were related to enslavers who had held interviewees in bondage. The interviews also took place in the Jim Crow South, and so most of the people being interviewed were very elderly people who were children during slavery. Finally, the interviewers asked leading questions, like asking about the good times during enslavement. Despite this, you still find people who criticized slavery, sometimes in coded ways. As historian Cynthia Lynn Lyerly says, “If you read carefully enough, you can often see the formerly enslaved people finding spaces to tell the truth about slavery despite the fact that the interviewer wants them to tell a rosy story.”

primary and secondary sources and then draw their own conclusions.

The LFJ resources “[Using Inquiry To Teach Honest History](#)” and “[Teaching Hard History Inquiry Design Models](#)” provide strategies and examples.

Tool 5: Teach students to read the world critically.

If you have a fixed curriculum or a problematic text that centers a dominant narrative that you are required to teach, consider shifting your pedagogical approach to help students critically read and engage with the content.

Learning for Justice offers several [critical reading teaching strategies](#). “Reading Against the Grain” can help secondary students to analyze the dominant reading of a text and engage in alternative or “resistant” readings. Even elementary students can participate in similar strategies; consider using “Challenge the Text” to help them recognize multiple perspectives and uncover assumptions and biases within a text.

Tool 6: Consult policies, course mandates and professional organizations.

Educators should explore state-level policies and mandates around teaching honest history to understand what protections they have for teaching more complete and accurate history. Some states [have expanded teachers’ requirements to teach honest history](#) that includes the perspectives of historically excluded groups. Similarly, educators can refer to state standards, many of which require the teaching of topics such as slavery, the Civil Rights Movement and current events. Educators can also learn about their rights to teach about racism, sexism and other topics. Check with local and state unions for additional support and guidance for teaching honest history.

Outside of state policies, educators can identify course mandates or refer to best practices from national organizations to help advocate for

teaching a more inclusive history. For example, the [College Board has taken clear stances on censorship in Advanced Placement \(AP\) courses](#), stating that courses could lose AP designation if schools remove required topics from them and affirming its support for “an open-minded approach to the histories and cultures of different peoples.”

Other nationally recognized professional organizations such as the National Council for the Social Studies and the National Council of Teachers of English have shared position statements on the [importance of inclusion of LGBTQ+ history in instruction, accurate portrayals of Indigenous peoples’ histories, and educator engagement in anti-racist teaching and learning](#).

I’m an elementary teacher. How can I ensure that my classroom discussions on race, gender and honest history are age appropriate?

Many elementary students, including our youngest children, experience racism, sexism or other forms of oppression. They need educators to create spaces for safe, restorative dialogues about students’ experiences.

Affirming and embracing students’ identities helps students develop positive personal and social identities and gives them the opportunity to respectfully learn about and honor others’ identities. As scholar and educator Beverly Daniel Tatum said to Chalkbeat, “Children are not colorblind, but they do learn to be color-silent. They learn early that they’re not supposed to talk about some topics, but they’re also absorbing attitudes at a very young age. The best antidote to prejudice is the conversation.”

Tool 7: Continue to learn how to teach honest history.

Educators should prioritize developing content background and skills to ensure they are responsibly teaching honest history. Teachers must understand developmentally appropriate curriculum and instruction practices, intentionally select pedagogies that bring students safely into and out of challenging conversations, and uncover primary sources that highlight historically excluded narratives.

Several organizations provide educators with free or low-cost support in teaching honest history, including Learning for Justice, Facing History & Ourselves, the Zinn Education Project, Teaching for Change, and Rethinking Schools.

Beyond ensuring that students have an accurate understanding of our past, teaching honest history is an ethical responsibility of educators. ●

What can I do about regulations or restrictions on what I teach?

States and districts have different requirements and constraints on what can and cannot be taught. While this guide is certainly not exhaustive, here are some strategies and materials you may be able to use when teaching honest history:

Use nonfiction texts. The push for rigor and citation of text-based evidence opens the door to using nonfiction texts like those in the online [Teaching Hard History Text Library](#). You can also use the National Archives' educator resource [DocsTeach](#) and the Library of Congress' [online archive](#). These primary source resources directly address Common Core and many state standards around informational texts and citing textual evidence (see Common Core standards RI.1-10).

Use shorter texts. If there are restrictions about particular novels or books, try using excerpts, short stories, poetry or news articles. Search the [Teaching Hard History Text Library](#) and explore [Newsela](#), both of which contain articles that cater to a range of reading levels. Also, use fiction and nonfiction—poetry, biographies, graphic novels, visual and multimedia texts, scholarly journals and articles—from a variety of sources.

Use a variety of authors. Incorporate texts from a diverse set of authors to provide multiple perspectives on a particular topic. For example, you can find texts about American enslavement written by Black and Indigenous authors on sites such as the [Center for Native American and Indigenous Research](#). [We Need Diverse Books](#) is another great resource for finding a variety of texts.

Let students take the lead. Have students do the research. Give your students the tools to find texts, use critical thinking skills and break down concepts around honest history. Try using [LFJ's digital literacy lessons](#) to help prepare students for finding and reading primary and other sources that will help them learn honest history.

- Grades K-2: [Choosing Reliable Sources](#)
- Grades 3-5: [Evaluating Reliable Sources](#)
- Grades 6-8: [Understanding and Evaluating Online Searches](#)
- Grades 9-12: [Evaluating Online Sources](#)

Encourage students to start and lead book clubs. Check out [LFJ's Reading for Social Justice guide](#) for tips and strategies on having students create reading groups around texts, especially books.

Engaging Families and Caregivers

Overview

Families and caregivers want the best for their children, and they play an essential role in students' learning. When educators actively engage the people who are central to children's lives outside of school, they are building networks that support students' experiences within school as well. Teachers who create a space where caregivers can see themselves as a valuable resource in students' learning strengthen interactions among educators, students and caregivers.

To advocate for honest history and inclusive school practices, educators must actively partner with families and caregivers. This section highlights tools to help build collaboration to ensure that all students have access to learning honest and accurate history.

LFJ's *Critical Practices for Social Justice Education* guide has a section on "[Family and Community Engagement](#)" that offers strategies to consider when engaging families and caregivers in conversations about historical topics and suggestions for how educators can invite families to share knowledge.

Tool 8: Build relationships with families and caregivers.

Prioritize getting to know students and their caregivers. All children have unique stories, histories and experiences. Educators can be intentional in learning about the identities of students and their caregivers, what they value, and what they hope for in the students' future.

Taking the time to build and sustain engagement with families and caregivers shows that you value their identities and perspectives. Families and caregivers have historical narratives and wisdom; incorporating these narratives into students' education helps make connections to their identities.

Tool 9: Cultivate dialogue with families and caregivers about what's happening in the classroom.

Maintaining open and honest communication with caregivers is key to strengthening

Tool 8:

Build relationships with families and caregivers.

Tool 9:

Cultivate dialogue with families and caregivers about what's happening in the classroom.

Tool 10:

Collaborate with families and caregivers to reduce or eliminate pushback.

Tool 11:

Draw on family and community knowledge about historical topics.

relationships between families and schools. Communication strategies that honor the agency and contributions of families and caregivers enable them to become active participants in students' learning.

Communication is essential for families and caregivers to trust that educators are prioritizing the best interests of their children. When preparing to teach honest history, it may be helpful to provide caregivers with an overview of what students will explore, research and uncover. Educators can share this information at teacher-family meetings, in a classroom newsletter or via other methods used for regular communication. Throughout the school year, communicate regularly to keep caregivers informed and engaged in what their children are learning (see the family contact sheet in Appendix B of this guide).

Make yourself available for dialogue with families when students or their caregivers feel they are faced with a challenging topic. Listen, ask questions, don't assume and remain sensitive to caregivers' concerns. Ask caregivers how you can partner to support their students' learning. Maintaining honest communication with

families builds relationships and partnerships that establish trust between educators and families.

In addition to focusing on “what” is being taught, clearly explain “why” this learning is essential and how it benefits all children. Provide extensions for learning at home on particular topics so caregivers can engage both in learning and teaching children. Remember, families and caregivers are among their children’s first and most important teachers. Be proactive with your communication and willing to listen to families and caregivers in return.

Tool 10: Collaborate with families and caregivers to reduce or eliminate pushback.

Teaching honest history sometimes means addressing topics that some individuals might find uncomfortable. These conversations can be difficult and are being restricted in some states. However, depriving some children of affirming spaces and erasing historically marginalized communities from representation run counter to the principles of responsible education.

Families and caregivers can be crucial collaborators in advocating for honest history in schools, communities and states. In building relationships with caregivers, educators can foster understanding among families of the importance of inclusive learning spaces that affirm all children, not only those who are the majority in specific classrooms and schools. Educators have an opportunity to listen to, affirm and advocate for underrepresented communities and families. Focusing on every child’s right to safe, affirming and inclusive schools can help to build empathy among caregivers in understanding perspectives beyond their own lived experiences.

Educators can use age-appropriate practices for children in all grades to learn honest history. And again, open and honest dialogue and proactively sharing information about what students are learning can help reduce pushback from families, caregivers and students. Even so, educators may experience opposition. Share

lesson plans with your administrator as well as with those pushing back. Consult your union or a licensed attorney in your jurisdiction about any applicable laws and how they may affect your ability to have these classroom discussions. Outline how your plans align with state standards, and listen to families and caregivers who are feeling uncomfortable. Invite them to observe a lesson in your classroom or otherwise engage with the curriculum.

Building collaboration with families and caregivers can help in creating a broader base of support for honest history lessons and inclusive school practices that benefit all students.

“An artificial division between parents and educators is being exploited to advance the harmful agendas of political groups attacking inclusive learning in public schools to the detriment of young people’s well-being and education.

“Most parents and caregivers—and responsible family and community groups—in the U.S. support education based on credible well-researched pedagogy, want learning that develops young people’s critical thinking, and favor confronting the challenges of inequitable structures so all children can grow and develop as future decision-makers and citizens.”

From “Parents and Caregivers for Inclusive Education” by Maya Henson Carey, Ed.D.

Tool 11: Draw on family and community knowledge about historical topics.

By tapping into family and community histories, backgrounds and cultures through teaching honest history, educators enable students to explore the history of the U.S. and make connections to the histories of their families and communities.

Creating opportunities for students to share family and community stories means students can benefit from their collective experiences, perspectives and wisdom, and this method of learning from others can build their appreciation for diversity. When educators provide space for historically excluded narratives and histories, they affirm student, family and community identities.

Learn and know how to talk about race and honest history and how to be a facilitator of the learning process. Recognize how your identity shows up in the learning space and know your students, families and community and how they can support learning. Bring in individuals from the community and family members who are scholars on a given topic. Remind students and families about the purpose and goals of the lesson and be clear about your intentions.

To draw on family and community knowledge, consider the following:

- Create assignments that encourage participation from caregivers or require seeking input from community members.
- Invite caregivers and community members to sit in on student presentations that involve family and community support, such as showcases of local history.
- Take a historical tour through the school community, inviting families and community members to join the tour or present their historical perspectives. ●

Educators can connect students' families and communities to historical topics, which benefits students' learning and builds relationships with families and communities. In the Learning for Justice article "[Reading Together](#)," writer Dave Constantin shares how families created a learning space for their children to think about and discuss social justice. LfJ's [Reading for Social Justice: A Guide for Families and Educators](#) can assist caregivers in organizing social justice reading groups.

New 2023 Edition!

Teaching Honest History

If young people are to make the vision of a just and peaceful world a reality, we must give them the tools to build a strong multiracial democracy—and those tools include an accurate, comprehensive and inclusive history of the United States. Learning for Justice offers the following curriculum frameworks for teaching honest history.

Teaching Hard History: American Slavery

Most students leave high school without an adequate understanding of the role slavery played in the development of the United States. *Teaching Hard History: American Slavery* is a comprehensive framework for teaching this critical topic and helping students understand how slavery influences us in the present day. Resources include: the K–5 and 6–12 frameworks, student texts, the *Teaching Hard History podcast series*, Key Concept Videos and professional development webinars.



Teaching the Civil Rights Movement *A Framework for Teaching the Black Freedom Struggle*

At this critical moment in which states and districts are attempting to censor discussions of race and racism in U.S. history, *Teaching the Civil Rights Movement* is an essential resource. This curriculum begins in 1877 with Reconstruction and continues the narrative of the movement for equality and civil rights through the Civil Rights Movement of the 1950s and '60s to the present. This framework centers Black Americans' struggle, while pointing out the ways in which white supremacy was institutionalized—across multiple levels of society—to deny political, social and economic equality to Black people.

Explore these resources at

learningforjustice.org

Engaging Colleagues

Overview

When educators feel like they are not alone in their belief that students deserve access to accurate and inclusive learning, they are more likely to persevere in their advocacy for teaching honest histories. Colleagues in school buildings who know the same families and community members can be an essential source of support. Educators who actively engage with their colleagues foster communities that can work together to teach honest histories.

Some educators have lamented that they often experience pushback instead of supportive partnerships from their colleagues. Others have commented that they feel restricted in what they can do. Sometimes colleagues are not actively resistant to teaching honest histories, but their passive reluctance to engage creates barriers. As an educator from California noted, “Many of [my colleagues] are interested but don’t have the time or motivation to explore on their own. Some of them are stuck in their habits and not willing to reexamine their teaching.” We have heard similar stories from educators across the nation. More recently, educators have expressed that their colleagues are fearful of teaching honest history because of concerns around parent pushback or job loss. Some are even getting in trouble for teaching it. As a result, educators can feel alone in this work.

On the other hand, educators who say they have supportive colleagues feel empowered and encouraged to keep teaching honest histories.

Understanding these dynamics, we provide the following tools to help educators engage colleagues.

Tool 12: Identify and engage allies.

Remember that you are not alone in your support for the teaching of honest history. There are allies in your school and community doing this work, whether you have identified them already or not. Find the colleagues who are teaching diverse and inclusive narratives, even if only partially, and collaborate with them. For example, is an art teacher doing a unit on Indigenous art? How might you

Tool 12:
Identify and engage allies.

Tool 13:
Use Learning for Justice’s *Speak Up at School* and *Let’s Talk!* resources.

Tool 14:
Create a professional learning community on teaching honest history.

Tool 15:
Break down silos within the school community to foster an interdisciplinary approach.

“When confronted with these realities during their visit, learners of all ages realize we aren’t merely in some place to look passively at history—we are in an active, transformative space where our understanding of the lives of people who were enslaved is challenged directly. This history lives and breathes every day, and we have a role in changing the narratives around enslavement and Black people in the U.S.”

From “Survival, Resistance and Resilience” by Amber N. Mitchell, former director of education at Whitney Plantation

then bring related content into your units of study? This could be done in single lessons, by combining classes with the art teacher, or simply by brainstorming and co-planning with your colleague about how you will both address the topic. Educators can build coalitions with other educators, community members, families and caregivers, school administrators, district staff, unions, and, most powerfully, students.

Allies can also be found outside of schools. The LFJ article “[Partnering With Museums To Teach Honest History](#)” by Jey Ehrenhalt provides examples of how educators who work

for community groups, like local museums, can be considered colleagues. They also advance honest histories, and school-based educators can partner with them to deepen students' understanding of these topics. Taking the time to listen to colleagues who are doing this work can inspire others to take action as well.

Tool 13: Use Learning for Justice's *Speak Up at School* and *Let's Talk!* resources.

The *Speak Up at School* guide offers tools, resources and strategies to prepare educators to speak up against prejudice, bias and stereotypes at school. Sharing the *Speak Up* resource along with its strategies may build your colleagues' confidence in teaching honest histories. This resource provides educators with tangible steps to stop bigotry and hate from being expressed in classrooms, schools and communities.

When prepared with the four strategies from the *Speak Up at School* guide (Interrupt, Question,

Educate, Echo), educators can feel more confident in engaging in difficult conversations with their students. Educators will be prepared to intervene if and when someone makes a disparaging comment.

Let's Talk! is a resource for educators to help build their competency facilitating classroom conversations about critical topics like identity, discrimination and inequality. Learning how to communicate about such topics as white privilege, police violence, economic inequality and mass incarceration requires practice, and facilitating critical conversations with students demands courage and skill. This guide offers classroom-ready strategies educators can use to plan discussions and facilitate these conversations with students.

These guides can help educators feel more prepared, and they can open the door to discussion and collaboration among colleagues.

Consider advocating for staff professional development sessions around *Speak Up* and *Let's Talk!* Learning for Justice offers [open-enrollment workshops](#) about these publications.

Speak Up at School

Interrupt

Speak up against every bigoted and prejudiced remark—every time, in the moment, without exception. Think about what you'll say ahead of time so you're prepared to act instantly.

Question

Ask simple questions in response to hateful remarks to find out why the speaker made the offensive comment and how you can best address the situation.

Educate

Explain why a term or phrase is offensive. Encourage the person to choose a different expression. Hate isn't behind all hateful speech. Sometimes ignorance is at work, or lack of exposure to a diverse population.

Echo

If someone else speaks up against hate, thank them and reiterate their anti-bigotry message. One person's voice is a powerful start. Many voices together create change.

Tool 14: Create a professional learning community on teaching honest history.

A professional learning community (PLC) can provide educators with collaboration and support around teaching honest history. By participating in a PLC, educators co-create safer spaces to discuss resources, research and pedagogy. And PLC participation can limit feelings of isolation by building allyship and partnerships.

PLCs take multiple forms and have various areas of focus. Educators can create a PLC with other teachers in their content area to help revise and decenter whiteness in current lessons and curricula. Or they may choose to create a PLC across content areas to provide space for co-constructing interdisciplinary units. There is strength and power in numbers, and finding colleagues willing to work with you is essential to creating change in schools.

Learning for Justice offers a PLC through our [Teaching Hard History: American Slavery cohorts](#). Check out our website for more information, and apply to be part of our community of educators working to ensure students receive an honest, accurate history of slavery.

Tool 15: Break down silos within the school community to foster an interdisciplinary approach.

Honest history should not be solely relegated to social studies classrooms but incorporated instead into all content areas. First, teaching honest history across subject areas can create more holistic and comprehensive curricula, helping students build connections and strengthen their critical thinking skills. Second, a multidisciplinary approach addresses history through a variety of contexts and lenses, so students learn more facets of a subject or topic. Finally, in the language of Rudine Sims Bishop, Ph.D., in [“Mirrors, Windows, and Sliding Glass Doors,”](#) this approach creates a sliding door that students can cross through in order to better learn to live alongside people who are different from them, as well as for students to see themselves and others represented in history and curriculum.

One way to break down silos is to create interdisciplinary units. For example, a history educator teaching about American enslavement may collaborate with a music teacher, science teacher and art teacher to provide students with a deeper, more complete history. The history teacher can provide the historical content and context while the music teacher provides a lesson on spirituals and the importance of music as resistance for enslaved people. The science teacher can contribute by teaching a lesson on race as a social construct and providing information around genetics and the myths around “racial” differences in body build and features (see [Race: The Power of an Illusion](#) from Facing History & Ourselves for more ideas around this lesson). And the art teacher can tie the unit together by having students sculpt memorials to honor formerly enslaved people. In this way, educators from different disciplines

can co-construct units that help students gain a better understanding of honest histories.

By working across disciplines, educators not only build connections across subject areas that are frequently siloed but also build connections with one another, limiting isolation and fostering a sense of community around their work. Colleagues acting together in solidarity create a safer, braver school environment in which their students can learn about and feel comfortable engaging with honest histories. Find that community within your school and support one another to help ensure honest histories are being taught—not just in certain classrooms but across all disciplines and at all grade levels. ●

“Democracy cannot be sustained, let alone flourish, in the 21st century without open and robust spaces for rational discussion and analysis about our different experiences and viewpoints. This is an essential reason why inclusive education is crucial to our basic self-interests and our collective success. Our schools must furnish a diverse platform to teach all students how to intellectually navigate a world full of profound challenges and an assortment of competing ideas, perspectives, cultures, religions, languages and philosophies.”

**From “The Promise of Inclusive Education”
by Gregory M. Anderson, Ph.D.**

A Collaborative Approach to Teaching Honest History

Educators who are working in collaboration can create lessons to engage students with essential questions that lend themselves to diverse answers. The aims of essential questions are to stimulate thought, provoke inquiry and spark more questions. Essential questions can also be overarching or topical. Specifically, educators might collaborate around a content topic and use Learning for Justice's *Social Justice Standards* framework to unpack and draft essential questions through the lenses of Identity (self), Diversity (others), Justice (systems) and Action.

Here are examples of essential questions that were drafted to better engage students in a topic frequently taught in U.S. history: the period typically referred to as "Westward Expansion." This topic is most often addressed from a white-centric point of view (evident even in the term "Westward Expansion"). For other people, like many Indigenous Americans, this same period might more accurately have been experienced as "Eastern Encroachment." The U.S. history teachers who drafted the following essential questions were seeking to engage students in a more critical understanding of this period in history and to draw out universal themes that help make connections to the world around them.

Topic: "Westward Expansion" (or "Eastern Encroachment")

Essential Questions

- **Identity:** What is my family's history of migration?
- **Diversity:** What are some of my classmates' histories of family migration?
- **Justice:** How are different groups fairly and unfairly affected by human migration?
- **Action:** What can we do to ensure that migration is fair to all people?

Work with your colleagues using the template in Appendix B to create essential questions around an honest history topic.

Engaging School and District Administrators

Overview

Administrative and district-level advocacy is central to a positive working environment for educators. When school and district leaders explicitly express support for their teachers and for honest histories, educators feel more encouraged to keep doing this important work. On the other hand, administrators who actively reject the teaching of honest histories or are simply silent about it can create discouragement, self-censorship and fear among educators.

Many principals and other school and district leaders understand the importance of research-based practices and the need to create safer and more inclusive school environments. The well-being and representation of all students should be a priority commitment of school administrators, and many administrators have taken strong stances in favor of teaching honest histories.

The following tools are aimed at helping educators gain the support of administrators in advocating for teaching honest history.

Tool 16: Create and conduct a school climate survey.

School climate is directly related to student learning. The National Center on Safe Supportive Learning Environments states that “research has shown that positive school climate is tied to high or improving attendance rates, test scores, promotion rates, and graduation rates.”

For examples of school climate surveys, see the [Local School Climate Survey from GLSEN](#) or the [Comprehensive School Climate Inventory](#) from the National School Climate Center.

To engage school and district leaders, it can be helpful for educators to gather data that demonstrates broad support from their constituents around teaching honest history. For example, create and send out a school climate survey to members of the school ecosystem—including educators, parents, caregivers, community members and students—to learn their thoughts and feelings on teaching honest history. Gather both quantitative data (such as

Tool 16:

Create and conduct a school climate survey.

Tool 17:

Promote student work and share student testimonies.

Tool 18:

Use family support in advocating for teaching honest history.

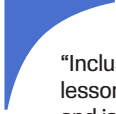
Tool 19:

Use colleague support and solidarity for teaching honest history.

showing the percentage of people in favor of teaching these histories) and qualitative data (such as testimonials from students and their families who have benefited from learning honest histories). Present the collected and analyzed data to your administrators as evidence of the importance and value of teaching honest histories in your school community.

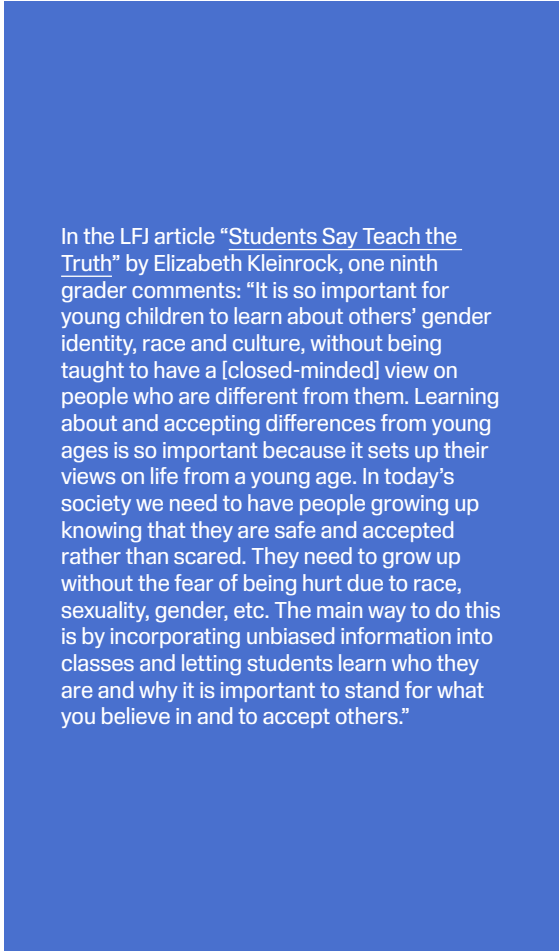
Tool 17: Promote student work and share student testimonies.

Students want to learn about honest histories—and their perspectives can, and should, have the most power in enacting real change. To engage students in this conversation, educators can collect and share student testimony on how teaching honest histories affects their learning and present that information to administrators. Educators can also consider encouraging students to advocate to administrators, engaging in dialogue as to why learning honest histories helps them make more meaningful connections to history and their communities. Perhaps the most powerful way students can advocate to administrators is by showing them samples of work they complete on the topic.



“Inclusive curriculum incorporates accurate lessons about historical events, figures and issues relevant to LGBTQ+ people and communities that have long been underrepresented in textbooks and other materials. Accurate and inclusive lessons not only affirm LGBTQ+ students, but also give non-LGBTQ+ students clear information about the diverse world around them and help prepare all young people to navigate and contribute to a multicultural society.”

From “Inclusive Education Benefits All Children” by Melanie Willingham-Jaggers and GLSEN



In the LFI article “Students Say Teach the Truth” by Elizabeth Kleinrock, one ninth grader comments: “It is so important for young children to learn about others’ gender identity, race and culture, without being taught to have a [closed-minded] view on people who are different from them. Learning about and accepting differences from young ages is so important because it sets up their views on life from a young age. In today’s society we need to have people growing up knowing that they are safe and accepted rather than scared. They need to grow up without the fear of being hurt due to race, sexuality, gender, etc. The main way to do this is by incorporating unbiased information into classes and letting students learn who they are and why it is important to stand for what you believe in and to accept others.”

Tool 18: Use family and caregiver support in advocating for teaching honest history.

Educators can elevate the perspectives of supportive families and caregivers in their efforts to engage administrators in this work. Families and caregivers can call, email or visit administrators to express their support.

Additionally, educators may create opportunities for parents and caregivers to come into school and see what teaching honest history looks like in action or discuss the history. This can be a community conversation that includes administrators, students, parents and caregivers, along with educators. For example, one educator from Georgia said they host conversation nights for parents and caregivers to come in and talk with one another about the honest histories being taught in the classroom.

If administrators see these conversations and hear words of support from caregivers and community members, they will be more inclined to ensure honest history is taught in their schools.

Tool 19: Use colleague support and solidarity for teaching honest history.

The power of collective advocacy with colleagues in the school building is necessary to advocate to administrators for the teaching of honest histories. Whether it is through a PLC or another means, educators can band together in solidarity to express concerns and emphasize the need to ensure that honest histories are taught in their school. Some educators may feel apprehensive about challenging administrators in support of this work for fear of backlash. However, there is strength in numbers. Use your community of allies to advocate together for continuing to teach honest histories in your school.

Administrators play an important role in setting the tone in schools. By creating an inclusive environment that uplifts students and educators, administrators lay the foundation for honest histories to be taught in their schools. Administrators can, and should, be among our main allies in this work. ●

Advocating to Local and State Boards of Education

Overview

Classroom teachers and administrators report that their ability to teach honest history is greatly influenced by local and state boards of education (BOEs). A number of BOEs have taken strong, supportive stances on the importance of honest history instruction in schools. However, some local and state BOEs have taken measures to censor honest, accurate and inclusive education. These efforts have included attempts to restrict history instruction as well as classroom conversations about racism and other forms of oppression.

Media reports have shown an increase in school board meetings dominated by mostly white community members who show up to demand certain curricula, books and resources be removed from their schools. One high school teacher in Virginia shared that a member of their BOE is a “woke checker” who posts on Facebook, outing educators who discuss honest histories. This same teacher now worries that her African American history course will be canceled, even though losing this course would be detrimental to the students who need this course as part of their education.

Despite news reports and social media posts showing certain community members loudly calling for book bans, censored materials, and the firing of teachers who are teaching and advocating for honest histories, research shows most U.S. parents and caregivers want honest histories taught in schools. The following tools offer guidance for advocating to local and state boards of education for teaching honest history.

Tool 20: Show up and speak up at school board meetings.

As educators, you can demonstrate your commitment to advocating for your students and championing honest, accurate and inclusive education by attending school board meetings. Sharing public comments with decision-makers offers an opportunity for educators to speak about the direct effects of decisions and policies on educators’ and students’ abilities to teach and learn honest history.

Tool 20:

Show up and speak up at school board meetings.

Tool 21:

Support student advocacy and uplift student work and testimonies.

Tool 22:

Engage multigenerational coalitions.

Tool 23:

Join committees to write or develop standards.

Learning directly from educators who speak up at board meetings also offers families, caregivers and community members an opportunity for a greater understanding of what is actually being taught in classrooms and the potential consequences—intentional or unintentional—of board decisions.

Tool 21: Support student advocacy and uplift student work and testimonies.

Educators can help students realize their power to affect policies and decisions by supporting student advocacy and activism. Start by helping students understand how decisions and policies from boards of education affect their learning. Support students in engaging with BOEs and leading action. Collect student testimony on how teaching honest histories is affecting students’ learning and present these stories on students’ behalf to school boards.

Educators should include students when engaging with school boards so students can share firsthand experiences that demonstrate the importance of teaching honest histories. Educators and administrators can also support these efforts by sharing case studies and student work with school boards to emphasize the value of teaching honest histories. Case studies,

“A history that honestly addresses race and racism in the United States is essential because it is a whole history that allows us to identify the root causes of enduring structural challenges and to develop effective, equitable solutions. It reminds us that history is alive and a powerful force in our everyday experiences.”

From **“Paving the Way to a Vibrant Multiracial Democracy”** by Angela Glover Blackwell and Learning for Justice

for example, can link teaching honest history to improving school climate and culture. See the “What Administrators Can Do To Support Educators” section for more information.

Tool 22: Engage multigenerational coalitions.

Building coalitions and solidarity among educators, students, families, caregivers and community members is key to effectively advocating for teaching honest history to decision-makers. This advocacy work is essential in showing that the coalition supporting honest history is larger than the vocal minority against it.

The Conflict Campaign: Exploring Local Experiences of the Campaign To Ban “Critical Race Theory” in Public K-12 Education in the U.S., 2020-2021 states that “[t]he National Education Association (NEA) provides a model resolution to present to school boards for consideration, which contains ‘a commitment to affirming inclusion of all students,’ insistence on ‘the right of our students to learn,’ and a firm stance inviting professional development to support students better.” This proactive approach can help sway school boards toward supporting teaching honest histories instead of working against it.

Tool 23: Join committees to write or develop standards.

Educators can leverage their expertise in the classroom by creating or developing state

standards around honest history to help ensure that educators in their state are required to teach a more inclusive, accurate history. Educators can also use their local networks to ensure that historians, colleagues and other community members who are knowledgeable about and supportive of honest history share feedback on state standards.

Although state legislatures ultimately have the power to change statutes, including standards, only a few states require legislative action for the adoption of standards. ●

“Collective agency and acts of resistance have been the most powerful and inspiring ways of participating in democracy. This is why knowing the true history of our nation is fundamental to understanding the rights and responsibilities each person has in challenging democracy to be more inclusive.”

From **“Civics for Democracy”** by Jalaya Liles Dunn, director of Learning for Justice

Advocating to State Legislators

Overview

Some states are restricting or limiting educators' ability to teach honest history in their classrooms. If a classroom censorship bill is introduced in your state, consider providing testimony at state hearings, writing an op-ed for your local or state newspaper, directly contacting lawmakers, and other actions to advocate for state policies that support teaching honest history.

Tool 24: Know your rights.

The National Education Association has state guides on [knowing your rights](#), which cover a range of information, from what educators are allowed to teach about racism or sexism to how educators can speak up and challenge bills or policies that limit the teaching of these topics. If possible, check with your local union; they may have additional, region-specific support for teaching honest history.

Tool 25: Prepare your messaging.

Research has shown there is broad support for teaching about race and racism. "[Truth in Our Classrooms Bridges Divides: A Messaging Guide](#)" from the Partnership for the Future of Learning is one resource that can help educators prepare messaging that is broadly appealing and invites the public to support their work. Race Forward's [H.E.A.L. Together toolkit](#) also provides narrative guidance.

Tool 26: Contact your state legislators.

Whether you ask to meet with legislators one on one or contact them via email, letter, phone or social media, educators should express the importance of teaching honest history with state legislators. The Intercultural Development Research Association's (IDRA) guide "[How To Meet With Your Elected Official](#)" is a helpful starting point for preparing to talk to a legislator. IDRA also has helpful tips on [how to navigate the policymaking process](#).

We've included a sample template for writing a letter to your state legislators in Appendix B.

You can also work with other organizations—

Tool 24:
Know your rights.

Tool 25:
Prepare your messaging.

Tool 26:
Contact your state legislators.

Tool 27:
State your public support for teaching accurate history.

Tool 28:
Organize with local, statewide and national coalitions.

"No student should feel erased by their education. From their earliest years they should see themselves reflected in the American story. It is essential for the health of our communities and our democracy that our classrooms promote justice, give students the knowledge and resources to exercise critical thinking, and equip educators with the best tools to guide them. Educating our next generation of leaders about where we've been and how far we have to go is our best hope for realizing a just and equitable future."

From "A Time of Transformation and Possibility," a Learning for Justice Q&A with Margaret Huang, president and chief executive officer of the Southern Poverty Law Center (SPLC) and the SPLC Action Fund

such as your teachers union or local advocacy organizations—to find groups that speak with state legislators.

Tool 27: State your public support for teaching accurate history.

By sharing your stance on teaching honest history, you are expressing solidarity with students. There are several ways to publicly share your support—such as writing a letter to the editor of a local newspaper. You can post your testimonial supporting honest history on social media or even make nonverbal statements, like wearing a Black Lives Matter shirt. You can also sign petitions, joining thousands of educators who have promoted the Zinn Education Project’s “Teach Truth” campaign.

Tool 28: Organize with local, statewide and national coalitions.

There are many people who believe in the importance of students learning honest history. Educators can find allies and coalition groups, either locally or nationally, who are working collectively to challenge anti-truth bills and expand inclusive education. You can join or host local events, such as the Zinn Education Project’s Teach Truth Day of Action, where educators around the country who are committed to teaching honest history gather together in their communities.

At a regional level, IDRA’s Southern Education Equity Network is a forum and resource hub for “concerned parents and caregivers, students, community members, and organizational and coalition friends who advocate for public education and student success across the U.S. South.”

Nationally, Race Forward’s H.E.A.L. (Honest Education Action & Leadership) Together initiative is aimed at “building a movement of students, educators, and parents in school districts across the United States who believe that an honest, accurate and fully funded public education is the foundation for a just, multiracial democracy.” H.E.A.L. Together provides tools and trainings to help you organize your school and community for educational equity.

Learning for Justice provides opportunities—such as our Teaching Hard History Professional Learning Cohorts—to network and learn with and from other educators who are deeply committed to the inclusion of honest histories in schools. ●

“The practice and enforcement of whose perspective is prioritized and whose is erased creates a clearer picture of the harm intended by anti-CRT legislation. For example, when I was an 11th grader, I felt immense discomfort when my U.S. history teacher taught us that slavery was a ‘system of a different time’ and many enslaved people, ‘slaves’ in her words, ‘had good relationships with their “slave masters.”’ Her lesson caused me so much angst that I became combative. Because of my confrontational behavior, the teacher sent me to the principal’s office to be disciplined. I was humiliated and ashamed that I had been disruptive in class, but I was also angry. My parents had instilled in me a love of learning and a respect for educators. They also taught me to be proud of my Black heritage. So, when my history teacher minimized the experiences of my enslaved ancestors, I could not stay silent. These intense feelings of discomfort among students of color should be considered in these legislations, but they are disregarded.”

From “Centering Diverse Parents in the CRT Debate” by Ivory A. Toldson, Ph.D.

What Administrators Can Do To Support Educators in Teaching Honest History




Overview

School and district leaders often act as gatekeepers for whether educators can teach honest histories in their classrooms. Educators have shared with us that their administrators are either very supportive of teaching honest histories or more resistant for fear of “rocking the boat” or because of pressure from school boards to keep teaching histories in traditional, whitewashed ways. Administrators can support educators in advocating for teaching more comprehensive and accurate histories using the following tools.

Tool 29: Proactively communicate your support for teaching honest history.

By simply communicating support for teaching honest histories, administrators can uplift and validate educators. In faculty meetings, administrators may point out the importance of teaching honest history or discuss ways the school community has already enhanced efforts to do this work.

Additionally, administrators may oversee school newsletters and social media accounts that highlight the work teachers and students have done in their classrooms around honest histories. These serve as positive spaces to broadcast to the wider community the work being done in schools, showing why teaching honest history is important.



“This is the really difficult moment that we’re in, so we’re really calling for our school district leaders and school districts to just be bold in how they plan to ensure that every child who steps into a classroom is going to feel safe and affirmed—because that’s what’s needed to be able to learn.”—Ian Siljestrom, Equality Florida’s Safe & Healthy Schools Project

From “Building a Just Future” by Dorothee Benz, Ph.D.

Tool 29:

Proactively communicate your support for teaching honest history.

Tool 30:

Create or join a PLC of administrators who support teaching honest histories.

Tool 31:

Support teachers through affinity groups.

Tool 32:

Support students by honoring their identities.

Administrators also play an essential role in communicating with (and clarifying information for) parents, caregivers and families about the importance of honest history and support for educators.

Tool 30: Create or join a PLC of administrators who support teaching honest histories.

Organizations like [ASCD](#) have many resources and opportunities for school leaders to engage in work around teaching honest histories. Administrators may also choose to create a PLC with other administrators in their school and district to discuss promising practices around teaching honest history as well as how to support their teachers in this work. Refer to the section of this guide on “Engaging Colleagues” for more information on PLCs.

Tool 31: Support teachers through affinity groups.

By encouraging the teaching of honest histories, administrators can help teachers feel supported in their work. Administrators may also choose to

create, listen to and engage with diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI) councils where educators can brainstorm pedagogy and promising practices around inclusive education.

Administrators may also support educators by creating affinity groups. According to [the Great Schools Partnership](#), an affinity group is a group of people sharing a common trait, such as race, gender or religion, “who gather with the intention of finding connection, support, and inspiration.” Affinity groups provide a space for attendees to have conversations with others who share their identities. Administrators can help set up these groups by conducting a survey to explore which teachers want to start a group and which identities they want to organize around. The interested educators can then set up meetings as they desire.

Actively supporting teachers builds trust and a positive school culture that is conducive to having difficult conversations around honest histories.

Tool 32: Support students by honoring their identities.

Showing students that administrators support the teaching and learning of honest histories in your school acknowledges that you value all students and actively wish to honor and uplift their identities. Encourage symbols of equity and allyship in classrooms and throughout the school to create physical reminders that school should be a safe and affirming space for all students.

At the most human level, administrators should get to know their students, ensuring that all students’ identities are reflected in the school. This can be accomplished through curriculum efforts, elective class choices and extracurricular activities. Examples include creating or supporting a Black Student Union (BSU) or a Gender and Sexuality Alliance (GSA) club or offering elective courses on Asian American Pacific Islander history, Holocaust and genocide studies, or African American history.

Administrators can also establish affinity groups for students and create student-led DEI councils so students can influence policies and practices

in the school community. Even if there appear to be legal restrictions on explicitly discussing specific identities, you can uphold the values of celebrating difference and making your school environment safer for all students.

For more tools around cultivating an inclusive school culture and climate, see Learning for Justice’s [Critical Practices for Social Justice Education](#) resource guide. Find strategies for preventing and navigating bias- or hate-related incidents in the LfJ guide [Responding to Hate and Bias at School](#). ●

Administrators are encouraged to read other sections of this publication for further guidance and information on engaging families and communities.

“Despite the political attacks, it is important to recognize that LGBTQ+ students have legal rights that no school is allowed to impinge upon. Foremost among these when it comes to GSAs [Gender and Sexuality Alliance clubs] is the Equal Access Act of 1984, which protects public secondary school students who want to form a noncurricular club, including GSAs.”

—From [“A Refuge for LGBTQ+ Young People”](#) by Dorothee Benz, Ph.D.

What Districts Can Do To Support Educators in Teaching Honest History



Overview

Educators have identified district support as a crucial lever for teaching honest history. While anti-LGBTQ+ bills and policies to restrict honest history (typically referred to as “anti-CRT,” an acronym for “critical race theory”) have been introduced across the country, and several have even passed into law, some districts have taken stances in favor of inclusive education. Other districts, however, have remained silent or folded under pressure against teaching honest history.

District office personnel play important leadership roles in protecting educators who teach honest history. In the ASCD article “[How Leaders Can Create Clarity on Race and Curriculum](#),” an equity officer from a Southern school district explained the importance of district support, sharing that districts “have to continue to push back against the opponents of this work by really talking about what it is that we’re doing ... to make sure that every young person that is involved in the school system has an adequate opportunity, has adequate access, and has everything they need to be successful.”

For district-level staff members, here are five tools that you can use to support educators in teaching honest history.

Tool 33: Proactively communicate your district’s support for teaching honest history.

Districts should share clear, matter-of-fact communication about how honest history supports students and what teaching honest history looks like in classrooms. For examples, district staff can review the Learn From History Coalition guide *[Minimizing Misinformation About History and Social Studies](#)*.

Tool 34: Identify state standards and course mandates that support teaching honest histories.

Educate yourself and your school administrators and teachers about state standards and other

Tool 33:

Proactively communicate your district’s support for teaching honest history.

Tool 34:

Identify state standards and course mandates that support the teaching of honest histories.

Tool 35:

Support educator use of strong curricular and instructional practices for teaching honest history.

Tool 36:

Identify allies in the district and the community who can share their support for teaching honest history.

Tool 37:

Support school leaders in teaching honest history.

mandates. This helps staff understand their legal obligations and provides guidance for what content educators should include in their curricula. Some states have legal requirements about teaching inclusive history. Additionally, many professional, nationally recognized institutions, such as the National Council of Teachers of English and the National Council for the Social Studies, have written position statements in support of the responsibility educators have to teach honest history.

“An honest retelling of United States history includes events and experiences of all people who shaped it. To challenge the traditional narrative—one steeped in white supremacy and American exceptionalism—is to challenge power. Hence, the agitation we’re witnessing around what teachers teach and how.”

From “Teaching the Past To Improve the Future” by Coshandra Dillard

Tool 35: Support educator use of strong curricular and instructional practices for teaching honest history.

Many educators need support in learning promising practices for teaching honest history, which can include curricular resources, pedagogical choices and inclusive classroom cultures. Districts play a vital role in providing professional development and support for school administrators and teachers, such as bringing in historians or experts in history to speak at districtwide professional learning events.

Learning for Justice provides professional development options including virtual workshops, learning cohorts, facilitator guides and self-guided learning.

Tool 36: Identify allies in the district and the community who can share their support for teaching honest history.

There is broad support for schools to teach about the true history of the United States, including the history of racism. Consider working with a diverse cross section of community members to galvanize support. These groups can speak at school board meetings, advocate for legislation that supports inclusive history and help educate the broader community about the importance of learning hard history. Many community

members are invested in ensuring that students have the freedom to learn, and they can be powerful allies.

Tool 37: Support school leaders in teaching honest history.

When requesting support for teaching honest history, teachers are most likely to approach their school leaders first. District staff can help school leaders in advocating for teaching honest history by providing specific messaging that school leaders can use to communicate to the school community, families and caregivers, and the public. Additionally, district staff can help school administrators by providing professional learning on teaching honest history as well as curricular resources and guidance on difficult topics. ●

For more information on supporting teachers, we encourage school and district staff to read other sections of this guide.

Appendices

Appendix A: FAQ

I'm not a history or social studies teacher, but I believe that students deserve to learn honest histories. How can I help?

Every discipline has a history; you can choose to include or ignore it. Honest history can and should be incorporated into all content areas. First, this creates a more holistic and comprehensive curriculum to help students build connections and develop critical thinking skills. Second, it reinforces different histories through a variety of contexts and lenses, so students learn more facets of a subject or topic. Finally, it creates more windows and mirrors for students to see themselves represented in history and throughout the curriculum.

Here are three steps to bring more honest history into classrooms:

- 1. Assess.** Ask yourself the following questions: Where are the gaps in your curriculum around teaching honest histories? Thinking about a range of identities and lived experiences such as race, ability and citizenship, who is represented in what you currently teach? Who or what should you incorporate to be more representative of your students, your community and the nation? Do your books, resources, notable figures and other curricular materials focus on dominant narratives, or do they feature multiple perspectives?

The [Culturally Responsive STEAM Curriculum Scorecard](#) from NYU Metro Center is a great place to start for math and science educators who want to assess their understanding and inclusion of honest history in their classrooms.

- 2. Learn.** Take time to study history with which you're not familiar. As educators, we are never finished learning. Understanding the history you want to teach your students is an essential step in making connections to units of study you already teach and bringing a more diverse and complete history into your classroom. Science teachers can turn to the Learning for Justice article "[Use the Tools of Science To Recognize](#)

[Inequity in Science](#)" to better understand inequity in science content. The LFJ webinar [Justice in the Science Classroom](#), hosted in partnership with the Smithsonian Science Education Center, is also a helpful resource. Math educators can draw inspiration from the organization RadicalMath and the [Rethinking Mathematics](#) publication from Rethinking Schools.

- 3. Plan.** When you create your units and lessons, start with inclusive and thought-provoking essential questions: For example, from where do we get clean water? How do environmental racism and pollution contribute to disparate health outcomes in my community? Incorporate a range of texts—such as biographies, audio, images, books, essays, graphs, charts, data, statistics, scientific papers, art and videos—into your units. Give students the ownership to explore and wrestle with different ideas and perspectives they might not have previously considered.

How do I talk about race, diversity, bias and different lived experiences in culturally responsive, inclusive and sensitive ways?

Every critical conversation, which means a dialogue or discussion about a challenging and emotionally charged topic, has its own context and content, but almost all touch on identity and injustice. Review the following terms (more can be found in LFJ's [Let's Talk!](#) guide) to help you and your students talk and think about critical topics more clearly.

- **Identity:** the set of visible and invisible characteristics we use to categorize and define ourselves and those around us (e.g., gender, race, age, religion, ethnicity, socio-economic status, language, marital/family status, ability, sexual orientation, etc.). Identity shapes our experiences by influencing the ways we see ourselves and the ways others see us.
- **Identity Group:** a group of people who share one or more identity characteristics

(e.g., women, Latine people, teenagers, etc.). Members of an identity group can share a wide range of experiences, positive and negative.

- **Dominant Identity Group:** an identity group whose members share a common privilege. An individual may simultaneously belong to dominant identity groups (e.g., straight, white) and nondominant identity groups (e.g., undocumented, experiencing poverty).
- **Bias:** conscious or unconscious prejudice against an individual or a group based on their identity. Before leading students through these conversations, it's critical for you to examine and consider your own identities. How do they shape and inform your perspective? What is easy for you to talk about? What is difficult, and why? What's holding you back? Educate yourself on different topics to be better equipped to have conversations.

When bringing students in, consider implementing the following strategies:

Use responsive classroom management as one component of an inclusive classroom culture. Discipline and classroom management are central to classroom culture. How are students encouraged to treat one another? What happens when they make poor choices or treat each other disrespectfully? What shapes student-teacher interactions? Involving students in setting classroom policies and expectations can strengthen adherence to shared expectations and values.

Honor student experience. When asking students to explore issues of identity, we must provide spaces where they are seen, valued and respected. Honoring student experience also means providing opportunities for them to learn from one another's varied experiences and perspectives.

Prioritize social emotional skills and safety. Students need to feel respected and valued if they are to fully participate in critical conversations.

Equip students with language and skills. Talk with students about evidence and experience. Give your students opportunity and language to talk about identity. Teach them terms and use them frequently.

Finally, you'll want to work on facilitating and

leading these conversations with your students. Consider the following as you work to lead these conversations:

Consider your goals for the conversation. You could use goals such as the following:

1. Connect a critical topic to shared principles like respect, fairness and individual worth.
2. Demonstrate understanding of perspectives and experiences different from your own.

Teach up to the conversation. Build on knowledge and scaffold teaching for the topics you'll address. Consider the following questions:

1. What context or vocabulary will my students need to speak clearly and honestly about this topic?
2. How can students connect this critical discussion to our curriculum and to their lives?

Be responsive to your students. Your students may experience a wide range of emotions, from discomfort to anger to sadness. Here are some options for checking in with them:

1. Check with students, as a class or individually, before discussions to gauge their feelings.
2. Plan ahead to prevent students from putting classmates on the spot.
3. Get in the habit of bringing guests into your classroom, including colleagues, guest speakers and community advocates.

Find more in-depth information on all of the above strategies and more in LFJ's *Let's Talk!* guide to help you dig deeper into facilitating critical conversations.

Appendix B: Supplemental Materials

An Example of an Interdisciplinary Approach to Teaching Honest History

Directions: With your colleagues, brainstorm essential questions pertaining to a topic around honest histories. Use the IDJA domains from Learning for Justice’s *Social Justice Standards* framework to guide your process.

Essential Questions			
Topic			
Identity	Diversity	Justice	Action
Brainstorm: How do these essential questions help students gain a deeper understanding of honest histories? How does this process of crafting essential questions help colleagues support one another in the teaching of honest histories?			

Family/Caregiver Information and Preference Form

Dear _____,

I believe that communication is important for student success. Please take a few minutes to let me know about your schedule and contact preferences. I will not share this information with anyone unless you allow it.

May I share this information with another teacher? **Yes** ____ **No** ____

May I call you at home? **Yes** ____ **No** ____

If yes, what is the number? _____

Time when you are at home: _____

May I call you on your cell phone? **Yes** ____ **No** ____

If yes, what is the number? _____

May I call you at work? **Yes** ____ **No** ____

If yes, what is your workplace's name? _____

If yes, what is the phone number (and extension)? **Phone** _____ **ext.** _____

May I contact you by email? **Yes** ____ **No** ____

If yes, what is the email address? (Please print clearly.) _____

Work or home email? _____

How often do you check it? _____

About Contacting Me

At school, I am available during my planning period, which is from _____ to _____, and you can reach me at this number: _____.

During the school day, outside of that time block, I cannot come to the telephone because I am teaching or supervising students.

I am also available to speak with you in the following evenings: **M** ____ **T** ____ **W** ____ **TH** ____

Just leave a message for me and be sure to include a description of what you'd like to discuss so I can bring any necessary files home and be prepared to answer your questions.

Thanks!

Template Letter To Contact State Legislators

Dear <State Legislator Name>,

As an educator in <location / district>, I know students are not taught an honest and inclusive history of our country and world and how the legacies of history impact us today. This is a fundamental flaw in our curriculum that leaves students unprepared to take informed action and to become global citizens and future leaders. Honest, accurate and inclusive history education is essential to ensuring students can learn from our past, understand how it influences the present and determine how to work together to build a better future.

I'm reaching out to you because I think my <town / city / district> in <legislator's region> can do better, wants to do better and needs to do better. I ask you to consider supporting educators in teaching the complete history of the country and diversifying the perspectives represented in our curricula. If we're ever going to come together as a nation, we must learn about the systems that tear us apart.

As an educator, I have a great deal of information and experience that I would welcome the opportunity to share with you. I request that you or your staff follow up with me to schedule a meeting. Thank you for your consideration. I hope you will pledge to support teachers, students and communities by encouraging educators to teach the truth.

Sincerely, an educator in your district,

Acknowledgments

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Advocating for Teaching Honest History
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New 2023 Edition!

Critical Practices for Social Justice Education Second Edition

Critical Practices for Social Justice Education (2023) is a resource to support K-12 educators in growing their understanding of social justice principles and integrating them into their practice.

This revised edition is informed by the current social and political landscape, and it acknowledges the new ways educators have been challenged by increased political scrutiny, censorship and debate about what can be taught in schools.

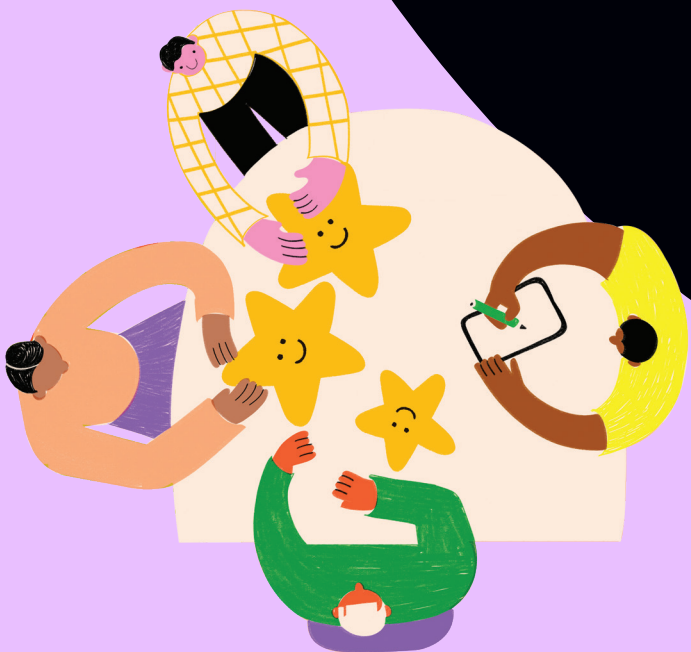
**The guide is organized into four pillars,
each representing a foundational aspect
of social justice education:**

- I. Curriculum and Instruction
- II. Culture and Climate
- III. Leadership
- IV. Family and Community Engagement

Download this guide at



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