

Republicans are drumming up Christian nationalists to swarm school board meetings and protest DEI/Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion and SEL/Social Emotional Learning policies over trumped-up concerns about CRT/Critical Race Theory. The three are often — and inaccurately — combined.

These attacks are an attempt to bully, harass and intimidate board members for taking a stand against hate. The radical right has been pushing political opponents out of board seats this way—we must let defenders of reason on school boards know they are supported.

→ CRT - short for critical race theory - is not taught in Arizona elementary, middle or high schools. Rather, CRT is taught in law schools and graduate-level university courses. Unfortunately, the right-wing is using "CRT" as shorthand for teaching accurate history and diversity, both of which are vital to raising productive members of society.

→ Some claim to support equality while opposing DEI — but DEI initiatives are designed to promote equality by addressing systemic inequalities that prevent some groups from accessing the same opportunities and resources as others. Claiming to support equality while opposing DEI initiatives is inconsistent.

→ Some argue that DEI initiatives are divisive, or even that they promote segregation and racism, while ignoring existing inequalities. DEI acknowledges the fact that inequalities already exist in our society, and develops initiatives that address these existing inequalities and promote inclusivity.

→ Some say they oppose DEI initiatives on the grounds of free speech or academic freedom. This is ironic, as DEI initiatives are designed to create a more inclusive and welcoming learning environment for all students, thus protecting free speech and academic freedom.

→ Some say that DEI initiatives are politically motivated or influenced by a particular ideology, without acknowledging the need for social justice and addressing systemic inequalities.

→ Many DEI opponents argue that individual merit should be the sole factor in determining access to opportunities and resources, without acknowledging that systemic barriers may prevent some groups from accessing the same opportunities and resources as others.

→ Most people agree that it is important for young people to have trusting relationships, a sense of purpose and belonging, and to learn and practice the skills they need to work toward their goals and contribute to their communities. SEL helps create educational opportunities and environments that promote learning and practicing social, emotional, and academic skills, all of which are fundamental to healthy human development.

→ In the context of SEL, "equity" refers to every student—regardless of race, ethnicity, family income levels, learning abilities, home language, immigration status, gender identity, sexual orientation, and other factors—engaging in high-quality educational opportunities and environments that best promote their healthy social, emotional, and academic development.

SEL initiatives provide tangible benefits. A meta-study of more than 270,000 students shows that:

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- SEL interventions that address the five core competencies increased students' academic performance by 11 percentile points, compared to students who did not participate.
  - Students participating in SEL programs showed improved classroom behavior, an increased ability to manage stress and depression, and better attitudes about themselves, others, and school.

→ A 2021 systematic review found that universal SEL interventions enhance young people's social and emotional skills and reduce symptoms of depression and anxiety in the short term. In comparison, other approaches have produced inconsistent results (mindfulness interventions) or limited evidence of impact (positive youth development interventions).

→ Benefits of DEI initiatives in schools include:

- Provides students with tools they need to understand and address existing inequities and their ability to detect their own and others' prejudices
- Improved critical thinking
- Higher overall achievement levels for both majority and minority group members
- Increased interest in improving the lives of people in their communities

**Conflating DEI, SEL and CRT isn't just inaccurate: it's a tool Christian nationalists and white supremacists use to intimidate and harass school board members. DEI initiatives facilitate the recognition and celebration of diversity, bringing benefits to students and communities. SEL supports students' mental health and provides important tools and skills such as self regulation, coping skills, self esteem, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making.**

**We must support those who take a stand against hate.**