



# Testimony

## SB 3

### Protecting Students Against State-Sponsored Racism\*

*Before the Texas House Public Education Committee*

by Kevin Roberts, PhD, CEO

Chairman Dutton and Members:

As a fifth-generation teacher and scholar of American history, I have spent many years in the classroom with students of all ages. With a roomful of students looking to me for knowledge, instruction, and guidance, I can't imagine looking back into their eyes and telling them that they're irredeemably bad, that their nation is built on a lie, and that some of them are more worthy than others—all depending on the color of their skin. This is exactly what critical race theory tells our children to believe.

Critical race theory (CRT) is a divisive, Marxist ideology that attributes differences in socioeconomic status, education, health, income, and other disparate impacts solely to one's skin color. Critical race theorists believe America's institutions and all her societal norms are embedded with racism, which is an abject lie. As Martin Luther King, Jr., reminded us, the fulfillment of America's promise is when we can come to see one another not for the "color of our skin," but for "the content of our character." CRT reverses the decades of gains we have made since MLK's prophetic words in 1963. It is evil and, speaking as a historian, absolutely wrong historically.

CRT also threatens the ability of Texas students to develop their own opinions and practice civil discourse. Instead of teaching students *how* to think, CRT teaches students *what* to think. As a result, the "Partisanship Out of Civics Act" (HB 3979) was passed during Texas's 87th regular session. HB 3979 protects our students from partisan indoctrination and state-sponsored racism, such as "critical race theory" and "culturally responsive teaching." SB 3 builds on this foundation.

1. Senate Bill 3 includes identical language that was introduced in similar legislation during the 87th Legislature's 1st special session (SB 3). The bill directs the commissioner of education to establish a civics training program that aligns with the Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS). While the implementation of professional development can yield positive outcomes for educators and students, we must be careful about one reality: Policy that vests too much authority in a given individual or agency can leave room for misuse, as the officeholder never outlives the office. There is the potential down the road for the civics training program to be used to institute CRT statewide. We have seen examples of this in many other professional development courses in Texas, such as with reading academies, and we would not want this to creep into state-designed training. We suggest adding proper oversight, such as an annual review of the program's curriculum, to ensure it meets TEA standards. In addition, we suggest that this program constitute no more than 25% of the Continuing Professional Education (CPE) requirements for social studies teachers to ensure that educators can still meet their required continuing education hours through providers of their choosing and in all their content areas, including pedagogy.
2. Through the civics training programs, teachers would be provided training on how to address media literacy, *including* instruction on logical fallacies. While we support civics training that addresses media literacy instruction, we believe media literacy instruction should be taught *through* study of logical fallacies, removing any opportunity for partisan teaching and identification of "propaganda." We should be providing students with the tools to determine the accuracy of information sources themselves, so they can maintain these skills far beyond their classroom's walls.

\* This written testimony was originally given before the Texas Senate State Affairs Committee on August 10, 2021.

3. The bill provides language that intends to expand transparency of instructional content and allow parents to see the curriculum. This is a great step in the right direction, and we suggest making this more comprehensive by requiring that all instructional materials assigned to students and through the civics training programs be available and easily accessible to the state's taxpayers, even those who may not be parents of school-aged children.
4. SB 3 also mandates students learn the importance of our democratic processes, while ensuring educators do not pressure students to engage with governmental institutions. The new version of the bill has much clearer language than the previous versions, which will help to discourage the creeping in of the insidious "action civics" movement. Students need to be taught civics, plain and simple—not someone else's version of what civic participation looks like.
5. Removal of the word "responsibly" before the word "participate" has the potential to be problematic. While voting is a sacred privilege and duty we enjoy as Americans, we believe this language would be strengthened if the TEKS taught voting as a civic duty, instead of encouraging students to "participate ... in a constitutional democracy *by voting*."

We believe SB 3 is a step in the direction of safeguarding students from racist ideologies and preventing educators from teaching distorted depictions of American history. We are eager to work together toward legislation that will better preserve our public schools for future generations of Texas children. ★

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR



**Kevin Roberts, PhD**, is the chief executive officer of the Texas Public Policy Foundation. He oversees all the Foundation's policy efforts but gravitates to initiatives on education reform, improving history and civics instruction, and transparency in government. As a scholar of America's Founding, Roberts approaches every public policy issue with the desire to increase self-governance and decrease government overreach.

A lifelong educator, Roberts was a history professor at the University of Texas at Austin before starting his own K-12 school in Louisiana, John Paul the Great Academy. He became the president of Wyoming Catholic College, which the *New York Times* described as being full of "cowboy

Catholics" for refusing federal student loans and grants. Both schools led by Roberts have earned regular recognition for being among the top Catholic schools in the nation.

Roberts earned his PhD in American history from the University of Texas at Austin.

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