



FOUNDATION  
AGAINST  
INTOLERANCE  
& RACISM

FAIR ADVOCACY TOOLKIT

**A Step-by-Step Guide  
For Parents**

## **Race-essentialism, Activism, and Illiberalism in Your School: A Step-By-Step Guide for Parents**

Students were separated by skin color at school as part of a diversity activity. Your child was asked to add up his “privileges” as a math assignment. A teacher refused to allow your child to select Albert Einstein for her science project because white male scientists have already received enough attention. You sense that one perspective is preferred or required to the exclusion of others. This is the illiberalism that has captured many of our institutions, including media, academia, medicine, and now K-12 education.

What can parents do? Here is a step-by-step guide to addressing your school’s illiberal programming.

### **Step 1: Get informed**

There are many terms associated with the new orthodoxy that has taken hold in our K-12 schools. You have probably heard the terms woke, identity politics, cancel culture, social justice activism, white privilege, anti-racism, intersectionality, ethnic studies, and diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI). Some of these terms have a nice sound to them. Unfortunately, these terms, their meanings, and their application are now being used in intolerant ways that treat individuals as representatives of an identity group instead of as full, complex human beings. This approach is divisive, regressive, and harmful to all people, regardless of their skin color or other immutable traits.

Race-essentialism views a person’s skin color as determinative of a person’s identity, beliefs, and perspectives. It flattens human beings into stereotypes and thus dehumanizes a person based on skin color, ancestry, circumstances of their birth, and other immutable traits.

Race-essentialism, which views people as avatars of their group identity, considers equity a matter of equality of outcomes. It assumes all unequal outcomes are the result of racism or racist institutions. To address this inequality of outcomes, proponents of race-essentialism believe that some groups must be treated differently than other groups. According to the popular race-essentialist writer Ibram X. Kendi, “The only remedy to past discrimination is present discrimination. The only remedy to present discrimination is future discrimination.”

Nothing could be further from FAIR’s mission of promoting a common culture of fairness, understanding and shared humanity. FAIR stands against intolerance and racism of any kind.

Read more about race-essentialism in Overview of the Issues in the FAIR Advocacy Toolkit.

### **Step 2: Document everything**

As soon as you start noticing race-essentialism, activism, or other illiberal orthodoxies at your child's school, start documenting. Write down what your child tells you about class activities. Keep copies of assignments. Save every school email, especially those having to do with DEI. Write notes of conversations with teachers and school officials, including dates and names. A good habit to get into is to write a follow-up email to the person you meet with, recapping exactly what was discussed.

### **Step 3: Ask questions**

The Elementary and Secondary Education Act and the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act are federal laws that require educators to use, to the greatest extent possible, academic and behavioral practices and programs grounded in scientifically based research. Furthermore, in education, it is considered best practice to establish learning targets that are clear and measurable. Don't hesitate to ask your child's school for evidence regarding the reasons why lessons with illiberal perspectives have been introduced, what evidence was considered in the decision making process to do so, and what purpose the lessons serve.

Remember, the issue is not whether the subject of race, diversity, or history should be included in school lessons. Of course, students should learn about all of these topics in a truthful and balanced way. The question to ask is why an illiberal orthodoxy is the singular lens through which these topics are being presented. Inquire as to the "metrics" of such lessons, which means what the goals are, how the goals are stated, and how they will be measured. One objective at this stage, and during any interaction with teachers and school officials is to elicit information.

### **Step 4: Build alliances**

Find like-minded people who are concerned about the new orthodoxy in schools. Start by talking to your trusted friends, and go from there. If you can, find just one teacher or staff member who shares your opinion and is willing to help you. Take time to understand the politics at your school. Examples of this include assessing the degree to which your PTA/PTO has influence and understanding the interpersonal dynamics of the school leadership (*i.e.*, the assistant principal might be more accessible than the principal). The non-licensed school staff, such as paraprofessionals and front office staff, can be allies and reliable sources of insider information, too. Get to know them. Having a good understanding of how your school works and developing strong relationships will help you cultivate whistleblowers and gather data.

### **Step 5: Talk to your child's teacher**

Even though your state and school district have academic standards and an approved curriculum, most teachers have a lot of freedom in what lesson plans they teach. If you have concerns about a lesson being taught by your child's teacher, reach out, and follow these tips. Don't get emotional, and do show respect. Start from a place of shared caring for students, and assume best intentions. Ask questions, then clearly articulate what you see as being problematic. Provide details, and explain your desired outcome. Connect this information to your child's classroom experience, but also to a broader perspective. Write down everything you discuss with the teacher, and follow up with an email. Be aware that many teachers, especially more recent college graduates, have been immersed in this ideology since college, and they genuinely believe that it is not just a theory, but that it is the undeniable Truth. Keeping an open and constructive dialogue with your child's teacher will allow you to most effectively advocate for a pro-human alternative to race-essentialism.

### **Step 6: Talk to the school counselor**

School counselors and/or social emotional learning specialists are a wonderful resource, and tend to be genuinely invested in helping students. If the school counselor suddenly becomes overwhelmed with students who are feeling bullied and depressed due to the school's divisive, activist, or illiberal activities, concerned parents will be able to get their attention.

### **Step 7: Talk to the school administration**

The school principal is in charge of shaping the school's philosophy and academic vision. So if you have talked with your child's teacher and the school counselor, and there is still no improvement, move up the ladder. Call your school principal and make an appointment to meet in person. It can be a one-on-one meeting, but remember that there is strength in numbers. Consider organizing a small group of parents who share your concerns, then make the principal aware that he or she will be meeting with a group. At a minimum, bring your spouse, partner, or at least one other friend. When you meet, have a clear objective, be prepared with documentation and a suggested course of action. Keep notes, and follow up with an email detailing what was discussed in the meeting and what was agreed upon.

### **Step 8: Involve the school board**

After you have exhausted all channels of communication at the school level and you still have not had a satisfactory outcome, it is time to involve the school board. If you take this step, get prepared, do your homework, and be organized.

See a detailed overview of why school boards matter and what to expect at a school board meeting here: [What to Expect at a School Board Meeting](#)

## **Step 9: Share your story**

Many are shocked at the speed with which illiberal race-essentialism has captured our institutions. People are being silenced, canceled, and fired for questioning the orthodoxy. Consider sharing your own story. How has this ideology affected you and your family? Have you had any success pushing back against race-essentialism? There is power in using your voice and connecting with others. Tell people your story, which will help the next person who lands in your situation. It helps to know that you are not alone.

FAIR also provides opportunities for members to share their stories in FAIR Community, chapter meetings, and through other FAIR initiatives like [Fairtransparency.org](https://www.fairtransparency.org).

FAIR also has a network of reporters who will write articles on stories submitted by whistleblowers. If you send us an email to [whistleblower@fairforall.org](mailto:whistleblower@fairforall.org), then we can put you in touch with a reporter who can cover your story.

## **Step 10: Connect online, and use FAIR transparency**

Sharing on social media can help connect you with others and amplify your message. Follow and engage with FAIR on Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram. Use FAIR's hashtag #BeProHuman to connect with others. Use your circle of contacts to broaden your connections. Be direct. Ask your social media contacts to share, like, retweet, respond and take action.

You can also share incident reports of illiberal practices at your child's school, including images, emails, and instructional materials, on [FAIRtransparency.org](https://www.fairtransparency.org). FAIRtransparency allows users to anonymously submit materials, which are then reviewed and posted online, and to submit reviews of organizations like schools, both positive and negative. The FAIR legal team often takes action on submissions that are concerning by reaching out to the organization in order to point out potential violations of civil and constitutional rights and, if possible, to open a constructive dialogue and promote a more pro-human approach to curriculum and programming.

## **Step 11: Consider taking legal action**

There are various ways you can challenge race-essentialism, activism, and illiberal orthodoxies at your child's school, both through administrative actions and in court. Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 prohibits discrimination -- including the creation of a racially hostile environment -- at institutions that receive federal funds. This includes public schools, which receive federal funds through a variety of programs, and it may also include some private K-12 institutions, though that is less common. You can bring a Title VI claim directly in a court of law, but you also have the option to file an administrative complaint with the Department of

Education's Office for Civil Rights (OCR). If OCR investigates and finds that a school has violated Title VI, it can order the school to take actions to come back into compliance or else lose its federal funds.

Here is the link to the US Department of Education's Office for Civil Rights: [OCR: Discrimination Complaint Form \(ed.gov\)](#)

You may also be able to take your child's school to court. At public schools, you can bring a federal lawsuit alleging violations of Title VI. There may also be First Amendment claims based on a school's imposition of an ideological orthodoxy on its students (for the same reason that public schools cannot compel students to salute the flag).

At private schools, there may be a breach of contract. For example, the school itself probably has a non-discrimination policy it is violating.

FAIR can connect you with attorneys who can help you determine whether you may have a claim. Here is the link: [Legal Network - FAIR \(fairforall.org\)](#)

### **Step 12: Live not by lies, and speak the truth**

Don't say something you don't believe. Don't sign an anti-racist statement that is, in reality, race-essentialist. Speak up in groups; you might be surprised that more people agree with you than not and will follow your lead. On the other hand, know that when you take a stand against the orthodoxy, it is possible that it will not be well-received. People might call you names, accuse you of being racist, target you on social media, or worse.

If you are not comfortable discussing what you are against, consider talking about what you support, such as the pro-human values of reason, fairness, equality, open inquiry, constructive dialogue, and multiple viewpoints. Whatever approach you take, remember that you have the right to speak up and that you are standing up for hard-fought civil rights and liberties. The longer you wait to say something, the more difficult it will become to effect positive change.

Speak the truth: we are all unique individuals, intrinsically worthy of dignity and respect, and at the same time, we are all human. That is the pro-human approach that will help promote fairness, understanding, and common humanity.