



## Vision

We will build the foundation for all children to be their best, achieve their dreams, and make the world a better place.

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February 8, 2022

City Schools of Decatur vehemently opposes [SB 375](#), [SB 377](#), [HB 888](#), and [HB 1084](#). These bills threaten to **harm students, cripple instruction, levy unfunded mandates, impede business, and undermine local control**. All of this would be in response to a “**problem**” that **doesn’t exist**. Supporters might think this legislation would splash cold water on Critical Race Theory, but instead it would **drown our ability to do basic schooling**.

### CRT: The elephant in the room

Having spent five years addressing racial inequities in our schools, we understand the anxiety about exploring the historic and current roles of race and racism in society. We know Critical Race Theory (CRT) is a popular source of angst. This summer, the State Board of Education [adopted beliefs](#) (largely [written by the National Association of Scholars](#)) stemming from their misunderstanding of CRT. It is disappointing but not surprising that a bill largely [written by the Heritage Foundation](#) and featured on their [\(anti-\)CRT page](#), and similarly-themed legislation, has captured support. Alas, national advocacy groups, the State Board of Education, and now our legislators are advancing [deliberate efforts to distort CRT into a cultural boogeyman](#). SB 377 and HB 888 purport to protect students and staff by shielding them from being forced to adopt or espouse certain beliefs. Fortunately, neither CRT nor any other academically-rigorous approach to studying race, ethnicity, creed, color, or national origin involves compelled thought, speech, promotion, or activity. **Georgians deserve legislation that doesn’t have its roots in disinformation, and Georgians deserve better than copy-and-paste legislation handed to them by Washington, D.C. “think tanks” that don’t know Georgians’ needs.**

### These bills harm students

If enacted, these bills would harm students by chilling schools’ ability to begin and sustain the work of addressing equity around race, ethnicity, religion, color, or national origin in their community. These bills would scare educators into avoiding these subjects at all, lest they be *accused* of compelling a student’s or colleague’s belief or action. However, *not* having these discussions perpetuates harm to students who feel unseen, unheard, and unvalued. **These bills would deny those students the caring adult support to examine past and present actions that have marginalized them or people who share their background or experience.**

The bills’ chilling effects would extend to addressing Georgia’s egregiously disparate outcomes that manifest on racial lines. We must talk honestly about race itself to address racial disparities, even when it is uncomfortable. These bills undermine educators’ ability to advance educational outcomes for all students. That these bills require or recommend withholding 10-20% of QBE from districts that even *inadvertently* violate these vague laws would **unconscionably hurt Georgia’s children. A 20% QBE reduction in CSD is equivalent to 63 teachers.**

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**Jana Johnson-Davis**  
Chair

**James Herndon**  
Vice Chair

**Tasha R. White**  
Board Member

**Carmen Sulton**  
Board Member

**Hans Utz**  
Board Member

## These bills break basic instruction

HB 888 proposes that ancillary instructional materials be available for review 24 hours before being used in class. This expectation reflects a bizarre belief that we run quaint one-room schoolhouses that reuse well-worn readers and chalky slates between visits from the Sears wagon. In reality, teachers rapidly adopt ancillary materials in response to students' passions and needs. Additionally, databases and online resources often send users to primary sources (e.g. research or news articles), and they cannot all be vetted and their information published (and updated) on school websites ahead of time. For example, imagine a student excited by an oceanography lesson who wants to research Pacific Ocean volcanoes. A school database might refer them directly to [an article about a recent volcanic eruption in their native Tonga](#), amplifying their interest at a personal level. HB 888 would require the teacher to stop the child from accessing the article, review it, publish its information to the school webpage, and wait 24 hours before letting the student read it – at which point, their interest might have evaporated. Multiply this story by a room or school full of children, and the scale of the problem is clear.

Research-based best-practices encourage teachers to help children identify and use their passions to pursue learning and develop critical thinking skills. Students often choose for themselves what books or issues to explore to develop and demonstrate their mastery of standards. Under HB 888, teachers must choose between investing time on the nigh-impossible task of identifying every conceivable ancillary item relevant to their students or to merely lower expectations and reduce the richness of their classrooms. Georgia would consequently expect to see students learn less and our best teachers leave the state or the profession. **All roads from these bills lead to plummeting student outcomes.**

## These bills are unfunded mandates & big-government anti-business intrusion

HB 888 creates an unfunded mandate for districts to identify staff and develop procedures to accommodate yet another state reporting regimen. Additionally, new complaint processes would fuel the efforts of malicious actors who create disingenuous barriers to and distractions from addressing equity. HB 888 overtly invites costly court litigation as a remedy for complaints.

SB 375 goes further, meddling in how districts negotiate vendor contracts and even the vendors' internal policies. It is likely vendors, including niche or sole-source providers, will balk at big-government intrusion into their training, causing them to walk away from schools. In light of the United States Supreme Court's decision that the government cannot impose a vaccine mandate on employers, it is disturbing that the Georgia Senate seeks to force private employers to choose between working with schools or exercising their First Amendment right on how to train their staff. **Small businesses that rely on school customers are especially vulnerable to this intrusion; small districts that don't have leverage with major providers to force such contract terms are likewise at significant risk.**

These bills combine nebulous terms with a reckless timeline

While the bills create obvious harms, they are also disturbingly vague in some areas. The bills fail to define key terms like “impartial,” “politically nonpartisan,” “sexist,” “racist,” and “public policy issue.” For example, HB 888 requires the “*impartial and politically nonpartisan* instruction on the historical treatment of a particular group.” Would educators need to consider the fragile feelings of [Georgia’s neo-Nazis](#), and be careful to remain “impartial” by not calling Naziism *bad*? That HB 888 calls even *this* into question highlights this legislation’s failings. HB 888’s requirement to be largely implemented in just six months is reckless: districts are already planning next school year, and a major change in curriculum and reporting would be unduly burdensome and a setup for failure.

HB 888 says school personnel “shall [not] compel or attempt to compel any individual to engage in or observe a discussion of any *public policy issue*.” This would erode teachers’ use of problem-based learning and development of students’ civic-mindedness. This provision means teachers could not conduct classroom debates about local bike lanes or school lunch, or even give students that first taste of democracy by having them write to their representatives about a topic the child and their family support. **Rather than protect children’s First Amendment rights, this legislation cripples teachers’ ability to encourage students to exercise it.**

These bills undermine local control

While we are sad that some districts have been taken in by and banned the CRT strawman, it is their right to identify content that is appropriate in their schools. Regardless of the topic, each Georgia school board has processes to identify and address community needs and complaints. These bills are poor “answers” to a CRT “problem” that doesn’t exist, and where solutions are already available even if it did. **These bills hinder school boards’ local control over classroom and staffroom policies that reflect community standards.**

These bills deserve to overwhelmingly fail ... before they overwhelmingly fail kids

Three of these bills say they are not intended to “infringe upon the intellectual vitality of students.” This laudable sentiment is entirely undercut by the *substance* of SB 375, SB 377, HB 888, and HB 1084. These bills have dangerous, ill-conceived provisions that would harm students and set Georgia education on an embarrassingly retrograde path. The bills purport to address a non-existent problem, and districts already have local mechanisms to identify and resolve *actual* problems. City Schools of Decatur urges the House and Senate to **give these ill-informed big-government intrusions the “F” they deserve.**

Regards,

**City Schools of Decatur Board Members**

Jana Johnson-Davis, Chair

James Herndon, III, Vice-Chair

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