



NYU

STEINHARDT

Metropolitan Center for Research  
on Equity and the Transformation of Schools

# TOOLKIT for ORGANIZING YOUR COMMUNITY

Uniting Our Communities  
For Strong Schools and a  
Multiracial Democracy

PART 1:

Introduction and Background



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# 1. INTRO TO H.E.A.L. TOGETHER

(Honest Education Action & Leadership)

## A Race Forward Initiative For Strong Schools and a Multiracial Democracy.

**H.E.A.L. (Honest Education Action & Leadership) Together** is building a movement of students, parents, and educators 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, and pluralistic democracy.

Initially borne from the politically motivated attacks perpetuating lies that Critical Race Theory (CRT) is taught in public schools, H.E.A.L. Together is our response to the ways in which certain politicians and pundits are bringing the culture wars to our schools by banning books; censoring educators that honestly teach about race, gender, sexual orientation; dehumanizing people of color, immigrants, and LGBTQ people; and slandering the work of equity and justice.

We believe that public schools are the centers of democracy in neighborhoods across the country. We are fighting for strong, equitable public schools where students receive an honest education about our history, read books that accurately represent their experiences, and get the resources and support they need — so they can work together and across difference to tackle our country's greatest challenges.

**By joining H.E.A.L. Together, you will learn how to organize your community to fight for the schools that students deserve.**



Lisa Guerro speaks at a press conference in Kenosha, WI. She founded Parents For Safety and Equity and is a member of the Kenosha Education Justice Coalition. Photo courtesy of the Kenosha Education Association.

This H.E.A.L. Together toolkit shares why the recent “controversies” around CRT and education deemed “divisive” are showing up in your school district. This toolkit equips you with strategies not just to respond to these manufactured “controversies” but to also organize students, parents, and educators on making your schools and community more equitable and inclusive.

This is a living document and will be updated to include the lessons learned from campaigns and to share examples of other efforts from communities across the country.

## H.E.A.L. Together is a partnership between local and national organizations

The H.E.A.L. Together initiative was started by Race Forward in January 2022. Founded in 1981, [Race Forward](#) is the largest multiracial racial justice organization in the country. Race Forward’s mission is to catalyze movement building for racial justice. In partnership with communities, organizations, and sectors, Race Forward builds strategies to advance racial justice in our policies, institutions, and culture.

### CORE PARTNERS



The [NYU Metro Center](#) promotes education equity through research, policy analysis, professional development and community action with schools, districts, states and communities nationally. Metro Center’s Education Justice Research and Organizing Collaborative (EJ-ROC) builds on the long tradition of movement-driven, community-derived research by providing critical data, research, policy and strategic support to the education justice movement.



The [Schott Foundation for Public Education](#) is a national public fund serving as a bridge between philanthropic partners and advocates to build movements to provide all students an opportunity to learn. Schott’s mission is to develop and strengthen a broad-based and representative movement to achieve fully-resourced, quality PreK-12 public education.

### THANK YOU TO ALL THE H.E.A.L. TOGETHER PARTNERS:

- |   |  |
|---|--|
| → <a href="#">Red Wine &amp; Blue</a>   | → <a href="#">Local Progress</a>                       |
| → <a href="#">Student Voice</a>         | → <a href="#">Mom’s Rising</a>                         |
| → <a href="#">Women’s March</a>         | → <a href="#">Parents Together</a>                     |
| → <a href="#">UnKoch My Campus</a>      | → <a href="#">Center For Popular Democracy</a>         |
| → <a href="#">Western States Center</a> | → <a href="#">National Education Association (NEA)</a> |
| → <a href="#">People’s Action</a>       | → <a href="#">Midwest Academy</a>                      |

## 2. USING THIS TOOLKIT

### What is the H.E.A.L. Together toolkit for organizing community?

This is a campaign planning and messaging toolkit to win the fight for honest, accurate, and fully funded public education that is the foundation for a just, multiracial democracy.

**Everyone who believes in strong schools and educational equity has a role to play** — especially the students, parents, and educators who are most impacted by the culture wars in our schools. This toolkit will help you call your community to action.

Please share widely — so we can face our challenges together, not hide from them.

#### **This toolkit contains:**

- Background to help you understand how we got here
- Steps to help you build a campaign in your school and community
- Researched and tested messaging guidance to help you talk about these issues
- Resources to help you take action, including templates, worksheets, and more

As our movement grows, so will this toolkit. Consider this a living document and expect updates.

**“You cannot change any society unless you take responsibility for it, unless you see yourself as belonging to it and responsible for changing it.”**

**—GRACE LEE BOGGS**

## Where do I start?

This toolkit is divided into three main documents, plus a rich library of additional resources, activities, tools and worksheets:

- **PART 1:** Introduction and Background (this document)
- **PART 2:** [Building a Campaign](#)
- **PART 3:** [Battle of Narratives](#)
- **PART 4:** [Library of Tools and Worksheets](#)

If you are new to H.E.A.L. Together, **[please take the H.E.A.L. Together pledge!](#)**

Once you have taken the pledge...

- **If you are concerned about strong schools and want more background on current attacks,** go next to [“what we are up against”](#) and [“how we fight back”](#)
- **If you are familiar with the political motivations behind attacks on schools, families and educators and new to organizing,** go next to [“how we fight back”](#)
- **If you have organized before and are familiar with these issues,** go next to [Part 2: Building a Campaign](#)
- **If you are looking for guidance on how to talk about these issues,** read all of Part 1 for background and then go next to [Part 3: Battle of Narratives](#)
- **If you’re not sure,** please just keep reading!
- **If you have any questions,** reach out to [healtogether@raceforward.org](mailto:healtogether@raceforward.org)

### WHAT IS “ORGANIZING?”

**The Organizing Center** defines organizing as **“the process of building the people power necessary to win and maintain systemic change.”**

Throughout this toolkit, we talk about organizing your schools and communities. Even if this term is new, the ideas and actions likely are not. If you’ve ever signed or started a petition, that might have been the result of organizing. If you’ve ever given comment at a community meeting, that might have been the result of organizing. If you’ve ever talked to your friends and peers about an important issue, and convinced them to speak up about it, too, *you* might have been organizing!

# 3. TAKE THE H.E.A.L. TOGETHER PLEDGE

**SIGN THE PLEDGE NOW AT [HEALTOGETHER.ORG](https://healtogether.org).**

## **H.E.A.L. Together Pledge**

*We are students; we are parents; we are educators; and, we are all people committed to strong schools and a multiracial democracy.*

*We are H.E.A.L. Together (Honest Education Action & Leadership).*

*We are united in our belief that an honest, accurate, and fully funded public education is fundamental to building a just, multiracial democracy – a society in which everyone can thrive with power and purpose.*

*By signing this pledge, I commit to:*

- *Advocating for an honest, accurate, and fully funded public education in my community and across this country;*
- *Deepening my own learning about systemic racism and doing my part to address it in my own community;*
- *Fighting back against those who would deploy divisive narratives for their own political gain—whether they are harmful narratives about people of color (Black and Indigenous people in particular), immigrants, LGBTQ people, people who are disabled, and other marginalized people; or false narratives about the work of equity, inclusion, and justice;*
- *Working to build a just, multiracial, pluralistic democracy so that every person has the freedom to thrive.*

**READ THE FULL PLEDGE AND ADD YOUR NAME AT [HEALTOGETHER.ORG](https://healtogether.org).**

**TO ENDORSE H.E.A.L. TOGETHER AS AN ORGANIZATION, PLEASE FILL OUT [THIS FORM](#).**

Once you've signed the pledge, please return to read ***“what we are up against.”***

# 4. WHAT WE ARE UP AGAINST

For more information, including citations and resources, please read [What We Are Up Against - A Deeper Dive](#) and [this presentation](#) by the African American Policy Forum.

## What's the purpose behind the attacks on "Critical Race Theory" (CRT)?

- **To stifle the widespread conversations and action that erupted about structural racism in the Summer of 2020 in the wake of the murder of George Floyd.**
- **To continue the attacks on public education. There is a billionaire class in this country that has been spending hundreds of millions of dollars for years to undermine, dismantle and ultimately privatize the public education system.**
- **To preserve power and wealth amongst certain politicians who are using classic "divide and conquer" politics, reminiscent of the "Southern Strategy" that emerged to reverse the progress of the Civil Rights Movement.**

This latest iteration of the culture wars – in which "Critical Race Theory" (CRT), "divisive concepts" and any education about race, gender, and sexual orientation are suddenly deemed controversial – started in the summer of 2020 after the public outcry over the murder of George Floyd led to direct action and growing recognition of how systemic racism shapes almost every life outcome in our country.

A chorus of critics, pundits, and politicians - including the prior Administration - have sought to manufacture a controversy that uses "CRT" as a catch-all term to shut down essential racial equity work and conversations in institutions across the country—especially schools, universities, and government—by spreading a false narrative that equity, particularly racial equity, harms white people. At the state level, they have introduced upwards of 20 legislative bills (some which have passed) that would ban or censor education on race in schools, along with bills and executive orders that target LGBTQ youth and their parents.

Each of these attacks share the same root: **they are all designed to spread fear and misinformation – about people of color, immigrants, LGBTQ people, and about the work of equity, inclusion, and justice – in order to keep us all distracted and divided so that the wealthy corporate elite and their enablers retain power and dominance at a time when a multiracial majority is emerging in this country.**



# 5. HOW WE FIGHT BACK

Public schools have long been the targets of these culture wars and this time is no different. Public schools are often the center of communities, where our students come to know about our history, how it shapes our present, and how they can work together to create a better future. The attacks on this type of education are really **a fight about who we were, who we are, and who we are to become as a country.**

Certain politicians and pundits seek to censor or re-write history in our schools. They are robbing us of our history to thwart progress towards becoming a just, multiracial, pluralistic democracy, where we all have the freedom to thrive.

Students, educators, and parents – of all backgrounds – are uniting to fight back and to advance racial equity in their schools as part of a larger fight to win the just, multiracial democracy we all deserve.

## WE NEED PEOPLE LIKE YOU TO JOIN US.

We hope this guide will help you to organize your community to do just that. Now that you've learned about the background on what we're up against, please continue to **Part 2: Building a Campaign** to start making a plan for action, or to **Part 3: Battle of Narratives** to learn how to counter-narrate these attacks so that we can continue building a just, multiracial democracy that works for everyone.