

World's Largest Education-Content Publisher Promotes Radical Political Agenda in U.S. Schools and Government

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KEY TAKEAWAYS

Pearson, the world's largest educational publisher, said it will include the ideology of critical race theory in everything it produces.

The Pearson content that includes critical race theory, DEI mandates, and gender ideology may conflict with state and federal civil rights laws.

Lawmakers should study Pearson's editing guidelines and reject such woke content; taxpayers should not have to pay for propaganda in public schools and government.

Pearson, the world's largest educational publisher, calls itself “the world's learning company.”¹ The British publishing giant produced the exam that was once administered to students in 24 U.S. states and Washington, DC, as part of the Common Core national standards; it has contracted with the U.S. government to produce assessments for federal employees; it remains the largest publisher of U.S. college textbooks; and, at one point, had a financial stake in *The Economist* and owned the *Financial Times* and the Penguin publishing house.² Today, Pearson still owns one of the largest virtual charter school networks in the U.S., Connections Academy, and recently released Pearson+, an online subscription service that provides subscribers with access to thousands of textbooks and instructional videos.³

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This behemoth company maintains significant influence in the education-publishing world. So, when the publishing giant’s editorial guidelines say that the company will make radical ideas, such as “antiracism,” “colorism,” “colonial discourse,” “genderism,” and “intersectionality,” part of everything it does, parents should know what this influential publisher is producing for students and adults everywhere.⁴

In December 2022, the company announced that it purchased Personnel Decisions Research Institutes (PDRI), a business that produces “workforce assessment services” for federal agencies.⁵ With the acquisition, Pearson now controls the company that operates USA Hire, a website operated by the Office of Personnel Management (OPM). Applicants for positions in the federal government use this website to submit their application materials and then complete assessments as a part of the application process for federal positions. Some 40 federal agencies use the platform, and more than 500,000 applications are reviewed each year.⁶

Local, state, and federal K–12 education officials, as well as federal hiring managers across the U.S. government, must be aware of the radical race-related and “gender”-related content produced by Pearson because such materials may violate state and federal civil rights laws by promoting unlawful discrimination. Pearson created content based on Marxism-inspired ideas, such as critical race theory (CRT) and critical gender theory. These “woke” philosophies promote racial preferences, including in college admissions. Critical race and gender theories promote prejudice in public programs and education instruction and abandon biology by replacing biological sex with “sexual orientation and gender identity.” Public officials should protect students, teachers, and federal employees from discrimination and reject the use of Pearson’s material that advances critical theory in K–12 public schools and across federal employment programs.

Pearson’s Editorial Policies and Content: Based on Critical Race Theory

The publisher’s editorial content guidelines booklet, which provides information on Pearson’s priorities for the content created or published by Pearson, states a commitment to “anti-bias, anti-racism, and social equity in *any* content we produce” (emphasis added).⁷ Pearson commits to “embedding” these woke concepts in “teaching and learning.” These terms are common buzzwords found in the prevailing woke orthodoxy that falsely maintains that America is systemically racist and that its system of laws perpetuates a culture that oppresses women, people who are confused about their sex (“trans” individuals), and ethnic minorities.

Pearson wants consumers of its materials to be social justice warriors: “We go beyond representation and strive to practice principles of social equity. Within this, we intend to create products and services that impact learners’ engagement in social justice.”⁸ This call for readers of Pearson’s publications to apply CRT principles is one of the prevailing themes of the theory itself. (For example, in *Critical Race Theory: An Introduction*, Richard Delgado and Jean Stefancic write that critical race theory “contains an activist dimension.”⁹)

Pearson’s guidelines draw its editorial priorities even closer to CRT’s main ideas, including CRT’s concept of intersectionality, which maintains that individuals are defined by the identity groups with which they choose to associate based on race, the ambiguous concept of “gender,” or other characteristics, such as sexual preference.¹⁰ “Racism and sexism readily intersect in the lives of real people,” according to Kimberlé Crenshaw, resulting in the “imposition of one burden interacting with preexisting vulnerabilities to create yet another dimension of disempowerment.”¹¹ Intersectionality lies at the center of the contemporary radical narrative claiming that ethnic minorities and those who assume different genders face multiple levels of oppression when public policies result in disparate outcomes—dividing individuals into groups who claim varying levels of oppression.

Videos offered on Pearson’s website provide more insight into the publishing giant’s priorities. For example, Pearson created a video titled “A History of Protest Movements,”¹² where speakers repeat the falsehood that America is systemically racist. “Education is such a force for equity and change, yet systemic racism is holding back black and other ethnically diverse people in a vicious cycle,” says LaWada Stone, director of Pearson’s corporate affairs, in the video.¹³ The claims are made despite the Civil Rights Act of 1964, other civil rights laws adopted at the state and federal levels since, and surveys demonstrating that nationally representative samples of Americans believe that slavery was a tragedy that harmed America, but that freedom and opportunity define the nation’s future.¹⁴

Other participants in the video go on to say that then-presidential candidate Joe Biden’s choice of a minority woman as his running mate was either “in its own way an act of protest” or “the result of protest,” as opposed to the selection of the best running mate he could find. This is a “critical” analysis, an interpretation of an event that assumes that the issue can only be explained in terms of identity groups vying for power. Such an interpretation elides a discussion of whether American politicians should be chosen based on their ideas and credentials rather than their sex or skin color.¹⁵

Pearson also creates and publishes content for diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) training courses.¹⁶ These courses claim that all individuals have inherent biases and that a person's personal, emotional experience trumps any facts about history, politics, or society. Yet research has found "anti-bias" and DEI training to be ineffective in changing individual behavior.¹⁷

Pearson, however, has produced material to train students and teachers to have "meaningful conversations" about race and ethnicity, LGBTQ+, equity, gender, and disability.¹⁸ A book featured among Pearson's DEI resources—*Sociology: Structure and Change*—promotes the use of gender identity over biological sex to describe individuals. The book approvingly cites the work of Alfred Kinsey, a trained zoologist who used poorly designed research methods in an attempt to prove that children of all ages can benefit from sexual activity.¹⁹

Jodie Lawson, the author of the book, defends so-called transgenderism and says, "It is important to note that transgender people...face government sanctioned discrimination" in the U.S., and provides a section titled "Agents of Change" that has few specifics beyond encouraging readers to take action, for example, by advocating for "pay equity."²⁰ Neither in this section nor in the table of contents does the text include a discussion of research showing that affirming a person's gender choice does *not* alleviate mental health issues, such as anxiety and depression, along with the long-term negative impacts from medical interventions that permanently sterilize or disfigure sexual organs.²¹

Policy Recommendations for State and Federal Lawmakers

Lawmakers must protect K–12 students from the discrimination caused by the application of CRT in schools and the federal workplace and alert parents and the public to the complications and other negative effects of socially affirming young children who are confused about their sex or of medically intervening to alter a minor's sex organs.

- **Congress should hold a hearing to investigate the material that Pearson will produce for the federal workforce.** As part of its acquisition of PDRI, Pearson will be providing assessments to federal jobseekers. If the company is "embedding" antiracism into all its activities, taxpayers and lawmakers should anticipate that CRT's Marxist perspective will be reflected in Pearson's content.
- **State lawmakers should require that education officials review content created by Pearson and reject the books and other resources that violate state laws prohibiting discrimination or**

the application of CRT. State lawmakers in Idaho, South Dakota, Virginia, and elsewhere prohibit the application of CRT, which results in prejudice, in K–12 schools. Lawmakers in other states should follow their lead and review content created by Pearson and reject materials that apply critical theory’s race-based and sex-based discrimination.

- **State lawmakers should review content created by Pearson that includes gender ideology and prohibit the use of these materials at least in elementary schools.** Parents and school officials should decide on instructional content that is age-appropriate for K–12 students. Any material, however, that implies that a person can be “born in the wrong body,” denies or equivocates on the sexual binary of male and female in human beings, or implies that sex is *assigned*, should not be taught in public schools.

Conclusion

Pearson is a giant in the education publishing industry and now holds a contract with the federal office that manages hiring and assessing federal employees. The OPM has already adopted a DEI statement and is operating under President Biden’s executive orders from 2021 that mandated the adoption of radical racial and gender policies throughout the federal government.²² This makes Pearson’s commitment to the woke orthodoxy consistent with the current White House’s commitment to critical theories—potentially placing it in conflict with state and federal civil rights laws.

Lawmakers at the state and federal levels should study Pearson’s editing guidelines and reject material based on critical theory that applies racial discrimination and gender ideology. Educators’ application of these radical and discriminatory theories can be found in mandatory racial affinity groups and other school policies based on racial preferences, along with the teaching of gender theory.

Pearson is free to produce the material that it chooses, even to embed the discriminatory ideas of anti-racism into all its content—but taxpayers should not have to pay for content that is based on woke orthodoxy.

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Endnotes

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