

2023 Policy and Program Priorities



Executive Summary

Gillis Education is committed to contributing to the nation’s education system in a meaningful way. Our aim is to fiercely advocate for equitable education across state lines and through various avenues, including the provision of academic services, the development of innovative products, and strategic advocacy. To streamline our efforts, Gillis Education selects focus areas annually. This document outlines our policy and programmatic priorities for Calendar Year 2023.

Our 2023 policy priorities include:

- (1) Combating efforts to erroneously use Critical Race Theory to erase important aspects of educational curricula nationwide;
- (2) Examining legislative redistricting and its impact on education at the local and federal levels;

(3) Promoting investments in educational technology and multi-platform media to make quality education more accessible; and

(4) Pushing for high-quality early childhood education.

Our 2023 programming —events, workshops, summer programs, and targeted community partnerships—will center on the immediate need to promote:

(1) civic education for students in grades K-12 and

(2) literacy for students in Pre-K through 5th grade.



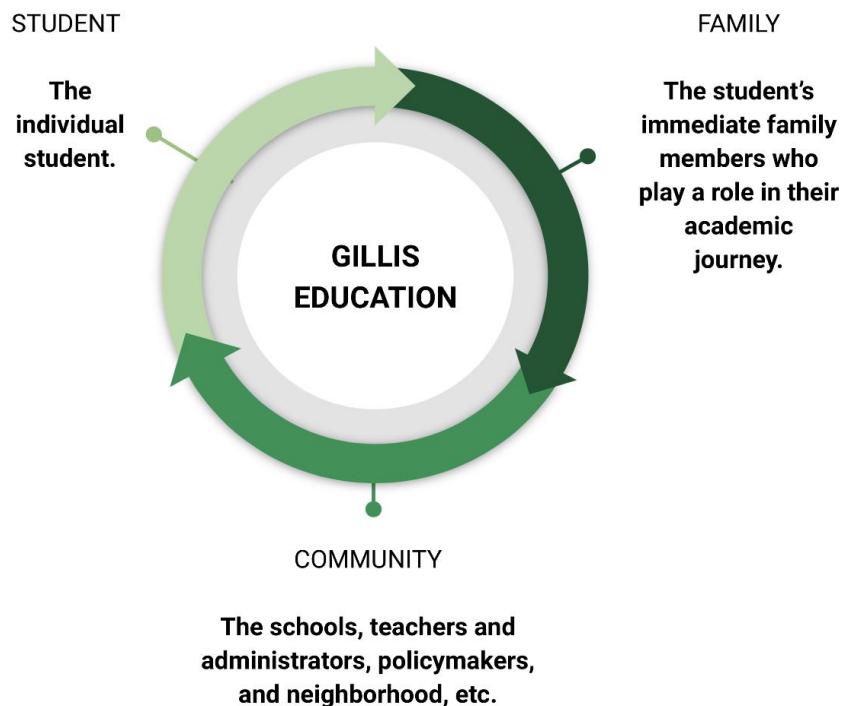
“Gillis Education is committed to employing effective advocacy strategies that lead to positive academic outcomes for all students.”

– Tiffany Gillis Brown, Esq.
Founder and CEO of Gillis Education LLC

Introduction

About Gillis Education

Gillis Education is a consulting firm that provides products and services to students and their families, academic institutions, and public figures. We offer a wide variety of educational products and services including tutoring, academic coaching, homeschooling support, and special education advocacy. We seek to nurture the interests, identities, and academic abilities of the students we work with. We provide strategic advising to academic institutions and public figures on the latest trends in educational law, policy, and research. We fiercely advocate for education reform at the local, state, and federal levels.



Our mission is to support students and their families, academic institutions, and public figures as they navigate our education system by providing timely, targeted, and innovative products and services.

Policy Priorities

Understanding Critical Race Theory and its Place Schools

Critical Race Theory (CRT) was introduced in the field of legal studies and is based on principles articulated by legal scholar **Derrick Bell** in the 1970s and 1980s. Mr. Bell and other academics highlighted the failures of the civil rights movement, the need for traditional legal scholarship to move past tokenism, and championed the use of storytelling in legal studies, specifically, anecdotal accounts of discrimination against minorities and women. **Kimberlé**

Williams Crenshaw, who is credited with coining the term “critical race theory,” gathered 30 law professors of color and [wrote a group manifesto](#) based on the idea that racism is permanently baked into multiple facets of society, including the legal system. Laws could not only undermine efforts to eradicate racial inequality, but could reproduce and even fortify racial inequality. CRT also recognizes **intersectionality**, the idea that race intersects with other identities, sexuality, gender identity, and others (see “[A Lesson on Critical Race Theory](#)”).

Today, **CRT has been broadly, and *inaccurately*, applied to race-conscious material and policies that advance diversity, equity, and inclusion, and has been labeled as a danger to children.** A libertarian ideal of the past is resurfacing in education policy: parents, not the state, should control a child’s education. The Supreme Court has guarded parents’ constitutional rights to make decisions for their children for almost a century. In the 1923 case of *Meyer v. Nebraska*, and again in *Pierce v. Society of Sisters* two years later, the Court overturned state statutes on the ground that they “unreasonably interfere[d] with the liberty of parents . . . to direct the upbringing and education of [their] children.” *Pierce v. Soc’y of Sisters*, 268 U.S. 510, 534 (1925). Underlying this sentiment is an inherent distrust of collectivism and a fear of the “standardization” of children.

Following the country’s racial reckoning after the murder of George Floyd by police officers, conservative voices have led a wave of challenges to elementary, secondary, and post-secondary curricula containing concepts labeled, albeit sometimes inappropriately, CRT. Between January and September 2021, undoubtedly inspired by [federal Executive Order 13950](#), 24 state legislatures introduced 54 separate bills (see “[Educational Gag Orders: Legislative Restrictions on the Freedom to Read, Learn, and Teach](#)”) intended to restrict teaching and training in K-12 schools, higher education, and state agencies and institutions.

These state actions have led to questions of censorship as state lawmakers and school boards remove books and other instructional materials from curricula. They also set an ominous precedent. For one, this movement may further spread misinformation OR disinformation by hiding basic truths about history, ones that students need to learn to be knowledgeable, well-rounded citizens. There is also a broader threat to free speech guaranteed under the First Amendment as these efforts may silence race- or gender-based discourse and critiques of U.S. society and history. Lawmakers cannot carve out certain ideas from educational curricula simply because they do not agree with them or find them to be uncomfortable subjects. The College Board’s Advanced Placement program would agree. The program recently [re-articulated its core principles](#), forcefully asserting that it “opposes censorship” and highlighting the program’s “deep respect for the intellectual freedom of

teachers and students.” It also notes that “if a school bans required topics from their AP courses, the AP Program removes the AP designation from that course.”

It is critical that schools do not engage in anti-democratic erasure. Rather, **we must remember a primary purpose of public education — to prepare children to be productive participants in our U.S. democracy — and its role in passing on cultural, moral, and social-emotional values.** Most importantly, we owe it to our students to not let ideological chasms stand in the way of rich, culturally-relevant lessons and conversations. Students should be taught to think critically and independently, and to have respectful discourse about the backgrounds and experiences of others. Arguably, this right to debate differing perspectives is constitutionally protected. It is important to, as Derrick Bell would argue, tell the truth without “disabling despair.” The truth can be uplifting for all, no matter how difficult it is to reckon with, if taught with compassion.

There is a middle ground: Most parents and teachers likely agree that schools can improve upon how the topic of race relations is taught in schools. **Good-faith, age-appropriate efforts to teach the concept of race and institutionalized racism in America in constructive ways should be encouraged.**

Gillis Education’s Strategy

- **Evaluate** the pedagogical benefits or drawbacks of specific curricular materials, educational approaches, frameworks, or professional training. We will use these findings to design age-appropriate curricula at the elementary, secondary, and post-secondary levels.
- **Educate** lawmakers, school boards, parents, and others about the consequences of overreaching censorship in education.
- **File** amicus briefs, where appropriate, expressing views on the matter.

Addressing the Impact of Legislative Redistricting on Education

[*Brown v. Board of Education*](#), the 1954 Supreme Court case striking down segregation in public schools, was the culmination of years of legal challenges to segregated schooling. Today, racially segregated schooling remains widespread. Racially discriminatory housing practices along with school funding inequities are partly to blame. Legislative redistricting is another factor impacting the state of the American education system, and is worth monitoring closely.

Legislative redistricting is the process of drawing the lines of districts from which public officials are elected ([ACLU](#)). Many times, a state’s redistricting efforts are challenged in the

courts, due to the process of drawing district maps being seemingly steeped with racial discrimination and/or partisan gerrymandering. As of March 2022, 58 cases have been filed challenging congressional and legislative maps in 21 states as racially discriminatory and/or partisan gerrymanders (see [analysis](#) by the Brennan Center for Justice).

Gillis Education’s Strategy

- **Educate** the public about the civil rights violations rampant in election campaigns and voting procedures, and how these violations negatively impact school systems.
- **File amicus briefs** expressing views on relevant matters.

Improving Remote Learning and Use of Multi-Platform Educational Media

Stable, in-person learning environments are critical for optimal learning. The pandemic and disruptions to classroom instruction have further exposed the reality of educational inequality. The education community can learn from the uncomfortable shifts that needed to be made during the pandemic, mainly that there are several stop gap measures that can be taken to limit learning loss when students need to be absent from school or are otherwise struggling to excel in person. Additionally, quality broadband for all students and their families is crucial (see [Affordability & Availability: Expanding Broadband in the Black Rural South](#)). The pandemic revealed how vital high-speed connectivity is to life and learning, making expanded internet access one of the Biden administration’s top priorities (see Bipartisan Infrastructure Law).

An egalitarian approach to education, particularly at the secondary and post-secondary levels, would be one that offers quality remote learning options when in-person learning is not feasible. Additionally, there are opportunities for students to grow in their vocabulary, comprehension, writing, and other skills when technology is used effectively. This is especially important in homes where exposure to printed text (books, newspapers, etc.) is not accessible. Investing in educational technology (“edtech”) — which has long promised to deliver more equitable outcomes — and training that makes lessons and communication accessible when students have to miss school can work to close the achievement gap.

Gillis Education’s Strategy

- **Advocacy:** Gillis Education plans to write letters to School Boards and state and federal legislators explaining how investing strategically in edtech can drive positive learning outcomes. Gillis Education will especially advocate on behalf of students with different learning abilities and request remote access where appropriate.

High Quality Early Childhood Education

Over the past several years, there has been a push for full-day kindergarten that incorporates more robust academic instruction. However, the issue of quality pre-school and inadequate kindergarten programs, full and half-day, remain unresolved. We are committed to supporting efforts by district leaders to design comprehensive and equitable language arts, mathematics, science, engineering, and arts education pathways for the earliest learners. Equally important is the facilitation of young children's social, emotional, and physical well-being.

Gillis Education's Strategy

- Submit policy recommendations that advocate for evaluations of:
 - the characteristics of classroom instruction and whether curricula used are comprehensive and culturally relevant;
 - the qualifications of teachers hired and whether hiring practices promote educator diversity; and
 - how districts are allocating fiscal, material and Human Resources to ensure positive learning outcomes.
- Advocate for free, full-day kindergarten in all states
- Promote social-emotional curricula and training for teachers, beginning in the early years

Program Priorities

Partnerships to Promote Literacy

Gillis Education will develop partnerships with a variety of organizations in key markets to promote literacy. This includes expanding tutoring operations and our BookLove subscription service.



Civic Education and Engagement

As the U.S. Supreme Court noted in its 1954 opinion in the landmark case *Brown v. Board of Education*, “education is the very foundation of good citizenship” and “is perhaps the most important function of state and local governments.” Gillis Education will produce events, social media content, and materials related to civic education and public engagement in the political process.

“Education serves the essential function of instilling in our young an understanding of and appreciation for the principles and operation of our governmental processes. Education may and still the interest and provide the tools necessary for political discourse and debate. Indeed it has frequently been suggested that education is the dominant factor affecting political consciousness and participation.”

- *Race and Races: Cases and Resources for a Diverse America*

Sources:

National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine. 2022. *Science and Engineering in Preschool Through Elementary Grades: The Brilliance of Children and the Strengths of Educators*. Washington, DC: The National Academies Press. <https://doi.org/10.17226/26215>