

# What you need to know:

## The War on Merit

### What is the war on merit?

The war on merit can be broadly defined as an attempt to lower the bar for students, often in the name of “equity” or “antiracism.” This can lead to grade inflation, which gives students and families a false impression of the student’s success. It can include:

- Equitable grading or implementing subjective rather than objective metrics of student success
- The removal of advanced coursework and gifted and talented programs, or relying on subjective measures to assess a student’s aptitude for such programs
- Eliminating standardized tests or lowering the score students must earn to pass the test
- Eliminating failing grades

### What’s the issue?

The pandemic worsened a pre-existing decline in student performance. Instead of demanding more from schools, activists blame these issues on unfounded claims about low funding for schools or systemic racism. Gifted and talented programs are one institution that activists claim is grounded in white supremacy.

When they say...	You can say...
<b>Merit is a vestige of white supremacy. We must fight racism in all forms.</b>	Advanced coursework and gifted and talented programs allow students from all backgrounds the opportunity to excel, thrive, and stand out when it comes time to apply for college. Eliminating these opportunities removes a rung in the ladder for <i>all</i> students, regardless of their race or socioeconomic status.
<b>Privileged families are able to afford additional services to prepare their kids for high school or college entrance exams. Eliminating standardized tests gives all kids a fair change.</b>	It’s true that some kids have less support at home than others. But eliminating opportunities to demonstrate aptitude hurts disadvantaged kids the most. Instead of eliminating tests, schools should provide tutoring and other services to give all students and equal opportunity to succeed.
<b>Equity is a good thing. It ensures that all students get what they need as individuals.</b>	Kids’ needs should be assessed on an individual basis. Equity does the opposite. It assumes needs based on immutable characteristics like race. A child’s needs, including in the academic sphere, cannot be predetermined by his or her race. It’s discriminatory to make assumptions about a child’s needs based on their race.

### Examples:

Thomas Jefferson High School for Science and Technology in Virginia, a nationally-ranked STEM magnet school, eliminated its entrance exam in 2020 and instead opted to select students based on their race to fill racial quotas.

Seattle Public Schools will end its gifted and talented program and replace it with something more “equitable” after being dismayed by the racial breakdown of student participants.