

ADVERTISEMENT

Phone calls  
Appointments



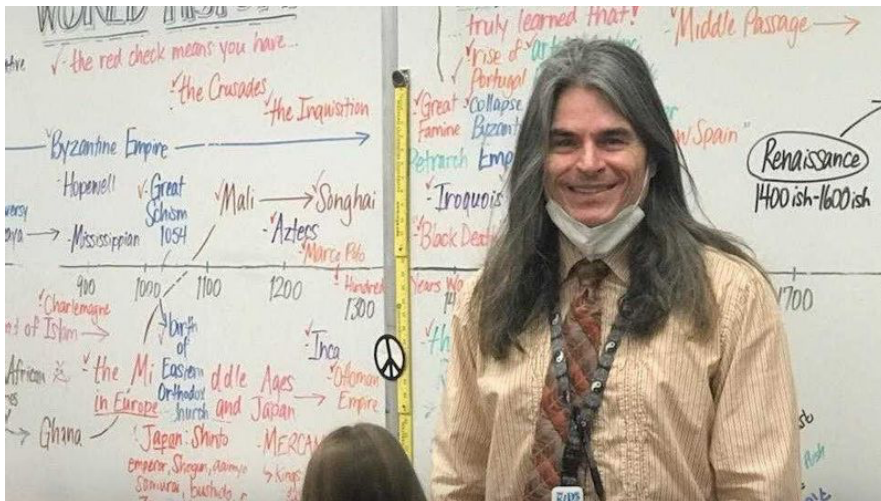
Tampa Bay Times

SUBSCRIBE

NEWS / THE EDUCATION GRADEBOOK

# Pinellas teacher accused of Marxist lessons says his focus is U.S. history

Educators must stand firm amid anti-CRT politics that question their motives, Dunedin High teacher Brandt Robinson says.



TRENDING IN THIS SECTION:

Florida's omicron wave could be worse than data shows

By Jeffrey S. Solochek

Dunedin High School history teacher Brandt Robinson has a message for his colleagues as they face increased challenges to the way they teach about race in society: Don't fold.

"The only thing we can really do is stand up to it and demand that American history be taught in its entirety," Robinson said.

It's not an easy ask, he said, with Gov. Ron DeSantis repeatedly suggesting that teachers are attempting to indoctrinate children with liberal ideology, and the Legislature considering bills that aim to prevent students from feeling discomfort, guilt or anguish about race.

The Senate Education Committee is scheduled to take up one such measure ([SB 148](#)) on Tuesday, after returning from the holiday commemorating civil rights leader the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr.

---

A D V E R T I S E M E N T



ASSISTED LIVING &  
MEMORY CARE  
FOR YOU AND YOUR LOVED ONE

 **ANGELS**  
senior living

[LEARN MORE](#)

---

Robinson already has been caught up in the wave.

In June, he urged the Pinellas County School Board to take a stance against the rising move against a field of study known as “critical race theory” or CRT. It has come to be the focus of a broader campaign targeting a variety of lessons touching on race, as well as the concepts of equity, social-emotional learning and related topics.

“We’re not here to indoctrinate students. We’re not here to teach students to hate America,” Robinson told the board. “What we do is encourage our students to examine deeply the history of this country, because we’re preparing citizens to be functional wonderful citizens in a democracy.”

The following month, Pinellas parent Renee Chiea challenged Robinson’s position before the board, accusing him of making false statements. He was playing word games, she said. “Call it CRT or whatever you want. It’s still Marxist indoctrination of our youth.”





Renee Chiea, standing at the lectern, speaks to the Pinellas County School Board in July. In comments, she challenged statements by Dunedin High history teacher Brandt Robinson, saying his lessons constituted "Marxist indoctrination of our youth."

[ PINELLAS COUNTY SCHOOLS ]

Chiea continued: "The worship and teaching of perceived reality has no place in public school. ... Focus on teaching children the objective truth and providing them the tools they need for life's success."

---

A D V E R T I S E M E N T



---

In August, she filed an objection to the syllabus Robinson assigned in his African American history course at Dunedin High, where her son attends. She said one unit and the associated text in particular would provide a skewed view

of American history by framing the nation as inherently racist.

Robinson fought back. He presented his case to a review committee with school and community members, who unanimously found that the text met state academic standards and was appropriate for the class. The book by historian Nell Irvin Painter is titled *Creating Black Americans: African-American History and its Meanings, 1619 to the Present*.

The committee rejected accusations that it was aligned with *The 1619 Project*, a *New York Times* initiative that, according to its website, “aims to reframe the country’s history by placing the consequences of slavery and the contributions of Black Americans at the very center of our national narrative.” In Florida, the project has been [banned by the State Board of Education](#).

Members of the Pinellas committee noted Painter had made public statements opposed to *The 1619 Project*, saying it was not the accurate way to study history.

“What’s happening with this parent is probably something that is being replicated across the country,” Robinson said. “My sense of what a teacher should do when they’re faced with the perception that what they’re about to teach might have some blowback is to make it clear to students, ‘My job is not to teach you what to think. It’s to help you be a better thinker.’ ”

---

A D V E R T I S E M E N T



---

After cutting through the rhetoric surrounding race lessons, Robinson said, it becomes evident that the state’s standards, rules and laws support teaching many of the topics that have come under fire. It has been a long effort, he said, but educators and activists have gotten historical events such as the [Rosewood](#) and [Ocoee](#) massacres written into the standards and onto state exams.

Even the State Board of Education [rule](#) banning “critical race theory” reiterates [state law](#) requiring instruction about slavery, the Civil War and Reconstruction, and the civil rights movement.

The legislation that Republicans are advancing about individual freedom asserts teachers’ ability to “facilitate discussions and use

curricula to address, in an age-appropriate manner, the topics of sexism, slavery, racial oppression, racial segregation, and racial discrimination.”

The proposed prohibition would be on attempting to “indoctrinate or persuade,” much like the annual reminder during winter holidays that teachers should teach, not preach, about religious activities.

A spokesperson for DeSantis was quick to point out the difference.

“Educating students on the good and the bad in American history is required in Florida public schools, and Gov. DeSantis fully supports factual historical education, as Florida law also requires,” Christina Pushaw wrote.

---

A D V E R T I S E M E N T

Sponsored by **Walletgenius**

**Most iPhone Owners Don't Know This (Do It Today)**

---

**SEE MORE**

“By contrast,” she continued, “‘critical race theory’ is not factual. It is an ideologically driven construct, which promotes unsubstantiated and divisive narratives that have no place in our classrooms.”

Still, teachers face criticism, including from the governor, that they’re indoctrinating.

Robinson said it’s ironic that anyone would think a teacher facing a dense pacing guide on what to teach would have the time to get into great depth on any single issue, much less a controversial one that isn’t in the standards. He suggested DeSantis, who has turned [“Stop WOKE”](#) into a Florida campaign staple, knows all this yet chooses to pursue it anyway.

“He’s pacifying a part of his base that he knows probably doesn’t know a great deal about our history, and he doesn’t expect any of the people that he’s getting riled up to in any way question him,” said Robinson, a teacher union activist who [sued the state](#) over its teacher tenure law in 2011.

It’s difficult to make the nation’s enlightened ideals of equality for all jibe with the reality of an institution that enslaved humans, Robinson said. Teachers need to walk that path without fear.

“That is just something that is factually true,” he said.

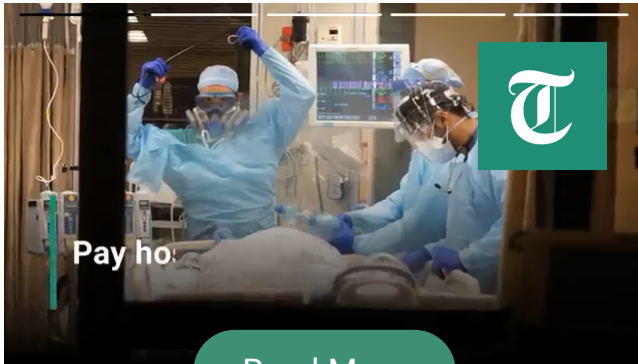
Pushaw didn’t disagree.



“Any educator teaching history in a factual manner aligned with Florida law and standards ... would not run afoul of the rule prohibiting critical race theory,” she said.

---

A D V E R T I S E M E N T



---

*(Editor’s note: This story has been edited to reflect the correct month that Renee Chiea filed an objection with the Pinellas County school district. A previous version of this story contained the incorrect month.)*

...

## Sign up for the Gradebook newsletter!

Every Thursday, get the latest updates on what’s happening in Tampa Bay area schools from *Times* education reporter Jeffrey S.

Solocek. [Click here](#) to sign up.

---

**JEFFREY S. SOLOCHEK**

Education Reporter

[Read more articles by Jeffrey S. Solocek](#)

---

Loading ...

# Tampa Bay Times

© 2022 All Rights Reserved | Times Publishing Company

 SUBSCRIBE

 NEWSLETTERS

[CONTACT US](#)

[JOIN US](#)

[MEDIA KIT](#)

[PLACE AN AD](#)

[LEGAL DISCLAIMERS](#)

[PUBLIC NOTICES](#)

[SITEMAP](#)

[SEARCH](#)

**Need help?**

CALL CUSTOMER SERVICE



1 (800) 888-7012

