

Florida governor backs ban on diversity lessons in state colleges

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**Florida Governor Ron DeSantis standing with hands folded between two US flags
Ron DeSantis says diversity programmes will get 'no funding' under new plan [File: Marta Lavandier/AP Photo]**

Miami, February 2 (RHC)-- Ron DeSantis, the governor of the U.S. state of Florida, has announced plans to block state colleges from having programs on diversity, equity and inclusion, as well as critical race theory (CRT).

The Republican governor made public the proposal on Tuesday as part of a larger, higher education legislative package expected to be taken up by the GOP-controlled state House of Representatives when its regular session begins in March.

DeSantis, a potential 2024 Republican presidential candidate, has heavily criticised critical race theory, which examines systemic racism, along with programmes about diversity, equity and inclusion, commonly known as DEI.

Critical race theory is a way of thinking about U.S. history through the lens of racism. Scholars developed it during the 1970s and 1980s in response to what they viewed as a lack of racial progress following the civil rights legislation of the 1960s. It centres on the idea that racism is systemic in the nation's institutions, which function to maintain the dominance of white people in society.

"I think people want to see true academics, and they want to get rid of some of the political window dressing that seems to accompany all this," DeSantis said at a news conference in the coastal city of Bradenton.

In a statement, the governor's office said the proposal "raises the standards of learning and civil discourse of public higher education in Florida" by "prohibiting higher education institutions from using any funding, regardless of source, to support DEI, CRT, and other discriminatory initiatives."

DeSantis promised "no funding" for such programmes. "I think that that's very important because it really serves as an ideological filter, a political filter," he said. The proposal was expected after the DeSantis administration requested in late December that state colleges submit spending data and other information on programmes related to critical race theory and diversity, equity and inclusion.

The governor is also pushing for education administrators to "realign" courses to provide historically accurate information and not include identity politics. DeSantis's proposals have not yet been introduced as formal legislation, but the Republican-controlled state house is often eager to carry out his initiatives.

DeSantis and other conservatives have long argued that critical race theory and diversity, equity and inclusion programmes are racially divisive and discriminatory – and are often cited in criticism of what they often call "woke" ideology in education.

Last year, the governor signed legislation dubbed the Stop WOKE Act, which restricts certain race-based conversations and analysis in schools and businesses. The law bars instruction that says members of one race are inherently racist or should feel guilt for past actions committed by others of the same race, among other things.

This month, the DeSantis administration blocked a new Advanced Placement course – an undergraduate-level programme for high-school students – that would focus on African American studies, saying that teaching it in Florida public schools violates state law. He also accused the course of being historically inaccurate.

So far, at least 25 states have considered legislation or other steps to limit how race and racism can be taught, according to an analysis from Education Week. Eight states, all Republican-led, have banned or limited the teaching of critical race theory or similar concepts through laws or administrative actions. The bans largely address what can be taught inside the classroom.

Proponents of diversity programmes and critical race theory have argued they aim to counter institutional racism and teach an accurate version of US history that shows the racism African Americans and other ethnic minorities have faced.

Several Democrats have slammed DeSantis's plans to interfere in public education. "Nothing says you oppose ideology on college campuses.... like pushing your ideology on college campuses," Florida house member Anna Eskamani wrote on Twitter on Tuesday.

The governor's move to block the Advanced Placement course on African American studies also drew outrage last week. "Ron DeSantis banning AP African American Studies because it 'lacks educational value' is unmasked white supremacy," Congresswoman Rashida Tlaib said in a social media post last week. "You cannot teach the truth about American history without African American history. Period."

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