

Testimony Opposing S.B. 359: An Act Prohibiting the Disaggregation of Student Data by Ethnic Subgroups in the Public School Information System

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Education Committee

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Good morning Senator Slossberg, Senator Boucher, Representative Fleischmann, Representative Lavielle and esteemed members of the Education Committee:

My name is Camara Stokes Hudson, and I am presenting testimony today on behalf of Connecticut Voices for Children, a research-based child advocacy organization working to ensure that all Connecticut children have an equitable opportunity to achieve their full potential. Thank you for the opportunity to present testimony opposing S.B 359: An Act Prohibiting the Disaggregation of Student Data by Ethnic Subgroups in the Public School Information System.

All students deserve the robust education that is necessary to equity these students—regardless of family and community resources—to pursue their chosen dreams and goals. But, that same education is also essential in ensuring the economic competitiveness of their communities, the towns that they come from, and by extension the entire state. For Connecticut to ensure that it remains strong into the future, education for all of its students must be a priority.

S.B. 359 would prohibit the state from collecting race/ethnicity education data with two major caveats: federal requirement and the ability of the state to collect data on every single ethnic subgroup. Given the sheer number of ethnic subgroups that exist, it is effectively impossible to disaggregate data to this level of granularity. This level of disaggregation would also pose legal concerns in that it may violate FERPA confidentiality regulations that protect the identities of students.¹ For these reasons, we oppose changing the education statute to require the data disaggregation for every ethnicity.

We further oppose the suggested change to the education statute that would prohibit the state from collecting race/ethnicity data except for when federally mandated because **race and ethnicity data is essential in the creation of education policies that effectively address the needs of Connecticut's students of color.**

It is now commonly acknowledged that disaggregating student data by race/ethnicity

¹ Supernant, K., Miller, F., & Pasternak, S. (2014, June). *IDEA and FERPA Confidentiality Provisions* (United States of America, Department of Education , FPCO). Retrieved from <https://www2.ed.gov/policy/gen/guid/ptac/pdf/idea-ferpa.pdf>

has a positive impact for students in that it informs how schools can improve experiences for children of color.² Policy priorities like reducing suspensions and expulsions, improving ELL instruction and decreasing chronic absenteeism all require that we take a look at data disaggregated by race/ethnicity. In Connecticut, when we examine key indicators of educational success by disaggregating the data, we see that Black and Latino students face clear and gaping disparities.³ For example, suspension rates in Connecticut for Black students are over four times higher than they are for White students,⁴ even though nationwide research suggests that there appears to be no real difference between races in misbehavior.⁵ When race plays such a significant factor in the educational outcomes of our students,⁶ it is essential that we are able to disaggregate education data by racial and ethnic categories so that we improve educational outcomes for impacted students.

It is through this exercise that we have been able to create policies and encourage practices that reduce these disparities.⁷ **Because of collecting and disaggregating student data by race, we have improved educational experiences for Connecticut students by decreasing chronic absenteeism,⁸ suspension⁹ and expulsion rates¹⁰.** Aggregated education data (data that is not broken up by category), on the other hand, simply does not tell enough of the story for policy makers, administrators or advocates to effectively support students of color because statistical averages tend to be more reflective of the outcomes of numerically larger groups (in Connecticut's case, White students).

² National Center for Mental Health Promotion and Youth Violence Prevention. (2012). *The Importance of Disaggregating Student Data* (Issue brief). Retrieved from http://www.educationnewyork.com/files/The%20importance%20of%20disaggregating_0.pdf American Association of School Administrators. (2002). *Using Data to Improve Schools - What's Working* (Rep.). Retrieved from http://www.aasa.org/uploadedFiles/Policy_and_Advocacy/files/UsingDataToImproveSchools.pdf, Darling-Hammond, L. (1998). *Unequal Opportunity: Race and Education* (Publication). Retrieved <https://www.brookings.edu/articles/unequal-opportunity-race-and-education/#cancel>

³ Connecticut State Department of Education. (2016-2017). [Rates of Chronic Absenteeism, Suspensions by Race/Ethnicity, SBAC Scores and Graduation Rates by Race Ethnicity]. Retrieval at <http://Edsight.ct.gov>, Hudson, C. S. (2018). *The Black-White Education Gap In Connecticut: Indicators of Inequality in Access and Outcomes* (Issue brief). Retrieved <http://www.ctvoices.org/publications/black-white-education-gap-connecticut-indicators-inequality-access-and-outcomes>

⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵ Skiba, R., Michael, R. S., Nardo, A. C., & Peterson, R. (2002). The Color of Discipline: Sources of Racial and Gender Disproportionality in School Punishment. *The Urban Review*, 34(4). Retrieved from <http://www.indiana.edu/~equity/docs/ColorofDiscipline2002.pdf>

⁶ Darling-Hammond, L. (1998). *Unequal Opportunity: Race and Education* (Publication)

⁷ National Center for Mental Health Promotion and Youth Violence Prevention. (2012). *The Importance of Disaggregating Student Data*

⁸ Connecticut State Department of Education. (2016). *All Students in School & Engaged! Reducing Chronic Absenteeism*. Retrieved from http://www.attendanceworks.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/08/presentation_of_report_chronic_absenteeism.pdf

⁹ Connecticut State Department of Education. (2016-2017). [Trend Suspension Rates by Race/Ethnicity]. Retrieval by <http://edsight.ct.gov>

¹⁰ Connecticut State Department of Education. (2017). *Understanding School Expulsions in Connecticut* (Rep.). Retrieved from http://portal.ct.gov/-/media/SDE/Board/Boardmaterials120617/Understanding_School_Expulsions_in_Connecticut.pdf

We agree that Race/Ethnicity data can be sensitive information, and support the ongoing and commonplace methods SDE presently uses to protect student's individual level data from the public via data suppression and de-identification. But, when race/ethnicity has such an extreme impact on outcomes for students, it is a disservice to students of color to remove one of the most important tools in combating the gap in achievement and access for them.

Thank you for this opportunity to present testimony regarding SB 359. I'm happy to answer questions, and I can be reached at chudson@ctvoices.org or (203)498-4240 x 115.