Using Data To Promote Education Equity In Connecticut

Why focus on race and ethnicity?
Opportunities vary dramatically for people of different races and ethnicities in Connecticut, and the opportunity to succeed in school is no exception. Racial disparities between White and Non-White students persist in both access to a robust education and in educational achievement -- even when other factors, such as parental education and family income, are equal.

What causes racial and ethnic disparities in education in Connecticut?
Disparities are due to many factors, including the impact of systemic racism; the daily stress of experiencing racism; the implicit and explicit bias of teachers, doctors, law enforcement officials, and strangers; and the lower socioeconomic status that is often the result of historical oppression and present day policies that sustain inequity in our systems. Connecticut’s Black and Brown residents face barriers to educational and career success due to employment discrimination, our state’s history of neighborhood redlining leading to housing discrimination, an upside-down property tax system in which people of color pay higher rates, a segregated public-school system, and other manifestations of systemic racism.
Why should we continue to collect data on racial and economic disparities?

- **Shedding sunlight on racial barriers:** Without these data, we will not be able to tell when our state systems better serve—or even penalize—some residents more than others based upon their race, nationality or culture. Averages often obscure the dramatic differences in experience between populations. This is especially true when race/ethnicity data are limited to the “Top-Five” categories (Black, White, Asian, American Indian or Alaskan Native, and Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander etc.), and the largest ethnic category, Latino, which often represent large and diverse groups with varying needs and assets.

- **Measuring success:** Multiple initiatives seek to reduce racial and ethnic disparities in educational outcomes. We cannot measure their success or limitations unless we have data on the race and ethnicity of the students impacted by these programs.

- **Fostering innovation:** Race and ethnicity data are an important factor in designing interventions and instruction that is culturally responsive to students’ needs. The use of these data ensures that our educational systems can adapt to meet the needs of all of the state’s children and that innovations close and do not exacerbate disparities in educational outcomes.

How are student data protected?

There are several federal and state laws and practices used today to protect student data. At the federal level, the Family and Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) protects all information directly related to an individual student, including their demographic data (race, gender, etc.). This prevents any public access to individual, student-level data. Even when school level data is publically reported by race/ethnicity, if the number of students is small enough that an individual child would be identified, the data are “suppressed” (not disclosed), making it extremely difficult to identify any individual student.