

My name is John Bullock. I am an assistant professor of political science at Yale University. I study primary and secondary education; currently, I am working with the Hartford Public Schools to better understand why some parents are satisfied with HPS while others are dissatisfied. I am testifying today in support of **House Bill No. 6491: An Act Concerning Longitudinal Studies of Student Achievement.**

H.B. 6491 will make it easier for researchers to obtain data on student achievement over time. In doing so, it will permit us to learn more about why some students and schools succeed while others do not. Of course, we already study this—but because it is difficult to track student achievement over time, some of our conclusions rest on questionable assumptions about school characteristics and how they change over time. For example, if fifth-grade students in a particular school perform worse this year than they did last year (when they were fourth-graders), it is difficult to know whether their performance declined because high-performing students moved out of the school system, because low-performing students moved in, or because of other reasons. To draw conclusions, we need to make speculative assumptions about what sorts of students are leaving and entering the school. But if H. B. 6491 is enacted, we won't need to make these sorts of assumptions. We'll have facts, and our research will be better for it.

And H.B. 6491 will help us learn about more than student achievement. By helping researchers obtain longitudinal data, it will permit us to learn about the “downstream” effects of high and low student achievement—on health, income, happiness, adult participation in community activities, and trust in government. We have reason to believe that student achievement affects all of these later-in-life outcomes, but our ability to draw strong conclusions is currently hindered by a lack of good data. H.B. 6491 can change that.

Student privacy is properly a concern of any legislation that seeks to promote the availability of student achievement data. Like many of you, I grew up in Connecticut's public schools. I do not want anyone to publicize, or even have the opportunity to publicize, my own records or those of my family. Under H.B. 6491, student privacy will remain protected; I could not support it otherwise. Indeed, by stipulating that a unique student identifier (e.g., a random number) is assigned to each student before the student's performance is tracked, H.B. 6491 strengthens student privacy protections by ensuring that students' names will not be linked to their achievement data. (See § 10-10a (a).)

As one who studies education, I am obligated to comply with the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA). FERPA offers strong protections of student records while permitting researchers to obtain data on student achievement, so long as the data “does not permit personal identification of parents and students by individuals other than representatives of the organization” that is conducting the study of student achievement. (See 34 CFR § 99.31.) By requiring that unique student identifiers are assigned to all students before their performance is tracked by the Department of Education, H.B. 6491 will make it easier for researchers like me to comply with FERPA while obtaining longitudinal data.