

**Testimony before the Education Committee**  
**Sherese A. Ward, Government Relations & Policy Director,**  
**Connecticut Black Alliance for Educational Options (CT BAEO)**  
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Good afternoon, Senator Stillman, Representative Fleischmann, and member of the Education Committee. My name is Sherese Ward, Government Relations & Policy Director for Connecticut BAEO, the Black Alliance for Educational Options; an organization established to create and expand high quality school choice options in our state, through advocacy for effective policies that work to eliminate the achievement gap across socio-economic and racial lines.

I'm here today to speak in support of Raised Bill No. 6432, An Act Concerning Closing the Academic Achievement Gap.

Last year, Connecticut BAEO convened the coalition, Campaign LEARN with the support of several state commissions, grass roots education advocacy organizations and the Black and Puerto Rican Caucus. Our collective fight for an overhaul of our education policies resulted in School Governance Councils, as well as what has become the Achievement Gap Task Force.

I was delighted to hear both Senators Harp and Stillman speak earlier today in strong support of reestablishing this task force and with enhanced objectives in mind. It is imperative that we tackle this work with the greatest sense of urgency, and I am encouraged that the task force is committed to eliminating the disparity of academic achievement between our white children and children of color within the decade.

I am particularly encouraged by the establishment of a Cultural Resource Center, knowing that English Language will have additional wrap around supports that foster and bolster their learning; that students on the fringe will be provided adequate supports and interventions to prevent further academic decline; and that appropriate professional development resources will be available for our teachers to as leaders in our classrooms.

It is my hope that state level identification and transparency of our schools and districts with the greatest needs will only serve to help our State Board of Education and LEAs in moving even more expeditiously to remedy low achievement before it results in chronic failure.

Additionally I believe that giving low-performing districts the authority to lengthen their school day and year as a means of improving student outcomes is a bold and welcome move to untie long standing binds that have persistently kept students without the full breath of resources necessary to succeed. Time on task matters.

The tasks force's mission, "to study, monitor and consider effective ways to close the achievement gap between racial and socioeconomic groups in Connecticut" is a noble one, and it is my hope that the recommendations of the standing task force coupled with the findings of the Commission on Educational Achievement and what I anticipate will be a new task force designed to study ECS will pool their collective thought power and resources, steer clear of redundancy and duplication of efforts, and work swiftly in a coordinated fashion to make systemic annual progress in Connecticut towards closing our shameful achievement gap.

Thank you for your time and the opportunity to speak before this committee today.