

Dr. James Thompson Jr., Superintendent of Schools, Bloomfield Public Schools

Testimony to the Joint Committee on Education Public Hearing

Thursday, March 19, 2015

Testimony on Senate Bill 1098 and House Bill 7021

Good Afternoon, Representative Fleischmann, Senator Slossberg, and distinguished members of the State Education Committee. My name is Dr. James Thompson Jr. and I proudly serve as Superintendent of Schools for the great town of Bloomfield, Connecticut.

Before you today are two bills that can ensure every child in Connecticut has the great teachers and effective leaders they deserve. **Senate Bill 1098 and House Bill 7021** would allow Connecticut the flexibility and policies necessary to attract the most diverse, best prepared and most effective teachers to our classrooms, and to prepare our educators to teach in some of our state's most vulnerable communities.

I stand here on behalf of not only students of my town, but for students all across the state of Connecticut. Bloomfield proudly boasts one of the most diverse teacher workforces in the State of Connecticut, and this is something I am particularly proud of. Increasingly, research suggests that students of color who are taught by teachers of color perform better on a variety of academic measurements. These metrics include better school attendance, retention, standardized test scores, behavior, and most importantly, better rates of high school graduation and college enrollment.

In addition, teachers of color are statistically more likely to teach in our urban and high-poverty schools. Thus, recruiting more minority educators can benefit students attending schools in our most vulnerable communities, which is why we have prioritized recruitment of highly qualified and diverse teachers and principals.

Here in Bloomfield, we have achieved one of the top five highest percentages of minority teachers, at 26.5%, and one of the top 10 highest percentages of minority administrators, at 41.2%, for the 2012-2013 school year. Through our efforts and these educators, we have come to understand that in addition to effectiveness, the diversity of our teachers can have a profound effect on student achievement and our ability to close Connecticut's largest in the nation achievement gap.

Not every town is like Bloomfield, however, and not every child in Connecticut is receiving their education from a diverse workforce. The statistics are staggering. Nationally, students of color make up about half of the total student population, but only 18% of the national teacher population is of color.

When you look towards our state, the disparity between students of color, teachers of color, and administrators of color becomes even larger. Currently, students of color make up nearly 41% of all students in Connecticut, however, approximately only 8% of teachers and 12% of administrators are also of color. **In fact, 127 districts in Connecticut have absolutely no minority administrators.**

Recently, the Center for American Progress measured the difference between the diversity of student and teacher populations in their Teacher Diversity Index. Results showed that only 9 states performed worse than Connecticut when it comes to teacher diversity. We are simply

falling behind our peers in how we recruit and retain teachers of color, and are not doing enough to ensure our children have the educators they need to be most successful in the classroom.

With nearly 40,000 children attending low-performing schools across Connecticut, many of whom are African American, Hispanic, and come from low-income households, we have a moral obligation to act and provide our students with teachers and school leaders that can help them learn and that they can see themselves in. House Bill 7021 gives us the ability to do this.

In addition to recruiting more teachers of color, we need to make sure we can recruit any and all teachers that are best prepared to serve our students. Senate Bill 1098 makes great strides toward ensuring all our teachers are of the highest caliber by including policies that provide our schools and districts the flexibility to hire candidates from other states, requiring cultural competency training for prospective teachers, and ensuring schools can bring in effective and highly-qualified educators certified through alternative routes. In all, this bill would finally reduce the barriers hindering our state's ability to hire the most effective teaching force, particularly in shortage subject areas, where the need is greatest.

The two bills before you today, Senate Bill 1098 and House Bill 7021, are important steps forward on recruiting a teaching force that is diverse, of the highest-quality, and best prepared to deliver the support necessary to drive student achievement in our most vulnerable communities. There is no doubt that every child in Connecticut deserves an effective teacher in their classroom, and an effective leader in their school. Thus, I unequivocally support these bills, and I urge the General Assembly to prioritize our children and do the same.

Thank you.

Dr. James Thompson Jr.
Superintendent of Schools, Bloomfield Public Schools