



## **State of Connecticut**

**African-American Affairs Commission**

**State Capitol**

**210 Capitol Avenue – Room 509**

**Hartford, CT 06106**

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Senator Slosberg, Representative Fleischmann, Senator Boucher, Representative Lavielle, Senator Winfield and Representative Sanchez and other distinguished members of the Education committee. My name is Subira Gordon and I am the legislative analyst for the African American Affairs Commission. The mission of the African-American Affairs Commission (AAAC) is to improve and promote the economic development, education, health and political well-being of the African-American community in the State of Connecticut.

I am here today to offer testimony in support of [S.B. No. 1098](#) (RAISED) AN ACT CONCERNING TEACHER CERTIFICATION REQUIREMENTS FOR SHORTAGE AREAS, INTERSTATE AGREEMENTS FOR TEACHER CERTIFICATION RECIPROCITY, MINORITY TEACHER RECRUITMENT AND RETENTION AND CULTURAL COMPETENCY INSTRUCTION. Specifically sections 10 through 12.

Studies show that minority students tend to be more successful when they are taught by minority teachers and have better outcomes when they have positive academic role models who are minority. For those the students who attend public schools in the areas of the state that have high percentages of minority students this is a serious issue. The Washington post in a 2011 article states, “We find that the performance gap in terms of class dropout and pass rates between white and minority students falls by roughly half when taught by a minority instructor. In models that allow for a full set of ethnic and racial interactions between students and instructors, we find African-

American students perform particularly better when taught by African-American instructors. . . . The class dropout rate relative to Whites is 6 percentage points lower for Black students when taught by a Black instructor”. Although minority students make up more than a third of the public school population less than 7% of their teachers are minorities. Section 10 of this bill addresses that very issue and gives school districts the ability to apply for funding in order to attract and recruit minority teachers. The commission has heard from school districts that are struggling to attract minority teachers and we believe that this legislation will assist them in the process.

Next I would like to talk about sections 11 and 12 of this bill that deals with cultural competency. The closest thing to have a minority teacher in classrooms is having teachers and administrators that are aware of their own implicit biases and are culturally competent. **Cultural competence** is **defined** as a set of congruent behaviors, attitudes, and policies that come together in a system, agency, or among professionals and enables that system, agency, or those professionals to work effectively in cross-**cultural** situations. In education this means, knowing the community where the school is located, understanding all people have a unique world view, using curriculum that is respectful of and relevant to the cultures represented in its student body, being alert to the ways that culture affects who we are, placing the focus of responsibility on the professional and the institution and examining systems, structures, policies and practices for their impact on all students and families.

This training will help teachers understand immigrant communities and communities of color as well as helping minority teachers who end up in classrooms that are made up of mostly non-minority students. There is a trend in the state to ensure that health care organizations are culturally competent. The AAAC believes that all organizations that interact with the public should receive some type of cultural competency training.

Below is an article on cultural competence in education.

I would like to thank you for your time today.

## Four Steps to Cultural Competence

(Originally titled “Inviting All Students to Learn”)

“All people are shaped by the culture in which they live,” say Hilary Dack and Carol Ann Tomlinson (University of Virginia) in this *Educational Leadership* article. “The shaping process is both subtle and pervasive, and it can be difficult for all of us to grasp that people shaped by other cultures will see and respond to the world differently than we do.” As a result, it’s easy for educators to interpret unfamiliar student behaviors as expressions of disinterest, deficiency, disrespect, or defiance. Dack and Tomlinson suggest four ways to become better attuned to differences so all students flourish:

- *Recognize and appreciate cultural variance.* Good teachers have always been “students of their students,” say the authors; now it’s important to be students of their cultures, “attuned to their languages, appreciating their experiences and histories, and valuing their lenses on the world.” This might include joining students at concerts, plays, movies, and other events reflecting a diverse array of cultures.

- *Tune in to culturally influenced learning patterns.* Some students’ backgrounds are collectivist while others are more individualistic, say Dack and Tomlinson: “Some will have learned to revere their teachers from a distance, others to negotiate with their teachers as they would with a peer, and still others that they owe their teachers no respect until it’s earned... Each new layer of understanding provides a platform for creating a classroom in which all comers can feel at home.” Here are a few other cultural continuums on which individual students are arrayed:

- Needs to observe <---> Needs to test ideas
- Needs external structures <---> Creates own structures
- Competitive <---> Collaborative
- Conforming <---> Creative
- Reserved <---> Expressive
- Fixed sense of time <---> Flexible sense of time
- Information-driven <---> Feeling-driven

A teacher noticed that several students were uncomfortable responding to quick-response questions and on-the-spot writing prompts. Advised by a colleague that these students had been taught to value reflection over speed, and to listen and reflect before speaking, the teacher made two adjustments: first, she gave advance warning of an upcoming question by saying, “I want to hear from a couple of additional students on this topic. Then I’m going to ask for your thinking.” Second, early in a lesson she said, “As we conclude our lesson today, I’m going to ask you to summarize your understandings in writing.” These minor tweaks made a noticeable difference to the comfort and performance of formerly reticent students – and not just those the teacher originally had in mind.

• *Look beyond cultural patterns to see individuals.* Although there are learning-style patterns within cultures, there are plenty of individual differences. Students who appear to be part of a homogenous group can vary tremendously because of differences in gender, school experience, parental support, time in the U.S., and personal temperament. “True cultural sensitivity requires person sensitivity as well,” say Dack and Tomlinson.

• *Plan inviting curriculum and instruction.* This means teaching history, literature, music, language, and contemporary issues in ways that make as many connections as possible to students’ varied cultures and experiences. “In other words, the curriculum leads students to explore content through universal lenses rather than only parochial ones,” say the authors. “A teacher who looks at students as individuals – no matter what their cultural experiences are – will attend to their varied points of readiness, their interests, their exceptionalities, their status among peers, and so on when planning curriculum and instruction.” And from a pedagogical perspective, it’s wise to try to hit as many points on the continuums listed above as possible, either in unit and lesson plans or the choices students are able to make.

For example, in preparing students for a challenging assessment, a teacher might give two options: a quiz bowl, in which students compete in teams to answer sets of questions, or a tag team, in which students collaborate in groups to propose answers to the same questions, explain their thinking, and ask one another for elaborations to clarify their thinking.

Dack and Tomlinson close by quoting John Hattie on the characteristics of classrooms that invite students to learn:

- Respect – Every student is valuable, able, and responsible.
- Trust – Each student contributes to the learning process.
- Optimism – Each student has the potential to be successful.
- Intentionality – Every step of a lesson invites each student to learn.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Tomlinson, Hilary Dack and Carol Ann. "Inviting All Students to Learn." *Educational Leadership* (2015): 10-15. (Tomlinson, 2015)