

Testimony: Yamuna Menon, Director of Research & Policy, ConnCAN
Joint Committee on Education Public Hearing
Thursday, March 19, 2015

Good afternoon, Chairman Fleischmann, Chairwoman Slossberg and distinguished members of the Education Committee. My name is Yam Menon and I am Director of Research and Policy for the Connecticut Coalition for Achievement Now, or ConnCAN.

ConnCAN is committed to supporting policies that will lead to excellent schools for every child, regardless of race, zip code, or family income. We know that great schools can transform children's lives and ensure the long-term economic prosperity of Connecticut. That's why we must deliver on the promise of an excellent public education for all children now.

Yet, far too many children in our state, nearly 40,000, in fact, attend chronically and persistently underperforming schools continue to receive an education that fails to prepare them for success and that puts the future of our state at risk. These children, who are predominantly low-income students and students of color, deserve far better, and we have the ability to change their circumstances.

Fundamental to providing all of our students with a high-quality education is ensuring that they have access to great teachers and school leaders and the option to attend great schools. Our ability to do so depends on how you choose to move forward on the following bills before you today: Senate Bill 1096, Senate Bill 1098, and House Bill 7021.

The first of these bills, S.B. 1096, seeks to place a two-year moratorium on approving any new public charter schools pending development of a comprehensive statewide charter school plan and review of all existing charter schools. This bill would eliminate one of the state's most effective ways to address Connecticut's achievement gap and would deny thousands of kids an opportunity to access high-quality educational options. With over 80% of our state's public charter schools outperforming their host district, and with parents continuing to demand these options, this bill would directly oppose the wants and needs of parents and communities and deny them options that deliver a great education for kids. This bill attempts to stifle choice in our state and will prevent our most vulnerable children from accessing the high-quality schools they need for lifelong opportunity and success.

No child should have to wait a single day for a quality education let alone two years. **For the many thousands of students who are benefitting from public charter schools and the many thousands more who are on waiting lists for high-quality school options, we ask members of this Committee to reject S.B. 1096.**

If this bill passes, Connecticut will not be able to expand high-quality options, Connecticut will deny a great education to far too many students, especially our most vulnerable, underserved populations, and our state will lose a valuable part of our efforts to close the nation's worst achievement gap.

In addition to protecting access to high-quality options, we must also ensure our schools are staffed with great teachers and principals. Research clearly shows that

educator effectiveness has more impact on student achievement than any other factor controlled by schools. While Connecticut's educator quality policies have improved due to the work of this committee and implementation of more rigorous educator evaluations, we still have a long way to go to ensure we have a highly effective and diverse teacher and principal workforce.

There is also growing evidence that teacher diversity has an impact on the success of students. Research shows that students of color who are taught by teachers of color, perform better on a variety of academic outcomes, including: school attendance, retention, standardized test scores, advanced-level course enrollment, discipline rates, high school graduation, and college enrollment. Additionally, teachers of color are more likely to teach and remain in urban and high-poverty schools.

Yet, despite evidence to support the need for a diverse educator workforce, there is still a significant shortage of minority educators across the nation, particularly in Connecticut. While minority students make up about 41% of the total student population, the percentage of minority staff is significantly lower. Over 92% of Connecticut's teachers are white (87% for administrators and principals), as compared to the student population of just over 58% white. We can and must do better.

To ensure all our students are able to achieve, we must provide students with high-quality teachers and principals who are prepared to meet their needs and reflect their own backgrounds. A critical step is to make sure we have strong teacher preparation programs and policies that ensure we are able to recruit teachers of diverse ethnic and economic backgrounds and experience.

That's why **we urge you to support Senate Bill 1098 and House Bill 7021**. Both of these bills can profoundly affect the success of our education system by helping to bring highly qualified educators of diverse backgrounds and experiences to our schools. Together, S.B. 1098 and H.B. 7021 would facilitate and encourage teacher recruitment to our highest needs subject areas; ease restrictions to bringing in high-quality educators and leaders to our state; support additional alternate routes to certification, particularly for school administrators; and incorporate cultural competency within teacher preparation programs.

Securing a bright future for our children, means ensuring they have the resources, educators and schools they need for success. To do this we must make sure our teachers and principals are well prepared and supported and that we use every tool at our disposal, including high-quality options to drive student achievement and success.

Together, we can ensure continued progress that puts our children and our state on a path to a bright future.

Thank you.