

Education Committee
Minority Teacher Recruitment Task Force
Public Hearing
Testimony of Jane McBride Gates
March 7, 2016

Good Afternoon Sen. Slossberg, Rep. Fleischmann, Rep. Lavielle, Sen. Boucher and members of the Education Committee. My name is Dr. Jane Gates, designee, representing the Connecticut State Colleges and Universities System and Provost and Vice President for Academic Affairs at Western Connecticut State University. I am here testifying in support of Senate Bill 379: An Act Concerning the Recommendations of the Minority Teacher Recruitment Task Force.

We are in a crisis. CT ranks #1 with the widest achievement gaps in the nation with a notable distinction when comparing poverty-stricken students with their affluent peers. CT's achievement gap between White students and Black and Hispanic students is wider than the nation as a whole in each grade and subject, based on the average scores on the *National Assessment of Education Progress*. 80% of the teaching force are women, 82% are white, 7.8% Hispanic, 6.8% African American, 1.8% Asian. 92% of the certified teaching force are White while almost half of the students attending public schools in CT are minorities. Research strongly supports that race/ethnicity matches between students and teachers impact student achievement, with significant benefits to students who are taught by matched-race teachers (Goldhaber and Hansen).

My expertise brought to the Task Force was in the area of measurement and evaluation through the lens of policy. Specifically, I focused on the validity and reliability of the PRAXIS exam. A compelling amount of research shows that the construct of the PRAXIS exam, norm-referenced/standardized, has historically had a disparate impact on minorities and individuals from lower income families. Norm-referenced tests compare students to each other (normed to whom?) as opposed to criterion-referenced tests that are designed to see whether the students have mastered the body of knowledge. The passing rate for first-time African American test takers was 21.5 percent, and for Hispanic test takers, 35 percent. A similar gap was seen on the reading and writing portions (*The New York Times, Tough Tests for Teachers, With Question of Bias*).

To be clear, I am not advocating the elimination of a marker to assess mastery of content subject matter. We must assess beginning teachers' readiness to teach. I am asserting that we must be certain that the purpose of the exam is appropriate and designed to measure and evaluate what we think it will measure. We must be aware that testing, any testing, can be useful but also deeply harmful when poorly designed or used improperly. We must be clear about what skills are necessary, rather than just trying to

eliminate people from the pool. We must consider better ways to assess our teacher candidates. The stakes are too high! If we are really serious in CT about access and diversity we must reexamine how we use norm-referenced tests.

Many universities have implemented SAT Optional policies for admission recognizing the disparate impact standardized tests have on minorities and the need to advance access and diversity. Among the SAT Optional universities are Stanford, University of Chicago, University of California, Harvard, University of Arizona, Sarah Lawrence and Western CT State University.

Licensure testing of the type and kind we now have in Connecticut and nationally has contributed significantly to jeopardizing the goal of diversifying the teaching force so that it may closely resemble the makeup of our state's student body. There is no scientific evidence that shows correlations between the content of standardized licensure test and teaching performance except in secondary math only. Evidence of the predictive validity of the standardized content area tests on teacher efficacy is mixed and mostly weak (Ayers, 1988). For the most part, these tests are unable to predict who will be a good teacher and who will be a bad teacher (Alan Singer).

In summary, we are losing talented teachers and teachers of color whose dreams are to become teachers. Most heartbreakingly, the American dream is in crisis for our kids due to the growing inequality gap of achievement and opportunities.

I urge you to accept the recommendations of the Minority Teacher Recruitment Task Force. I am available to answer any questions.

Thank you.