



State of Connecticut
GENERAL ASSEMBLY



Commission on Children

**Testimony before the Education Committee on Raised Senate Bills 381 and 379
Submitted by Steven Hernández, Director of Public Policy and Research
Connecticut Commission on Children
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Senator Slossberg, Representative Fleischmann, Ranking Members and Members of the Education Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to testify on these proposals before you. My name is Steven Hernández. I am the Director of Public Policy and Research of the CT Commission on Children and I am here today to speak in favor of:

- S.B. No. 381 (RAISED) AN ACT ESTABLISHING A TASK FORCE TO STUDY SCHOOL CLIMATE; and
- S.B. No. 379 (RAISED) AN ACT CONCERNING THE RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE MINORITY TEACHER RECRUITMENT TASK FORCE.

S.B. No. 381 (Raised) An Act Establishing A Task Force To Study School Climate

SB 381 would establish a task force to study school climate to review, streamline and align state policies relating to school climate, bullying, school safety and social-emotional learning. The task force would examine the manner in which local and regional boards of education are implementing the safe school climate plans, and any issues resulting from such implementation. The task force would be required to make recommendations relating to (1) school climate standards that local and regional boards of education will use to develop and implement safe school climate plans, and (2) an accountability methodology that uses the

results from student surveys to assess the effectiveness of such safe school climate plans.

School climate refers to the “quality and character of school life.” A school’s climate can be positive or negative. We promote positive school climates to ensure that students can learn, teachers can teach, administrators can lead, parents can engaged, and so that the social and emotional foundation of a happy and productive life can find support in our educational settings.

In the state of Connecticut, there are various entry points that schools and Districts use to help improve climate. Social and emotional intelligence, behavioral interventions and supports, restorative discipline and prevention practices, teen dating violence prevention, promoting school safety: each of these are entry points toward a common goal, which is to improve the quality and character of school life.

This bill is critical because it brings the right experts to the table to help us all understand what we know instinctually and experientially, which is that all of these concepts fit together.

For these reasons, we respectfully recommend a clarifying provision to ensure that every participant or designee bring experience or expertise in one or more of the areas to be considered, i.e. school climate, restorative practices, character education, social and emotional learning and, of course, bullying.

We would also recommend that you allow the task force to consider expertise and best practices from some of the premier local and national institutions that work in these areas. Among them are Yale and UCONN, but for the record I submit the National School Climate Center, the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL), the International Institute for Restorative Practices, and the Character Education Partnership (Character.org). This is by no means an exclusive list, but each of these organizations draws from local expertise that we would be remiss to ignore.

Finally, the Commission on Children respectfully requests that its Executive Director, or a designee, be allowed to serve on the task force. Over the years we have advised on policy and practice concerning our school climate and anti-bullying statutes, and we would be honored to lend our expertise to the adoption of best practices for the state of Connecticut in this particular capacity.

S.B. No. 379 (Raised) An Act Concerning The Recommendations Of The Minority Teacher Recruitment Task Force

The Commission on Children strongly supports SB 379 regarding the Minority Teacher Recruitment Task Force.

This bill would extend the Minority Teacher Recruitment Task Force until June 30, 2017. The task force would be charged with the additional, focused task of determining whether the Praxis examination, as currently administered, has an effect on minority teacher recruitment. The bill would also establish a Minority Teacher Recruitment Policy Oversight Council within the State Department of Education.

Finally, the bill would require that SDE conduct annual survey of students participating in minority teacher recruitment programs offered by regional educational service centers or at a public institution of higher education in the state. The survey would include questions relating to the components and effectiveness of the minority teacher recruitment program.

I had the honor of serving on the task force as the Commission on Children's designee. During a series of public hearings, the task force heard extensive testimony from educators, school leaders, community members, social scientists and others on the state of minority teacher recruitment in Connecticut. This included testimony on what we are and are not doing well to increase the number of minority teachers, not only in our urban centers but throughout the state, best practices, and a robust discussion on teacher certification and the Praxis exam.

During those hearings we learned that students of color represent over 1/3 of CT public school students, but only 7% of teachers and 2% of administrators are

minorities (CREC). 40% of CT public school students will never have a teacher who is not white (CREC). 25% of beginning teachers leave the classroom within 4 years (CREC). In high poverty areas, 50% of teachers leave in first 5 years (CREC).

Not only does the current state of minority teacher representation stress the need, so does the research:

- All students benefit from regular interactions with minority educators (CREC)
Minority teachers provide more effective role models for students of color (King, 1993; Clewell & Vegas, 1998; U.S. Department of Education, 1997; Graham, 1987, Ladson-Billings, 1994, NCTAF, 1996)
- Minority teacher presence is connected directly to closing the achievement gap (CREC)
- Racial pairings of teachers and students influence teacher expectations and evaluations of students (Ferguson, 1998; Castell, 1998; Zimmerman et al., 1995)

Research (2004 report by NEA) on achievement gap and minority teachers
<http://www.nea.org/assets/docs/HE/diversityreport.pdf>

- “Most of the data currently available on connections between teachers of color and student performance are generated from small-scale qualitative research involving single or multiple case studies. These data focus on a number of significant, though under-recognized, school achievement markers, including attendance records, disciplinary referrals, dropout rates, overall satisfaction with school, self-concepts, cultural competence, and students’ sense of the relevance of school.” (p.6)
- “Students of color tend to have higher academic, personal, and social performance when taught by teachers from their own ethnic groups. (However, this finding does not suggest that culturally competent teachers could not achieve similar gains with students of color from different ethnic groups.)” (p.6)
- “Teachers from different ethnic groups have demonstrated that when students of color are taught with culturally responsive techniques and with content specific approaches usually reserved for the gifted and talented, their academic performance improves significantly.” (p.6)

- “Teachers of color have higher performance expectations for students of color from their own ethnic group.” (p.6)

Dee, T. (2004). Teachers, race and student achievement in a randomized experiment. *The Review of Economics and Statistics*, 86(1): 195-210.

- Study in Tennessee, included more than 11,000 students, tracked for 4 years
- Assignment to an own-race teacher increased math and reading scores by 2-4 percentile points
- Statistically less experienced white teachers who work in poorer and more segregated schools
- Test score benefits of own-race teachers are concentrated in schools with more disadvantaged students and in more segregated schools, perhaps because racial dynamics in classrooms including role model effects and stereotype threat are particularly relevant in more disadvantaged and segregated black communities.

Thank you for your time.
