March 9, 2018

Dear Education Committee of the Connecticut General Assembly,

I am writing as an assistant professor of political science, a resident of the State of Connecticut, and a citizen of the United States to express my opposition to SB 359, “an act prohibiting the disaggregation of student data by ethnic subgroups in the public school information system.”

The prohibition of data disaggregation could be potentially disastrous for all racially identified minorities in the State of Connecticut. Our Asian, Latino/a, and Black populations are highly “diverse” in the sense that not all subgroups associated with these categories are equally (dis)advantaged in terms of educational opportunities, household wealth, and health outcomes. For instance, the term “Asian American,” while useful for the purposes of building coalitions and achieving strength in numbers, covers over significant socioeconomic disparities between, say, Cambodian refugee populations and Taiwanese skilled workers.

We need to see through the fallacy that collecting “ethnic subgroup” data is necessarily discriminatory either in its intent or in its effect. Data is information and information can be used or abused. Reliable data about Connecticut’s—or, for that matter, the United States’—diverse student populations is necessary for social scientists seeking to understand why ethno-national groups are experiencing disparate educational outcomes, for instance. I would also assume that education policymakers committed to equal opportunity would find such data useful in identifying challenges that some groups may experience more than others.

Best regards,

Fred Lee
Assistant Professor of Political Science and Asian American Studies
The University of Connecticut, Storrs