Testimony before the Education Committee Supporting S.B. 359, “Prohibiting the Disaggregation of Student Data by Ethnic Subgroups” By Weihua Niu, Residence of Orange, CT, Professor of Psychology, Thursday, March 8, 2018

Honorable Members of Education Committee:

My name is Weihua Niu. I am a Connecticut residence for the past 20 years and a tenured Full Professor of Psychology at Pace University in New York City. I support S.B. 359 “Prohibiting the Disaggregation of Student Data by Ethnic or Racial Subgroups in the Public School Information System (No. SB359)” for the following two reasons:

Data disaggregation should never be used in politics and procedures. Asking student to check boxes about the country of origin or language/dialect of their ancestry in addition to race and ethnicity reinforce group differences, create division, and harbor unnecessary hostility among groups.

It encourages the thinking that people are fundamentally different simply because they have parents or grandparents from different parts of the worlds; therefore, they out to be treated differently regardless what generation of Americans they are. If our schools practice this thinking, asking students, from an earlier age, to always think that they need to remember and report national origins of their parents and grandparents, we are raising a generation of American to have a stronger bias against out-group, also known as implicit attitude. What we should do, instead, is to deemphasize group differences, build trust and empathy among people from different groups, and be mindful about other and their own implicit attitudes. Just like separation can never be equal, disaggregation cannot achieve fairness but to create more social disparities.

Second, Data disaggregation harms health and psychological well-being of ALL students, especially non-Whites teenagers and young adults. It is well-documented that emphasizing race and nationality, in subtle language such as “where are you from and where is your ancestry from,” make people of color more likely to be perceived as less American than Whites regardless what generation of Americans they are. To defend themselves, people of color often experience anxiety, divert their attention from their everyday work and lives, which is called “stereotype threat.” As a result, they are more likely to feel vulnerable, choose identity denial, and suffer a whole set of mental health problems, such as depression, anxiety, self-harm, and even suicide. Racial difference in mental health is available at the CDC website. All research articles are also available upon request. Here I have taken exepts from three student written testimonies to speak about the impact of implicit racial stereotypes from teachers and peers on their well-being.
Exerts of Three Student Testimonies

A few months back, in school, we took the OLSAT (Otis Lennon Scholastic Ability Test). My teacher turned to the class and said, "put down your race as "White, American." I was about to put down "White, American" because I was born here and I knew I was legally American. But then the teacher turned to me and said that I was to put down my race as "Asian." But I am an American. I am American just like everyone else, and I was still being put into a different ethnic group. Nobody should be segregated because of their race, their background, and where they came from. That is why I am here to support Bill No. 359. - A ten-year-old boy.

I've experienced a lot of criticism for being Chinese, even though I was born and raised in America. People have commented, "you are Asian, you're supposed to be smart," "Hey, have you ever eaten dogs?" and mocking joked, "Chinese, Japanese, Taiwanese, etc." while pulling at both their eyelids to indicate the stereotypical Asian eyes. Others have pointed at my friends, also Asians, and laughed at them, doing strange postures and saying incoherent words to act as an Asian. I don't understand the reasons for racism, America is supposed to be a country of free and equal citizens, but the part of equality never really happens. " - A thirteen-yr-old girl.

When I was in 1st grade, I made a "friend," P. One day, during recess, P. said to me, "I can't play with a Chinese. My mom said I can't make friends with Chinese people." That night, my brother emailed my teacher, and my teacher passed this situation on to the principal. After the principal had a talk with P., she told other kids not to play with me. One day at recess, M. came to me, about to say something really important. But then P. came up behind her and called her away. Another day at recess, I asked another girl if I can play with her. But she said, "Hold on, I have to ask P." Then she ran away. This continued until the end of 1st grade. In 2nd grade I made a new friend, a true best friend. But P. lured her away at some point of the year. I told her about what had happened with me and P. in 1st grade, so she kind of stopped playing with P. Thankfully, P. moved away in 3rd grade.

I forced myself to forget all that had happened between us. Every time I think about this, I cry. It has been a long time before I thought of what had happened. Since I forced myself to forget, it was painful to hear my past again. We are all citizens of the US. We all have rights to be like every other US citizen and do what they can do. We are the United States of America, not the Divided States of America. I hope my story will make a contribution to the decision. It was painful to remember — A 7th grade girl.