March 8, 2018

Dear Representative Fox, Senator Slossberg, Senator Boucher,

The Connecticut Data Collaborative’s mission is to empower an ecosystem of data users across the state. We work with state agencies, non-profit organizations, philanthropy, community groups and municipal leaders to support evidence-based and data-informed decision making. We write to oppose Senate Bill 359: An Act Prohibiting the Disaggregation of Student Data by Ethnic Subgroups in the Public School Information System.

As we read the bill language, we understand that this act would prohibit disaggregation of data for reporting purposes. We oppose S.B. 359 for two specific reasons:

First, the bill’s language indicates that disaggregation of student mastery results by ethnic subgroups is only permissible when required by federal law. There are many reasons why the state education agency would want to share disaggregated data about student mastery tests even if not required by federal law and states should have the right to decide how and when they will share these disaggregated data. Most importantly, states need to examine disparities in performance on student mastery tests to be able to measure and improve educational outcomes for all students. To limit a district’s ability to analyze and share these data in this instance would set us back to pre-No Child Left Behind days when we masked real inequities between students and schools.

Secondly, we oppose the bill where the phrasing of A.v.II says disaggregations can only happen if data are collected “among the entire student population.” This is an impossible standard to meet since homeschoolers and private school students aren’t under the purview of the State Department of Education (SDE) and SDE does not have the authority to collect data on these students.

More broadly, we worry that prohibitions against the reporting of disaggregated data may spill over into prohibitions around data collection in general. As a state, we suffer grave inequities in the distribution of resources and the availability of high quality schooling and without data, we cannot continue to advocate for students in every town, school district, and demographic group. According to the most recent U.S. Census American Community Survey estimates, as a state, our population is 77% white and ethnic subgroups make up a smaller share of the population. Our diversity exists in segregated pockets and disaggregated data is not even possible to share in small towns. The SDE goes to great lengths to ensure proper suppressions in data they release to the public. They have data standards to ensure that data are not personally identifiable. Student privacy and safety are always the chief concern of the State Department of Education and the advocates fighting for schooling equity. To deny those champions the availability of evidence to show inequities exist would be a grave disservice to their work and most harmful to those its intending to benefit.

Connecticut has been a national leader in its commitment to open data at the state level. Conversations regarding the importance of public data are taking place at all levels of government and we hope you will oppose SB 359 to allow for continued momentum in the development of high quality data.

We remain available for questions. It is our hope that your committee will oppose this piece of legislation.

Best wishes,

Michelle Riordan-Nold
Executive Director, Connecticut Data Collaborative