



Connecticut Students for a Dream
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Testimony to the Education Committee
March 6, 2019

Testimony Regarding HB7082 & HB7083

Dear Members of the Education Committee of the Connecticut General Assembly:

We, Connecticut Students for a Dream (C4D), strongly support and calls on the members of the Education Committee to support the following bills with some modifications: HB7082: AN ACT CONCERNING THE INCLUSION OF AFRICAN-AMERICAN STUDIES IN THE PUBLIC SCHOOL CURRICULUM and HB7083: AN ACT CONCERNING THE INCLUSION OF PUERTO RICAN AND LATINO STUDIES IN THE PUBLIC SCHOOL CURRICULUM. C4D is in support of these bills and programs, but we believe that further changes are need to make the most impact for our students.

C4D is a statewide, youth-led network that fights for the rights of undocumented immigrant youth and their families. We do this through community organizing, leadership development, and advocacy. We are proud to be the only organization in Connecticut that is led by and for immigrant youth directly impacted by the issues we seek to address.

We testify today because our immigrant community in Connecticut yearns to live unafraid. We are living under difficult and challenging times for immigrant youth and immigrant communities in Connecticut and in the rest of the country.

To live unafraid, our immigrant students and students of color need educational institutions that fully supports them as whole human beings, and that includes having schools that teach, acknowledge, and support the histories of our communities and our people. That includes African American Studies and Latinx studies, which are often ignored by schools and not taught, or are offered only as electives and not part of the required curriculum of history or social studies classes.

The majority of the students we work with, both immigrant and non-immigrant, are youth of color, both Latinx and Black, as such this topic is an issue that is very important to the youth that we work with everyday. We've heard from our own students who express an interest and a desire to learn about their our history and culture, in a curriculum that is otherwise dominated by the history of white, cisgender males.

Research proves that teaching students so-called "ethnic studies" had positive educational outcomes for students¹, especially students of color and especially male students of color, leading to higher attendance, lower dropout rates, and higher GPAs.

¹ Thomas S. Dee & Emily K. Penner, 2017. "The Causal Effects of Cultural Relevance," American Educational Research Journal, vol 54(1), pages 127-166.

However, HB7062 and HB7083 do not provide the needed support system and implementation that we need in order for this effort to be successful. CT Students for a Dream recommends further changes and additions to make this effort the most effective and powerful that it can be.

First, in addition to adding African American and Puerto Rican and Latino studies to the curriculum, we also recommend that the bills also require the teaching of the history of Race and The History of Racism in the United States. This content is essential to include along side the teaching of ethnic studies and histories. Students need to have the opportunity to critically learn about and analyze the effects of race and racism on our communities, and the role that racism has played in the history of the United States, and how history continues to affect our communities of color today. Learning about the creation of the concepts of “race,” whiteness, and anti-Blackness in our country would be beneficial not just to youth of color, but to white students as well, in order for them to get a full picture of race relations in the US.

Second, the bills must require racial bias trainings for social studies teachers and administrators, in order for the curriculum to be implemented in a way that actually helps and does not hurt the students of color we are trying the most to help. Bias is a real thing, and many educator may not have the language or skills to overcome implicit bias in their teaching practices. Such a training would help educators not only in teaching this important and sensitive curriculum, but also help them in working and teaching their students of color better across all disciplines.

Third, the creation of a curriculum-building Committee within the State Dept of Ed that would include teachers, experts on critical race theory, and students. This will create the necessary structure and expertise that is needed in order to develop a standardized curriculum that can be used for all schools. This will help us ensure that the delivery of the content is effective, high-quality, and consistent with the vision of the law and the needs of our students.

Lastly, although there are separate bills for African American and Puerto Rican and Latino studies, our recommendation is to make this a joint bill in order to address the needs of our youth of color more inclusively and collectively, recognizing that identities and histories are intersectional.

Thank you and I hope the committee will make the recommended changes so that these bills can have the intended impact.

On behalf of the C4D Community,

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