

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

My name is Joan M Bosson Heenan. I am a resident of New Haven with two children, grades 6 and 4, in New Haven Public Schools. I am writing with enthusiastic support for Bill7082 with SEJ's amendments. I believe that in order to dismantle the current state of racism in our country we need to confront it head on, starting with a deeper understanding of what brought us to where we are.

Understanding African-American history as well as the history of race and racism in the United States is vital to all students. It is important that African American students see themselves reflected in our textbooks and know that we acknowledge the reality of our country's past. It is important for White students to understand our inextricable histories and to recognize the role that their whiteness plays in their privilege. We can legislate school integration but without a deep understanding of what caused the need for integration in the first place, policies lack the teeth to make any real societal change. African-American History IS American History, one that has been white-washed out of our textbooks. Current curricular History is one that fails to recognize not only the vast contributions of African-Americans to our country but also the fact that our country was founded on racism.

Adding an African-American Studies course to the required curriculum will have much greater impact if partnered with anti-bias, anti-racism training for teachers and administrators. Teachers in particular, should receive the type of in-depth training that would allow them to engage students in meaningful exploration of African-American history, race and racism. There should be a curricular committee dedicated to the vetting and exploration of appropriate and impactful curriculum, and an ongoing review of its effectiveness.

Over the past 11 years of living in and raising children in New Haven I have confronted my own privilege and implicit bias in difficult and meaningful ways. This self-examination has impacted the way I show up in my city, the ways in which I parent, and the direct and honest ways in which I teach my children about racism and the role that racism plays in our lives and the lives of non-Whites in the United States. If I'm honest, it's not always pretty, but it is always worth it and I am confident that my children will be better than I. Adding African-American Studies to the curriculum in a way that includes anti-racism exploration has the potential to effect significant positive change for generations to come.

When I asked my children why they thought that including African-American history classes was important they said so much of value, including the following:

“One month [February] of a few projects isn't enough to learn everything about Black people in the United States. “

“If we don't know the real history of Black people in the United States and how they have been treated by White people how can we ever understand how they feel now. How can we ever stop racism if we pretend it wasn't part of how our country was built?”

Thank you for your time,
Joan M Bosson Heenan
New Haven, CT