

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

My name is Dwayne Boucaud and I am writing this testimony in support of Bill HB7082, with Students for Educational Justice's amendments, calling for the mandatory inclusion of African American Studies in the Connecticut public school curriculum. I am a resident of Cheshire CT, and have three children; two currently in and one graduated from the Cheshire Public School system. I am also a Professor of Biomedical Sciences at Quinnipiac University.

The inclusion of African American Studies in public school curriculum is essential, as Connecticut, like the rest of the country, becomes more and more diverse. Although this is common sense and may be commonly practiced in schools where there is a sizable amount of African American students, it is not something which commonly occurs in predominantly white schools such as those in Cheshire. There are numerous reasons why Bill HB7082 is essential for school systems like Cheshire.

As a university professor I am acutely aware that education prepares students for responsible citizenship as well as future careers. As the United States becomes more and more diverse it is untenable to believe that students will be able to relate to one another without a firm understanding of the cultures reflected by their fellow citizens. In order to effectively engage in a diverse community one must be able to understand the motivations and needs of all in the community, not only those of a similar background as their own.

Diversity in the workforce has become sought after as it has been shown to strengthen productivity as well as increase innovation. As a result, employers, many of whom Connecticut is striving to retain and attract, rate "appreciation of diversity and individual differences" just as important as "critical thinking skills". Our schools have recognized critical thinking skills as being important enough to be integrated into the curriculum, it is now time for the same for multicultural content such as African American Studies. Bill HB7082 ensures that.

Lastly I would like to relate the tragedy of Anjelita Estrada, aged 11. Anjelita was a student at Doolittle Elementary School in Cheshire. This young woman came to Cheshire with her family late last year. In December of 2018 she committed suicide. Reports allege that she experienced bullying in school, which may have contributed to her death. In the weeks before her suicide, Anjelita reported being bullied because of her Hispanic race. In response to this event I emailed the superintendent, Jeffrey Solan, to see if this tragedy can be an opening for a dialogue on race that would include students, faculty and staff. Dr. Solan's response was to let me know about a climate survey to parents, lessons used from the Anti-Defamation League and watching Martin Luther King's I have A Dream Speech with a group of students. While I respect Dr. Solan's sympathy, I do not believe that these efforts will be adequate in teaching respect and appreciation for the differences of others. As a parent of mixed race children in the Cheshire Public School system, I believe that Bill HB7082, will be of much greater consequence than watching Dr. King's speeches.

SEJ is calling for the passing of Bill HB7082 with the following amendments:

1. The bill to require The History of Race and The History of Racism in the United States in the CT curriculum
2. Required racial bias trainings for social studies teachers and administrators
3. The creation of a curriculum-building Committee within the State Dept of Ed that would include teachers, experts on critical race theory, and students

I appreciate your action on this important matter.

Sincerely,

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