

HB7082 Testimony | March 6, 2019 | Tagan Engel

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

My name is Tagan Engel, I am a white parent of two mixed race children in New Haven Public Schools as well as being a graduate of New Haven Public Schools. I am a former educator, and also an Equity in Education Fellow with the Graustein Memorial Fund. I am in support of many things before you today including Puerto Rican and Latinx studies and increased play time for elementary students. I mainly here to support Bill 7082 for African American Studies with all of the Students for Educational Justice's amendments.

African American history is American history but the facts and stories are largely missing from our school curriculums. **It is so important that all students of every race and background learn about the massive contributions of Black people throughout our history.** Students need to learn inspiring stories of the Black work and brilliance that has helped to build this country, a history that goes far deeper than what's generally taught during Black history Month. Additionally, learning about the history of race and racism in our country is vital to understanding all aspects of how our society functions, who has wealth and power, American cultures, and more, and it is essential to improving not only our education system but also our society..

It is extremely important that you create a committee with strong representation from Black educators and students with a liberation framework to help create this curriculum. During this school year I have witnessed my daughter's 5th grade social studies class learning about the Native American Resettlement act through a terrible book called Weasel. This book is entirely about white people at this point in history, with no significant Native American characters. Additionally the main character of this book is a psychopathic mass murderer. There is no way in the world if there had been First Nations educators or students on the committee to create that curriculum that this book would have been chosen to represent the Native American history and experience. It was probably well intentioned white people who chose that book. Please do not make this mistake with this new curriculum and include the amendment to create a committee to do this right.

It is vital that teachers have anti-racism education and training in order to teach this curriculum with sensitivity and not traumatize students. To draw another example from my daughter's 5th grade class, this year they are doing a holocaust curriculum. As a Jewish granddaughter of Holocaust survivors, I am grateful that this curriculum is taught, however, when a teacher sends kids home to google Auschwitz and make a poster about it, or has them study for a holocaust vocabulary test, it is clear that there is a lack of sensitivity to the material. When my ten year old was singled out in front of the class as being an "expert" on this genocide that her grandmother survived, she was uncomfortable and very unhappy. **The last thing I want to see is Black students being traumatized by learning this new curriculum from teachers who are unprepared to teach it, and who lack the full analysis of how the racist history of our country affects our current actions today.**

I strongly encourage the inclusion of African American Studies, Latinx Studies in our CT k-12 curriculum as well as anti-racism training for these teachers as an important step in properly educating our children and starting to heal our future.

Thank you!
Tagan Engel

New Haven Parent at Betsy Ross Arts Magnet and New Haven Academy