

Education Committee Public Hearing

Thursday, March 6th, 2019

Ruben Felipe

House Bill 7082 An Act Concerning the Inclusion of African-American Studies in the Public School Curriculum, and 7083 An Act Concerning the Inclusion of Puerto Rican and Latino Studies in the Public School Curriculum

Good day Chairperson McCrory, Chairperson Sanchez, and members of the Education Committee. We are glad to have the opportunity to testify before this committee. My name is Ruben Felipe and I represent the Northeast Charter Schools Network.

The Northeast Charter Schools Network is a non-profit membership and advocacy association of public charter schools in New York and Connecticut. We are committed to ensuring that kids and families have access to great educational options.

Currently, Connecticut has 23 public charter schools serving over 10,400 students across 10 host districts. These schools serve nearly 75% low-income students and more than 85% Black and Hispanic students, and continue to deliver high-quality options to kids throughout the state.

Today we are testifying in support of House Bills *7082 An Act Concerning the Inclusion of African-American Studies in the Public School Curriculum, and 7083 An Act Concerning the Inclusion of Puerto Rican and Latino Studies in the Public School Curriculum.*

As previously stated these bills propose the inclusion of African-American and Latino studies into the public school curriculum. It is my personal belief that this is critical, not just to our state's growing population of students of color but for all students.

As a parent of current public school students of color, I can speak to the Eurocentric view in my children's textbooks and lessons. Often any consideration of non-anglo peoples and cultures either doesn't happen until high school or is relegated to short lists of names and events that fails to capture an accurate accounting of non-anglo contributions to American and World History.

This bill, by elevating the status beyond an elective, would send a very clear message that all history, including Black and Latino history, should be a requirement for all. All students, not just students of color, would benefit from a more authentic, unfiltered version of history that teaches minority contributions to our history.

Connecticut's charter schools seek to serve underserved communities, including low-income, Black and Brown students. Research tells us that classes that teach ethnic studies boosts student attendance, GPAs, and high-school credits (Stanford 2016).

More specifically, attendance jumped by 21 percentage points, grade-point average by 1.4 points, and students in ethnic-studies courses covering discrimination, stereotypes, and social-justice movements earned 23 more credits toward graduation. Per the

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research, taking ethnic studies not only improved the academic performance of students but also promoted their academic engagement and discouraged dropping out.

In other words, a more accurate and inclusive approach to teaching history helps us raise the achievement of Black and Brown students. More importantly, I believe that all of our kids deserve an education that is relevant, meaningful, affirming of their identities, and that gives them a sense of agency.

Thank you for your time today, and for your consideration.