



House Bill No. 7082
AN ACT CONCERNING THE INCLUSION OF AFRICAN-AMERICAN STUDIES IN THE PUBLIC
SCHOOL CURRICULUM
March 6, 2019

Senators McCrory and Abrams, Representatives Sanchez and Barry, and Distinguished Members of the Education Committee:

This testimony is submitted on behalf of the Center for Children's Advocacy, New England's largest children's rights non-profit legal organization. The Center provides holistic representation for poor children in Connecticut's communities, largely centered about the Greater Hartford and Bridgeport areas, through individual representation, training and education, and systemic advocacy. The Center represents children in a variety of matters, including child welfare, immigration, juvenile delinquency, public health, and special education.

I submit this testimony in support of Bill 7082, which proposes the implementation of African-American studies in our public school curriculum.

A recent study shows that in the United States, only 8% of class time in U.S. History is devoted to Black History.ⁱ Other studies have shown that these lessons generally are either too celebratory or lack complexity.ⁱⁱ Meanwhile, by way of example, Hartford's public school population is 30% African American; East Hartford's is 33%.ⁱⁱⁱ New Haven's population is made up of 43% black students;^{iv} Bloomfield's is 76%.^v Yet other school systems, such as Cheshire, have classrooms with only 3% black students.^{vi} All students need to learn the full history of this country. It is 2019, and it is time to implement meaningful, informative African American studies into Connecticut's public education for a number of reasons.

First, the implementation of African American studies into our curriculums is a way to show students that African Americans have a history of their own -- that they exist and they are important. That the struggles of their ancestors brought them to where they are today and that their continued perseverance, and all of our continued support, can truly make a difference moving forward. If we fail to consistently incorporate an African American curriculum into our students' educations, how can we expect them to grow into well-rounded and well-versed adults?

Additionally, implementing this curriculum is a way to ignite progress. It is the planting of seeds of knowledge into our children to give them what they need to grow and expand their minds. When children feel validated, respected, and accepted, they are more likely to succeed. Making this change in our curriculum could positively affect all of our students' feelings about not only school, but about themselves and one another, which in turn can positively affect their actions both in and out of the classroom. A few lessons during Black History Month each year cannot adequately teach students about the full history of this country and all of the ancestors upon whose backs it was built.

Clearly, this change in curriculum would not only be beneficial to African American children. As a white woman from an all-white middle-class suburb, the study of African American history was

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all but non-existent in my public school education, as recent as a few years ago. As a young adult, I had to go out of my way to learn about African American history, through elective classes offered in college. It opened my mind and expanded my understanding of the world, but had I not sought it, I likely would have never known.

Lastly, Connecticut would not be the first state to incorporate African American studies into its public education curriculum. Black history mandates in public schools have been implemented in at least thirteen other states, including New York, California, Florida, and Mississippi. It is time for Connecticut to join these states in pushing for a better-rounded, inclusive education for the children of our state.

For these reasons, we support the passage of S.B. 7082. Thank you for your consideration.

Respectfully Submitted,



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ⁱ The Status of Black History in U.S. Schools and Society.

https://www.socialstudies.org/system/files/publications/articles/se_810117014.pdf

ⁱⁱ Id.

ⁱⁱⁱ <https://www.neighborhoodscout.com/ct/east-hartford/schools>

^{iv} <https://www.neighborhoodscout.com/ct/new-haven/schools>

^v <https://www.neighborhoodscout.com/ct/bloomfield/schools>

^{vi} <https://www.neighborhoodscout.com/ct/cheshire/schools>