



“Unlocking the Potential in ALL Students”

Office of the Superintendent

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Distinguished Members of the Connecticut State Legislature:

Thank you for the opportunity to submit this written testimony in support of **SB1034: An Act Concerning Minority Recruitment and Retention**. Although, I am unable to attend the hearing, on this important proposed Act, in person, I emphatically support and endorse this initiative as a Superintendent of Schools and specifically as a voice of change, equity and leadership.

Throughout my career, and now as the Superintendent of the Middletown Public Schools, I have openly and actively advocated for the need to recruit, develop and retain a diverse Connecticut teaching profession. We need to do all we can to make teaching a viable financial and professional choice for potential teachers of color in our great State.

In a time where a pandemic as forced us to reimagine education it is not enough to consider how to make this change, but who should be included in it. Presently, only 9.6% of Connecticut's teaching population are teachers of color, while 50% of students are students of color. For students of color, having a teacher that looks like them can have a profound impact on their trajectory of their lives. In 2017, researchers from John Hopkins and American University found that Black students who have one Black teacher by the time they reach third grade are thirteen percent more likely to enroll in college, and those who had two Black teachers were 32% more likely to enroll in college. Additionally, the Institute of Labor Economics found the Black boys living in poverty who had Black teachers by the sixth grade were thirty-nine percent less likely to drop out of high school. Teachers of color change lives and when we change lives, we change communities.

I am excited to see this Act proposed and under consideration by your honorable legislative body. I have had the great privilege to have collaborated with Ms. Toni Williams from ConnCAN for many years regarding advocacy for this very topic. Please let take me this quick moment to recognize Ms. Williams tireless work in the education world of Connecticut.

I am strongly encouraging your passage of this proposed Act in light of the State's continued efforts to attract Black and Brown individuals into the profession. As you are aware, despite our collective best efforts, this remains a challenge for all of us. Despite these challenges, we must continue all our advocacy and firm efforts. To support these efforts, in Middletown:

- MPS is actively considering joining CREC's Residency Program which specifically focuses on the recruitment of a diverse teaching profession
- MPS actively supports and engages, with District monetary scholarships when possible, Connecticut programs such as CT-RELAY, a program that provides an alternate route to teaching certification. In the 2020/21 academic year alone, MPS nominated seven (7) individuals with three (3) slated to finish the program with \$1000 scholarships applied toward their RELAY tuitions. Since my entry to Middletown, we have sponsored ten (10) individuals through RELAY.

- MPS actively participates in the RESC Alliance Virtual Career Fair. This fair actively collaborates with Connecticut districts to increase the diversity of the state's teaching population. RESC deserves tremendous credit for sponsoring and coordinating this free online “meet and greet” experience between district's like Middletown and job-seeking educators of color.
- I am actively considering proposing to our local Board of Education, the hire of a District senior level leader, reporting to my office, to coordinate and manage a variety of equity, diversity and equal opportunity employment programs and initiatives. These critical efforts need to cease being side projects on the corner of another individual’s desk and need to start being front and center and focused efforts led across the District. It is my hope that a position like this will provide professional learning for our educators, will not only allow us to recruit teachers of color, but to retain them through creating an inclusive community where all teachers feel welcome and that they belong.
- MPS actively supports and is in the process of selecting a youth advocate to serve on any established statewide advocacy boards, something Ms. Williams and I have long discussed.

I am proud of our local efforts and our Board of Education’s support of these mission-critical initiatives. In Middletown, our commitment to recruiting and retaining educators of color has allowed our teachers of color population grow by almost four percent over the past five years. However, we must all share in this commitment for our students and community. I ask that we all join together in supporting this proposed Act and continue even greater and more direct efforts to grow and develop our educators of color. Thank you for your time and for accepting my written testimony.

Sincerely and with Highest Regard,

Michael T. Conner

Michael T. Conner
Superintendent of Schools
Middletown, Connecticut