



The Commission on
Women, Children, Seniors, Equity & Opportunity

CWCSEO

Connecticut General Assembly

**Testimony of The Commission on Women, Children, Seniors, Equity and
Opportunity
Presented to the Education Committee
Wednesday, March 17th, 2021 ~ 10:00 AM via Zoom**

Senator McCrory, Representative Sanchez and all the members of the Education Committee of the Connecticut General Assembly (CGA), my name is Steven Hernández, Executive Director of the CGA's Commission on Women, Children, Seniors, Equity, and Opportunity (CWCSEO). With the assistance of our Children and Families Policy Fellow, Thomas Nuccio, I am pleased to submit our testimony in support of the following bills:

HB 6619 “An Act Concerning The Development Of A Kindergarten To Eight Grade Model Curriculum.”

HB 6620 “An Act Concerning The Right to Read and Addressing Opportunity Gaps And Equity In Public Schools.”

SB 1033 “An Act Concerning The Inclusion of Computer Science And Financial Literacy As Part Of The High School Graduation Requirements

SB 1034 "An Act Concerning Minority Teacher Recruitment and Retention.”

The Commission wishes to testify **in support** of the following bills:

1. HB 6619, An Act Concerning The Development of A Kindergarten To Eight Grade Model Curriculum.

The Commission supports the development of a model curriculum for grades kindergarten to grade eight, which may be used by local and regional boards of education.

The Commission specifically supports the subject matter inclusion of, "Native American studies, Asian Pacific American studies, lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, and other sexual orientations and gender identities studies, climate change, personal financial management and financial literacy, and the military service and experience of American veterans."

Connecticut is home to five state-recognized tribal nations: the Mashantucket Pequot Tribal Nation, Mohegan Tribe, Eastern Pequot Tribal Nation, Golden Hill Paugusset Tribal Nation, and the Schaghticoke Tribal Nation.

The Asian and Pacific Islander communities are among the fastest growing communities of the State, bringing a diversity of resources, ideas, opportunities and needs to the future of our state.

The LGBTQ+ communities of the state face unique challenges and provide powerful opportunities for us to provide support to a community represented by members of your communities that could be our children, parents and other relatives, neighbors, friends, coworkers, employees and other professionals.

In the spirit of "nothing for us without us" the Commission asks that any model curriculum developed as a result of this legislation include meaningful input from the communities represented by the model curriculum.

In addition, this bill would create a strong civics component to be included into the model curriculum with the inclusion of a task force to enhance the training of civics, citizenship and government. This task force would make recommendations on how public schools provide instruction on civics, citizenship and American government to students by: reviewing existing curricula and the high school graduation requirements; receiving recommendations from educators, administrators and the public and, exploring the feasibility of establishing public and private partnerships to fund and support enhancements to such instruction. These instructions will help students be best prepared to be leaders and advocates in their communities.

This bill intends to develop a model K-8 curriculum which helps achieve three distinct goals including: setting a clear baseline for what students could learn in a given year; provide much needed curricular support for capacity-limited districts so that teachers are able to focus more on the delivery of material than building their own content; and to ensure that the curriculum includes culturally competent pedagogy and practice in order to increase understanding and engagement.

This bill would:

- Require the Department, in collaboration with the State Education Resource Center to establish a model K-8 curriculum.
- Require the Department and the State Education Resource Center to produce a description of the model curriculum, which would include the score and course objectives

The establishment of a K-8 curriculum will help bring awareness to the many underrepresented groups in the state of Connecticut while improving the educational experiences for our public school students.

2. HB 6620, An Act Concerning the Right to Read and Addressing Opportunity Gaps and Equity In Public Schools.

Nearly half of Connecticut public school students are not meeting grade-level expectations and Connecticut has reading attainment gaps showing vast disparities by race. Less than 6 in 10 students in Connecticut are on track for college and careers in reading. For some communities fewer than 1 in 10 are on track including schools in New Britain, Bridgeport and three schools in Hartford. Data suggests that students who cannot fluently read by the end of grade 4 face an uphill climb to high school graduation, college attendance and later find a full-time job in the Connecticut workforce. Furthermore, research indicates that students who do not read proficiently by third grade are four times more likely to leave school without a diploma than proficient readers.

HB6620 aligns with CWCSEO's priorities, including eliminating disparities regarding educational opportunities and child well-being. Evidence-based literacy instruction correlates to long-term success, reduced poverty and improved economic mobility. ¹

The 2019 National Assessment for Education Progress report indicates that only 41% of Connecticut's fourth graders are hitting the proficient mark in reading also reported that Connecticut's average fourth grade score of 224 was lower than only two other states.²

Black and Latino students scored an average of 33 points lower than white students. As it relates to socio-economic status, low-income fourth graders had an average score that was 35 points lower than non-low-income students. ³

The science of reading is supported by educational research as the proven, most effective way to teach foundational literacy skills.

The key areas of reading include phonics, phonemic awareness, vocabulary development, reading fluency including oral skills, and reading comprehension.

This Bill would:

- Identify and approve reading curricula models and programs that are based on the Science of Reading.
- Establish A Center for Literacy Research and Reading Success.
- Provide professional development and coaching.
- Advise and collaborate with education preparation programs.
- Solicit and leverage philanthropic resources; and
- Expand the Connecticut Literacy Initiative for intervention in high-need districts.

Dexterity in reading sets the framework for all Connecticut students to be on a pathway towards success which will improve economic mobility for many of our residents.

¹ Jones, Damon E., et al. "Early Social-Emotional Functioning and Public Health: The Relationship Between Kindergarten Social Competence and Future Wellness." *American Journal of Public Health*, vol. 105, no. 11, July 2015, pp. 2283–90, doi:10.2105/AJPH.2015.302630. Retrieved from <https://ajph.aphapublications.org/doi/full/10.2105/AJPH.2015.302630>.

² [2020-ap-cohort-data-report.pdf \(collegeboard.org\)](#)

³ [2020-ap-cohort-data-report.pdf \(collegeboard.org\)](#)

3. SB 1033, “An Act Concerning the Inclusion of Computer Science and Financial Literacy As Part Of The High School Graduation Requirements

The commission supports SB 1033, which would allow computer science to count as a STEM credit for high school graduation requirements. Educators in computer science and coding—the tools with which the next generation will utilize as building blocks for their careers have been out of access for many students. Delivering computer science coursework to more students, of all socio-economic levels in the state will expand new highly in demand horizons in the workforce for many students.

College Board is creating an advanced placement computer science course that intends to engage traditionally underrepresented students. Providing additional access to computer science courses is imperative to increasing access to the computer science’s jobs which are driven by competition.

Data from College Board suggests that students who take Advanced Placement Computer Science Placement (AP CPS) courses in high school are more than 3 times as likely to major in computer science in college, compared to similar students who did not take AP CSP. These same results have been held true for female, Black, Hispanic, and first-generation college students. In fact, Black students who took an AP CSP course majored in computer science at a 20% higher rate than any other racial group.

On financial literacy, it is critically important that any developed coursework teach the basic elements of entrepreneurship and wealth building.

4. SB 1034, An Act Concerning Minority Teacher Recruitment and Retention”

The commission fully recognizes importance of highly qualified educators. Students of color who experience at least one educator within their academic careers are more like to successfully progress through their education.

In 2015, data from the American Community Survey has found that just over half of American children aged 5 to 17 were white, but nearly 80 percent of young teachers were white. ⁴ Black students comprise around 13 percent of all school-aged children, black teachers represent only 8 percent of all young teachers, and while Hispanic students comprise around 24 percent of all school-aged children, Hispanic teachers represent only around 9 percent of all teachers. ⁵

According to a Brookings Institute study, “Minority students often perform better on standardized tests, have improved attendance, and are suspended less frequently (which may

⁴Brookings.edu, [The importance of a diverse teaching force \(brookings.edu\)](https://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2015/07/150714-diverse-teaching-force)

⁵ Brookings.edu, [The importance of a diverse teaching force \(brookings.edu\)](https://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2015/07/150714-diverse-teaching-force)

suggest either different degrees of behavior or different treatment, or both) when they have at least one same-race teacher.”⁶

New evidence supporting the claim has suggested that a black male student that has at least one black teacher in the third, fourth, or fifth grade, is significantly less likely to drop out of high school and more likely to attend a four-year college.

The commission also supports the anti-bias training creation and anti-bias obligation and teacher professional development for anti-bias which target the necessity to address both implicit and explicit bias in hiring in our education systems.

The residency program in this bill in collaboration with the grow your own pathway allows students to have the window that they need to become full time teachers in the state of Connecticut. The expansion of the residency program and state-wide anti-bias training improves the education experience for students in over 80 towns across the state. Interdistrict magnet schools enroll more than 35,000 students in 85+ schools throughout the state.

In the past two years the CREC Teacher Residency Program has had 25 residents in CREC magnet schools with over 200 students of all ethnicities looking to a professional educator who may be the first educator who reflects their ethnicity.

This group of students will benefit from this experience and 1000 of the future students will have a similar educational experience. The expansion of such program will increase the number of minority teachers in the state of Connecticut.

This bill would:

- Create an added definition for residency program.
- Create state-wide anti-bias training.
- Create a video training model as outlined in section 4 and 5 of the bills.

The commission supports these measures as they will help ensure that all students have access to high-quality education.

⁶ Brookings.edu, [The importance of a diverse teaching force \(brookings.edu\)](https://www.brookings.edu/)