

**Center for Youth Leadership at Brien McMahon High School
Mayor's Youth Leadership Council at Stamford High School**

Why wait for someone else to make a difference?

**Connecticut Legislature: Education Committee
Testimony in Support of *HB 1034: An Act Concerning Minority
Teacher Recruitment and Retention***

March 17, 2021

Hello Representative Sanchez, Senator McCrory, and members of the Education Committee. I have special greetings for Senator Miller, who represents the interests of our allies in Stamford, and Senator Flexer, with whom we have worked in the past.

My name is Roja Yousuf and I am a member of the Center for Youth Leadership and McMahon Students Support Equity in Education, both which are activism organizations at Brien McMahon High in Norwalk. I am testifying on behalf of those groups and the Mayor's Youth Leadership Council, which is our sister program at Stamford High School. I am testifying in support of *HB 1034: An Act Concerning Minority Teacher Recruitment and Retention*, which references Norwalk and Stamford as Alliance Districts.

We just finished celebrating Black History Month at our school. This testimony and this bill are about Black **futures**, and the futures of my Hispanic, Indigenous, and Asian classmates, and those who will follow in our footsteps.

Our public awareness campaign about minority teacher hiring and retention dates to May 2020, which is when we submitted a 14-point plan to district superintendents to address equity in education. Our discussions with district staff continue to this day.

The campaign, which educates students about the issue, includes statistics. For example, in Norwalk, of the district's 11,500 students, 71 percent are Black, Hispanic, or Asian, while just 17 percent of the teachers are (1). These numbers have remained fairly constant for several years.

The campaign includes references to a host of studies that demonstrate the impact of black teachers on the social, emotional, and academic success of black students. For example, one study looked at the records of more than 100,000 students in North Carolina. It found the following: *"Having just one black teacher in third, fourth or fifth grade reduced low-income black boys' probability of dropping out of high school by 39 percent, the study found. And by high school, African-American students, both boys and girls, who had one African-American teacher had much stronger expectations of going to college"* (2).

The campaign uses a series of quotes from educators to prompt conversations between teachers and students. Here's an example: *"The fact that my skin color matches that of my students doesn't give me any superpowers as an educator. But it does give me the ability to see them in a way that's untarnished by the stereotypes, biases and cultural disconnects that fuel inequality and injustice"* (3).

Finally, the campaign uses the voices of our classmates. Every month since September 2020, we've hosted a podcast. One show examined racism; another looked at the lack of black male students as leaders. Both were beyond poignant. Students talked about the role of racial passing in school, parents intentionally giving their children what they considered Caucasian-sounding names, and the academic tracking of students starting in middle school.

However, it was the voices of seven boys that captured everyone's attention. They talked about not having teachers their color to look up to. They talked about detentions and out-of-school suspensions based on the color of their skin. They talked about not meeting with their guidance counselors because they "would not understand my life, my pain." They talked about wanting to be understood.

We applaud the State Department of Education and its partners for the steps they have taken to increase the number of educators of color to ten percent by next year. The passage of HB 1034 will help maintain that momentum. Also, we support the creation of a video training model, as referenced on lines 140-144, 147-154, and 185-187). This is consistent with our call to have our school districts train staff in implicit bias and antiracism when hiring. Finally, we suggest the state look at efforts undertaken by local school districts to increase minority teacher hiring, including the partnership between the Danbury district and Western Connecticut State University (4).

Thanks for the opportunity to testify.

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Notes

1. *Per the Human Resource Office of the Norwalk School District, March 15, 2021.*
2. *Seth Gershenson, et al, The Long-Run Impacts of Same-Race Teachers, Institute of Labor Economics, March 27, 2017.*
3. *David Jackson, "The Real Reason Black Kids Learn from Black Teachers," The New York Times, April 15, 2017.*
4. *Julia Perkins, "Danbury Program Aims to Encourage Diverse Students to Be Teachers," Ridgefield Press, March 14, 2021.*