



Public Hearing of the Appropriations Committee
Connecticut State Legislature

Written Testimony of Susan Eaton
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The Legislative Office Building
Hartford, Connecticut

Dear Members of the Appropriations Committee:

It is my pleasure to submit this written testimony today at this important public hearing in Hartford, Connecticut. Thank you for this opportunity.

My name is Susan Eaton. I am author, most recently, of *The Children In Room E4*, a non-fiction book chronicling the *Sheff v. O'Neill* case and the lives of children in a high-poverty school in Hartford, Connecticut. I am author of previous books about the long-term effects of voluntary school desegregation and about the impact of desegregation jurisprudence of the 1980s and 1990s.

I submit testimony today in my role at Research Director of the Charles Hamilton Houston Institute for Race and Justice at Harvard Law School.¹

In this role, I commission, synthesize and translate scholarly research so that knowledge can be used effectively by advocates, elected leaders and others seeking to remedy the growing and still vast racial and economic inequalities in the United States. This testimony, then, will summarize the latest and highest-quality research related to both the benefits of diverse learning environments and the ever-growing body of work that points to the immense challenges of schooling in racially segregated, high-poverty environments.²

The research on these topics leads to a clear recommendation: ***The most efficient use of resources in these tough financial times would include proactive expansion of opportunities for diverse learning experiences for young people in the State of Connecticut.*** This recommendation comes in large part because the research on the benefits of diversity is so uncommonly, strikingly clear. But this recommendation also stems from the demographics and recent history of Connecticut, with which I'm familiar.

As you know, this affluent, small state records some of the nation's largest racial and economic gaps in academic achievement, educational attainment, income and opportunity. The state remains a highly segregated one, operating schools that do not approximate the larger society that children will someday join. This is largely a legacy of rampant housing discrimination. Because of these entrenched demographics, diversity will not just "happen" on its own. In order to create more diverse schools, the state must plan for and support it. This is true even as some many communities, like our nation at large, grow more diverse. However, because of the *Sheff* history, the state of Connecticut is also far ahead of many others in its demonstrated commitment to proactively provide racially and economically diverse learning opportunities for its youngest residents.

For example, On January 17, 2009, the Houston Institute convened a major national conference to explore the possibilities and continuing challenges facing the

¹ Under the leadership of civil rights lawyer and scholar, Charles J. Ogletree, Jr., The Houston Institute carries on the work of Charles Hamilton Houston, one of this nation's most important and overlooked civil rights figures. Houston was the principal architect of the legal strategy that ended legalized segregation in the United States. www.charleshamiltonhouston.org

² Under my supervision, the Institute is in the process of creating a series of more detailed research briefs on these topics, which we are happy to make available to the Committee upon their completion.

nation's nine major interdistrict school desegregation programs.³ You might be proud to know that Connecticut's progressive work in this area – particularly its flourishing magnet schools and its two-way interdistrict transfer programs – were often pointed to as models for other communities and states across the nation interested in improving or even beginning such efforts. Educators continue to look toward Connecticut's example in creating opportunities for diverse educational experiences.

I turn now to a brief discussion of the research. I would like to recognize the work of Roslyn Michelson, a professor of education at the University of North Carolina, who has been gathering social science evidence on these questions and from whose work I greatly benefitted as I wrote this testimony.

Social science evidence strongly supports an interest in attaining diversity and in avoiding racial isolation. The body of research on the benefits of racial and economic diversity in learning environments and the harm of racial isolation in such environments has been growing steadily since 1990. It includes research not just in education, but in public health, neuroscience and economics. As research methods improved greatly, beginning in the 1990s, so did the quality of research on these questions.⁴

The weight of social science research demonstrate that racially diverse schools are associated with achievement in math, science and language and reading. These benefits are experienced by students from all racial and economic backgrounds.⁵

Racially diverse learning environments are associated with improved critical thinking skills.⁶

The other benefits associated with diverse learning environments of the sort made possible through the Sheff programs include a decrease in “intergenerational

³ Information about the National Summit on Interdistrict School Desegregation can be found here: <http://www.charleshamiltonhouston.org/Events/Event.aspx?id=100083>

⁴ Later studies were more likely to use longitudinal data, for example and more advanced statistical modeling that can separate the influences of home or neighborhood. In 2010, three new volumes of research on these questions will be released by *Teacher's College Record*. These studies, too, will demonstrate even further, the short and long-term benefits of a racially and economically diverse learning environment for children in public schools.

⁵ See, for example, Brief of 553 Social Scientists as Amicus Curiae in Support of Respondents. *Parents Involved in Community Schools v. Seattle School District No. 1*, 127 S.Ct. 2738 (2007). Brief of the American Educational Research Association as Amicus Curiae in Support of Respondents. *Parents Involved in Community Schools v. Seattle School District No. 1*, 127 S.Ct. 2738 (2007). Eric A. Hanushek, John F. Kain and Steven G. Rivkin, *New Evidence atou Brown v. Board of Education: The Complex Effects of School Racial Composition on Achievement* (2004), at: <http://edpro.stanford.edu/hanushek/admin/pages/files/uploads/race.pdf>

⁶ John D. Bransford and Dan L. Schwartz, “Rethinking Transfer: A Simple Proposal with Multiple Implications,” In *Review of Research in Education*, ed. Ashghar Iran-Nejad and P. David Pearson (Sashington D.C.: American Educational Research Association, 1999): 61-101.

perpetuation” of racial prejudice and fear. Related to this, racially diverse schools are also associated with promotion of racially integrated neighborhoods and workplaces.⁷

An ever-growing body of research from the social determinants of health field demonstrates further the immense challenges associated with schooling in high-poverty environments. Even public health researchers are beginning to explicitly recommend that the share of children living and/or attending school in high-poverty racially isolated areas be reduced. Certainly, some high-poverty schools are more successful than others. But the research in this field clearly shows that the overwhelming and worsening social problems and unequal structures of opportunity in many neighborhoods and schools are beyond the control of parents and teachers. This includes exposure to violence, unhealthy food options, stress, economic instability and other factors that make learning more difficult for children and that, in concentrated numbers, simply overwhelm their learning institutions.⁸

Attendance at a segregated high school is associated with poorer college-level performance and persistence for children of color. In particular, African-American college students who attended racially diverse schools, fared better gradewise in college than college students who had attended racially segregated schools.⁹

Generally, statistical data demonstrates that racially segregated schools do the worse on measures of graduation and drop outs for African American males than racially diverse schools. Though we do not yet understand why, larger segregated schools have the worst records in graduating and preventing African American males from dropping out. Small, racially diverse schools have the best records in this area. However, it is important to understand more study is needed to determine the processes at work here and also to properly control for other variables besides segregation.

Mathematicians have found that diverse groups – that is with members who come from a variety of backgrounds with differing perspectives – are better problem

⁷ Michal Kurlaender and John T. Yun, “Measuring School Racial Composition and Student Outcomes in a Multiracial Society,” *American Journal of Education*. v113 n2 p213-243 Feb 2007. John T. Yun and Michal Kurlaender, “School Racial Composition and Student Educational Aspirations: A Question of Equity in a Multiracial Society,” *Journal of Education for Students Placed at Risk* 9, no. 2 (2004): 143-68. Amy J. Strefling, “The Influence of Integrated and De Facto Segregated School on Racial Attitudes of White Students toward African Americans” (paper presented at Council for Administration Convention, St. Louis, 1998); Jomills Henry Braddock, Marvin P. Dawkins and William T. Trent, “Why Desegregate? The effect of School Desegregation on Adult Occupational Segregation of African Americans, Whites, and Hispanics,” *International Journal of Contemporary Sociology* 31, no. 2 (1994): 271-83.

⁸ See, for example, Candice Player and Susan Eaton, “Things I Have Seen and Heard: How Educators, Youth Workers and Elected Leaders Can Help Reduce the Damage of Childhood Exposure to Violence in Communities. A CHHIRJ Research Brief. January, 2009.

<http://www.charleshamiltonhouston.org/Publications.aspx> Dolores Acevedo-Garcia, Theresa L. Osypuk, Nancy McArdle and David R. Williams. “Toward a Policy Relevant Analysis of Geographic and Racial/Ethnic Disparities in Child Health,” *Health Affairs*, 2008, 27 (2), 321-333.

⁹ Douglas Massey, Camille Charles and Gniesha Dinwiddie. “The Continuing Consequences of Segregation: Family Stress and College Academic Achievement.” *Social Science Quarterly*. 86: 509-528. 2007.

solvers and offer each other better educations than groups of people from similar backgrounds.¹⁰

Again, thank you for the opportunity to submit this testimony. I am happy to answer further questions or to furnish more documentation that might be helpful to Committee members as they make tough decisions in these difficult times.

Sincerely,

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¹⁰ See, AERA Brief of Amicus Curiae and also, Scott Page, *The Difference: How The Power of Diversity Creates Better Groups, Firms, Schools and Societies*. Princeton University Press, 2006.