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Side-by-Side  
Co-Founding Teacher

I am here to testify on Senate bill #1114. I am in a unique position to speak about the success of Side by Side's Charter School because I am one of the school's six founders. I also teach 7th and 8th grade language arts and social studies. The success of our school is attributable to some of the following.

Side by Side has a smaller class, 22 students to a class with a teacher and assistant. Students' are grouped heterogeneously and move at their individual skill level. The emphasis is on each student moving forward over time.

We loop which means that students have the same teacher for two years, which provides consistency; furthermore the student has more time to expand on skills and concepts and the teacher has an extended time to observe and evaluate students' growth over time.

We communicate regularly with the business community who report to us that they see students that come to them lacking in cooperative group skills. The business world has a need to have employees produce as a team as well as individually. We set up our classroom so that students often problem solve in small groups.

One of Side by Side's missions is social justice. The teachers create an atmosphere to raise student consciousness so that they know they have an obligation to take an active part in their school, community, state, and world issues.

We have just finished sending out letters to media, government officials, corporations and the mayor of Norwalk regarding issues such as the opening of teen centers for middle school age children, starting neighborhood watches to eliminate gang violence, as well as protesting the inhumane treatment of our companion animals in research labs.

Having said this, our school faces a continual uphill battle to compete with the funding provided to public schools. Our middle school is located with four trailers put together with a minimum of space for four classes.

The state mandates computer education; we struggle with a minimum of upgraded computers. We would like money to fund a computer lab.

Our middle school students would like to compete in sports with our local schools; however, we don't have a bus to transport them.

We know we are providing an excellent alternative education for our students with the continual progress they have made. Last year's 8th grade graduating class was in the 95th percentile for reading, writing, and math.

We also know we need increased funds to keep up with federal and state mandates and we are already at a disadvantage because we receive less money than the city's public schools.