

Friis, John

From: gabriella rhodeen [gabriella.rhodeen@gmail.com]
Sent: Monday, March 16, 2009 1:34 AM
To: Friis, John
Subject: HB6666 Section 5

To All Who Will Listen,

I am writing in concern for an institution closer to my heart than any other. My name is Gabriella Rhodeen and I attended the Educational Center for the Arts as a theatre major from 2005 to my graduation in 2008. Before that, my two older sisters attended ECA for creative writing and theatre. I began ECA in my sophomore year after attending the Foote school in New Haven for ten years. Never had I found a community so full of artistic minds coming together in order to selflessly enrich the lives of students. Never had I experienced a place where the value of the individual was more important than the averaged value of the whole. At ECA you are one beaming part of an intricate community.

High school, it is widely agreed, is one of the hardest times in any young person's life. We believe we know who we are and struggle when we realize that, perhaps, we don't know so well. We hold the weight of the world in our tiny backpacks and scrounge for the tools with which to unload that weight. Each student holds a different story, a different weight and therefore must be treated differently from every other student. ECA is the only place where I have seen this mentality acted upon.

I remember back when my sister's attended ECA I would go to the building and sit with them in that holy space and marvel at the overflowing of energy and expression in the halls. ECA *is* a holy space. It is a sanctuary for anyone who has ever been lost. When I stepped into those acting studios I was entering another world where it all made sense; and even if it didn't, I was supported and cared for, and understood. In acting we thrive on risk. Without risk art is boring. But to take the leap, to allow the body to succumb to the fall, is the scariest thing one can experience. It's like feeling the actual fall of falling in love. ECA created a space where falling was encouraged, because you can get up and dust off and keep going. As a teenager, everything seems bigger than it is because we don't yet know how to manage it all. Especially now in these complicated times where we are asked to take on more and more at a younger age.

These artists, our mentors, imbue our minds with their creative energy and cultivate our technique. They are not just teaching us to paint, they are teaching us the science of color. They don't just teach us to speak words, they guide us in the direction of understanding, awareness, and risk. They do not spell out answers for us, but gently push us towards our own paths of discovery. You cannot standardize this kind of learning and teaching.

ECA is an institution that puts forth the buds of great artists; Artists who travel the world and search for ways to make art new and effective. Without ECA I would have never discovered the idea of theatre for social change. I now attend the California Institute of the Arts as an acting major with a focus in theatre for social change. I plan to travel to Uganda and Rwanda next summer to study drama therapy with young children. Without ECA I would still be stuck in the world of escapist art—which, especially now, is not without value—but I would not have the sense of fulfillment I have now. I create theatre that will change the world. I act to inspire, to open minds and to create communities. To build life where none was, or where it was lost. To build bridges where they have fallen.

ECA is a place of inspiration and safety. It is an outlet for young people in the crux of

confusion. To shut down this institution is, to put it bluntly, a huge mistake. ECA is solely responsible for my acceptance to the California Institute of the Arts, my affiliation with the Yale School of Drama, my summer work with the SITI company in New York and for emotional and artistic development not available in any New Haven public school. Shut this institution down and you are cutting off dedicated students from their work, their passion. Please, do not make this grave error.

Please don't take another thing away from people who have already lost so much.

Thank you.

Sincerely and Deeply,

Gabriella Rhodeen.