

Friis, John

From: Lauren Stohler [lauren.stohler@gmail.com]
Sent: Sunday, March 15, 2009 11:57 AM
To: Friis, John
Subject: Support for HB6666 Section 5 = Support for Part-Time Teachers at ECA

To Whom it May Concern:

I am an alumna of ECA, the Educational Center for the Arts in New Haven, CT. I am distressed to hear that the continued existence of this institution is threatened by new legislature requiring state certification for teaching artists, and by legislature against parental tuition payments. There are many reasons why ECA deserves exemption from this legislature.

I personally studied under many professional artists during my time at ECA (2003-2005). These teachers believed that the most valuable aspects of themselves as teachers was their continued production of work and participation in their fields. Most, if not all of them, kept studios and/or practices in New Haven where we could observe our professors at work. This helped me to visualize, realistically, what a future in the arts would mean, and helped me formulate my future plans.

Having attended a teaching certification program at Southern CT State University for two years while holding down a full-time job, I can honestly say that I cannot imagine the ECA teachers going through the certification process in order to remain at the school. Not only is there the expense of classes, but the time commitment is intense, and after certification, that time and expense continues with CT's Best Practices. ECA's teaching artists are primarily *artists*. They work full-time at this career. Most do not *need* the extra income of ECA, but teach there because they enjoy working with young artists and because they enjoy forming a professional, peer-oriented community with their fellow teaching artists. They are graciously, generously sharing their abilities with young people. If we add stress, financial burden and loss of time to the ECA experience, especially in this economic environment, I'm sure these pro's can (and will) find a more pleasurable outlet for their time and skills.

There is a reason that ECA isn't already staffed with state certified art teachers. ECA is an alternative space, a magnet school in which usual processes and methods are replaced with creative learning/teaching strategies. If the teachers and processes are reformed to fit the rubric of state certification, then why should ECA even exist? It would be the same to send these outstanding youth for an extra period in the art classrooms of their schools. The community built at ECA is, speaking from personal experience, unified by the *difference* of its environment. There is something very special about attending a school where the educational 'rules' have been lifted-- especially to a devoted student of the arts to whom most of these educational rules did not make sense.

To put it differently: most educational rules put forth through the CT state certification program are in place to keep low-performing students 'in the game.' ECA students, however, must be above-average academic performers just to get *into* the school. These are youth for whom the rules can be flexed, for whom this flexion would allow for creative expansion.

Parents understand the way ECA works, and parents continue to clamor for their artistic children to attend. The service this school performs, just as the vo-tech schools train youth for a real trade, is to induct students into the arts world in a practical yet exploratory way. Just as parents expect that their children's college or trade school will incur expenses, they understand the costs associated with

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operating a center such as ECA. If the CT state government believes that no parent should pay tuition for a public magnet school, then the answer is simple: cover the costs for every student. If you don't have the money, you can't just bar people from entering the school when they have the money and will to pay for it. Resourceful students can find grants, perform fundraisers or petition their town for funding (as I did myself, testifying at a hearing in 11th grade). To actively prevent students from having the opportunity to attend ECA is not the job of CT's government. Don't pass legislature to that effect.

Thank you for taking the time to read this letter. If I could appear in person at the hearing, I would.

Please know that for every letter you're receiving, there are tens, maybe hundreds of past students who don't even know about this issue. They would undoubtedly write you the same letter.

Sincerely,
Lauren Stohler
ECA graduate, class of 2005, from the town of Hamden