

To Whom It May Concern:

I am a student at the Educational Center for the Arts in New Haven. It has come to my attention that two bills proposed in the state legislature would ultimately cause the closing of ECA. This is unendingly distressing, since I really love this school which has had a profound effect on me.

The first issue of concern is the requirement of teachers to obtain some sort of teaching degree. As you well know, this would cause many of the teachers to quit. Such would be horrible! At ECA we do indeed learn a lot, despite the fact that our teachers are not certified. I have learned so much about singing and music itself from ECA. First and foremost, is obviously the vocal technique. Simple measures for improving your sound such as keeping your tongue touching your lower teeth, and shaping your lips and not moving the jaw as to help produce clear vowels are so important, and yet are subtleties that, everywhere else I sang with, neglected to tell me. The teachers at ECA are professional artists, and can actually teach us the subtleties, because they know the ins and outs of their profession. ECA also teaches a lot, compared to, at least, Hamden's school system. When I was in middle school, the teacher not only led me to believe that the "alto section" was one that always harmonized, no matter the written line, but also neglected to correct me. It was not until I started taking private lessons with Judy Caldwell (the vocal director at ECA, as well) did I learn that "alto" just meant to sing what was written for the lower female voice, not to auto-harmonize with whatever the "sopranos" were singing. He never told us to open our mouths, either. We all sang with nearly closed mouths. He just gave us the music and taught it to us, whereas at ECA we get the experience of actually learning how to sing, and how to improve our singing. Even at Hamden High School, he barely mentions technique, and even so, he does not enforce it. The students still sing hunched over, with their legs crossed, with their mouths and throats closed and do not diaphragmatically breathe! That, and at ECA the students in the music department are required to take music theory, as opposed to having it as an elective that no musician need take at Hamden High School. The theory has really helped in my understanding of music. Since we learn all sorts of composition techniques, it helps me to recognize them in a piece of music and thus learn the piece that much faster or perform that much better. Also at ECA, we have a special bond with our teachers. Many of them are not only teachers, but are our fellow performers. Many times I have seen Eddie play the oboe or clarinet or various other instruments with his wind ensemble, and Marvin played the violin and viola with his string ensemble, and Jim will play the bass with his small Jazz ensemble or in his composition class. Tawnie, despite being a composition teacher, also performed with us, as a soprano when we performed her composition "Eia Mater, Fons Amoris" and played the piano and flute for her composition class (the flute being in my piece, "Sweet Sai") Thus we have learned more with them than with our certified teachers at school, and have them to critique our own work, as well as perform with us.

One thing that I've noticed about ECA that really helps in the experience, is that everyone wants to be there. When we go, there is such energy, such excitement to get to playing, and the kids talk about the music, (and music in general, of course. Where this really manifests itself though, is during rehearsal. If I may use the Hamden High School choir as a basis of comparison again (as some students are placed in the choir either because they need an arts credit for graduation or there are no other classes open) the students there are unmotivated and unwilling to

cooperate with the teacher, thus causing rehearsal time to be limited to a few minutes here and there throughout the class period. The students whine and talk back to the teacher, exclaiming how they do not want to be in the class, and thus outright refuse to sing, refuse to put away their cell phones, and some even listen to their i-pods during rehearsal. As well as this, the majority of the choir refuses to stop talking, talking when we pause to give one section a note, when we switch songs, while the teacher is explaining the piece, while the teacher is giving his rare Theory lessons, and even in the middle of a piece during rests or, when another group is singing. Despite the teacher begging them to stop, they do not. They do not even heed his requests to use the few vocal techniques he teaches us. All this chaos, simply because the students refuse to be in the choir. At ECA, this problem does not exist. We get right down to work and get so much more done, since we can move right through pieces and notes and lessons in technique, because the students do what they are told the first time, or at the very least, the second time, they are told. We meet about the same amount of time in Hamden as at ECA (Hamden being 45 minutes five days a week and ECA being two to three hours two days a week), yet at ECA we performed 15 or 16 songs up to this point in March, and at Hamden, 7. At ECA, simply because the students want to be there and are motivated, we perform twice as much in the same amount of time. This love for ECA also makes for a very friendly and nurturing environment. Nobody is disruptive, displeasing, which would cause rifts among students; everybody is happy and friendly. As well as this, the environment is just so pleasing compared to the artistic departments at Hamden. At ECA, everybody knows everybody in their department, and many people outside of it. It's so personal. Even if you aren't friends with somebody, you know who they are and like and respect them. For example, the music department is pretty much split between Jazz and Classical (we are occasionally exposed to other types of music, either through our small ensembles, or by the teachers, or even the outside experience of other students), the vocal concentration being mostly classical (as Judy Caldwell is a classical singer and she heads the ensemble, as well as the department). However, I know all the kids in the Jazz ensemble, and they me, despite the difference in Ensemble and preferred musical genre. It's just a nice feeling, knowing everybody.

The concern of the other bill is the prohibition of parents to pay tuition. Despite knowing few students who go on tuition (There are likely very many though, since most people don't know if someone goes on tuition or not), there is one girl, who has since graduated, who went on tuition who has made up the main fiber of the vocal concentration at ECA. I cannot imagine an ECA without her. She was definitely a leader in the department. She helped teach all the younger students the ropes of ECA and of singing, always was a leader in the choir, pulling her section together, worked at the auditions telling her possible peers anecdotes about her experience to calm their nerves (and I tell you, it was such a help!) and being in general helpful to them. She also had this vibrant personality that really defines ECA. She was just a bright beacon of light for the whole school. Now, if this bill had already been in effect, this girl would have never been able to go to ECA, and it would have been a colder place, as well as a more intimidating place for all the students, as well as the new ones. I would hate to deprive any other students of having such a person to guide them.

At ECA I have made so many friends. These friends share my interest in music, as well as many other things. I do have a unit of friends from Hamden, but it bothers me that I can't really be musical around them. They don't really know about music, so I can't make references,

talk about music or anything like that around them. My friends at ECA give me a commonality that I don't have with anyone else, besides just being friends anyway. ECA has also given me so much experience in the arts taught me what it is to be a musician, as well-being appreciative of all the arts including writing, dance, theatre and visual art. ECA has also given me experience in areas that at Hamden I never would have had. As electives I took two semesters of the Radio Show, where we learned how to produce content for the radio, and actually put it on the air as Road Kill Radio; a circus class, where we learned various circus activities like walking on stilts (which ended up being my particular strong point), juggling, balancing on balls, and even a puppet unit, as well as learning how to put it all together in a coherent show with a plot and a theme (we did a puppet show about global warming, and another class did a performance about racial inequalities in the judicial system), and a collaborative writing class, where we learned different cultural forms of collaborative writing, such as the Japanese Renga where each person writes a certain number of lines with a certain number of syllables, and we tried our hand at writing a story together.

All in all, ECA has been the most positive experience of my life, "and by your wanting to take that away from me, or from any human creature, I know that your counsel is of the devil, and mine is of God" (Scene 6, "Saint Joan", George Bernard Shaw, 1924) Maybe this situation is not as intense as the trial of Joan of Arc, but the message is the same. Do not deny anybody of such a fulfilling and life changing experience. Thank you for considering my letter.

Sincerely, Sarah Oppenheim