

**Testimony of Anne Olcott**  
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**358 Springside Avenue, New Haven, CT 06515**  
**Testimony submitted to the Appropriations Committee**  
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Honorable Chairs, Members of the Appropriation Committee;

There are many facets to Common Ground High School that I could discuss with you. My son James is halfway through his junior year so I have a real understanding of the many opportunities for growth and learning the school provides...growth and learning that promote true scholarship and preparation for becoming a socially aware citizen. I cannot possibly talk about all the good works being done daily at Common Ground.

So, I am choosing to focus on the ability of Common Ground to provide "differentiated instruction". This is the current jargon for meeting each child where they are academically and providing appropriate cognitive challenges within each individual class and among the range of courses offered by the school. Differentiated instruction also suggests that teachers pay attention to a student's interests (as well as abilities) and use those interests to hook the child into the kind of meaningful, rich learning that involves higher order thinking skills and propels the student on a path of lifelong learning. Differentiated instruction is given a lot of lip service in traditional public schools but in practice little differentiated instruction is provided for advanced students.

Common Ground gives real differentiated instruction on a regular basis.

For example, James has been able to take an AP class each year at Common Ground (AP Government, AP Environmental Science, and AP European History). He has worked hard, learned much, and performed well on the AP tests.

He has taken challenging "block classes" unique to Common Ground like "Architecture" which combined geometry and social studies, "Food and the Environment" which combined social studies with environmental science/biology, and "Drama" which combined theater and English with an in-school residency by Elm Shakespeare Company. These are some of his favorite classes that have inspired him greatly.

Within various classes he has been given challenging assignments such as developing a card game to teach the metric system ("Metric: The Gathering"), writing an illustrated "Idiot's Guide to the Industrial Revolution", and writing a missing scene from "Romeo and Juliet".

James is thriving as a student and as a person. I give great credit to Common Ground for his current success and a future full of possibility.

Anne Olcott