

Testimony of Rachel Gilroy
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358 Springside Avenue, New Haven, CT 06515
Testimony submitted to the Appropriations Committee
March 24th, 2011

Honorable Chairs, Members of the Appropriation Committee:

I am writing this letter as the Environmental Leader and Sustainability Coordinator for Common Ground Charter School, New Haven, CT and as a voting resident of the State of Connecticut. This is a testimony that I support Student-Based Funding to fund charter schools fairly and sustainably.

My passion for meaningful experiences coincides with our ever growing need to create sustainable connections with our whole environment. I believe this process starts with trying to understand our sense of place, by taking a holistic view of all the relationships of our common place. *The philosophy behind my work ethic is that I choose to live by example therefore the fact that Connecticut has the nation's largest achievement gap in yet is one of the top five spenders on education in the U.S. is unfair and discriminatory to "other" educational communities.*

It is because of this that I am drawn to the Common Ground Charter School community. I chose this Charter School for two primary reasons: **Personalized Learning** and **Social and Environmental Leadership**.

Personalized Learning

Common Ground's educational program is based in part on personalized learning, a concept which recognizes that students learn differently and deserve a learning environment that meets their individual needs. The Common Ground setting facilitates flexibility across all grade levels and at the same time, students can contribute to classroom achievement by becoming part of our PALS (Peers who assist with life at school) peer counseling/mentor program or peer tutors in their strongest subjects. This boosts camaraderie in a small learning environment. Likewise, the educational and environmental context becomes a professional learning community for teachers who are encouraged to share knowledge on how best to meet student needs across grade levels and subject areas.

On the other hand because of unfair provisions of resources this Common Ground's educational environment is created by limited amount of staff that work long hour and are not fairly compensated like ECS formula staff that receive our student's funds. This money could add staff support to our ranks, pay and treat our teachers as professionals, and hold all schools accountable for educational quality because students can leave if they are not being served, taking funds with them.

Social and Environmental Leadership

Common Ground also places very high value on developing social and environmental leadership skills. Come to campus any day and see university mentors and high school students interacting in a myriad of ways. All students and staff share a set of guiding principles- **P.O.W.E.R: Pride, Ownership, Wonder, Effort, and Respect** - that affirm our belief in the value of community building: every person, regardless of age, race, gender, sexual orientation, etc., has a role to play and is important.

Student-Based Funding would help all our students to include students with higher learning needs (those in poverty, who are traditionally underserved by the education system) receive a higher level of funding to provide that support. This backing would come in the form of enrichment class, additional AP classes, after-school programs that assist in developing our social and environmental leadership for all our diverse students.

Common Ground Charter School wants to provide this vital public service to students from all social and economic groups within our Common Ground Community. More importantly, Common Ground students should feel they have a voice, that they are understood by their Department of Education and that the State of Connecticut sees social equity in learning to be critical to the individual student and collectively as a whole state. This is why you will find Common Ground High School students demonstrating leadership in down-town Hartford to support this historic legislation.

I ask that “the money follow the child” for this funding which is crucial to our endeavor for a Connecticut sustainable future. I think accountability, transparency, and fair funding for all schools is a common ground. I think that’s common for people who care about quality education: transparency, accountability and social equity in education. Student-Based Funding for all schools!

Sincerely,

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