

Testimony of Britta Gunneson
Student at Common Ground High School,
358 Springside Avenue, New Haven, CT 06515
Testimony submitted to the Appropriations Committee
March 24th, 2011

Honorable Chairs, Members of the Appropriation Committee:

My educational experience isn't what you would call "typical". I have used a variety of schooling methods throughout my life. As a young child, I was "unschooled". After this, I attended a small, private Christian school through 6th grade. This was followed by 2 years at my town's Middle School, and then a short stint at the Local High School. I left shortly into the year for health and education reasons, and spent the rest of my Freshman Year at a weekly tutoring school. This year (My Sophomore Year), I chose to attend Common Ground High School, A Charter High School in New Haven. It may have been the best educational decision made for me so far. Common Ground High School has created so many opportunities for me that I never even imagined would be available for me at Branford High School, or any other schooling system I've attended. The educational content and opportunity that I have seen so far goes above and beyond the other Schools I have attended.

The academics at Common Ground are able to teach me in unexpected ways. I took a block class on Power - Both Governmental and Electrical. The class taught the topics as intertwined, and got us involved in how they work together by studying fuel. We studied who uses and controls the oil in the world, and how they are related by creating a massive, wall-sized concept web that we were able to share with the school by displaying in the lunchroom. We also studied alternative fuels and their uses to see which was best for the area around us. This class gave me a crash course in the environment, its importance, and the reasons alternative energy and gas prices are such a big deal. The projects that accompanied the class allowed us to share this information with others in our school and community - a friend and I went and taught a class on it at our town's middle school, for instance.

Another example was a class on Research Writing. The class focused on the topics of Freedom of Speech, and more specifically, the "N" word. The information and discussions brought up in this class were fascinating and taught me so much about the diversity around me in school and in the world. The conversation that best gave me the opportunity to see how diversity worked within my school, and the area around us, happened the day that some other students in the class started discussing the variety of people at Common Ground, one person even stating that telling the class she felt uncomfortable talking to my group of friends, because we were different than her group of friends. Her friend stood up and told her that she had sat down at our lunch table for a bit the previous day, and realized that we "talked about the same stuff, but in proper English." That conversation made me realize that diversity is way over-hyped in my life, since the community around me is not very diverse (My town is 95% white). Before that conversation, I always assumed diversity was something that divided people. That day, I realized that diversity is not a negative, and that the reason diversity was encouraged in my

town was because there was none. A conversation like this would never have happened at my town's High School, or any other schooling system I've attended.

This school has also given me the opportunity to learn outside of the classroom. Attending this school meant that i had to learn about independence. My parents and i made the decision to start using public transportation for my ride home. Trying to learn the bus and train systems was a bit confusing for me at first, but now that i have the hang of it, i love being able to travel home whenever is best for me. I can use the public transport to get home efficiently and when I need to, not when my parents need me to. I currently take this way home 2 or 3 times a week.

Common Ground has also literally taught me outside of the classroom. I had always seen myself being a bit more of an "indoor cat". The Adventure Club, however, has changed my idea about that. This club has taken me on two trips this year. one was hiking and camping in Massachusetts, and the other was a Cross-Country Skiing trip in New Hampshire. Hiking wasn't my favorite thing, i discovered, but i did find out that it was a lot more fun that I had anticipated. The cross-country trip ended up showing me something that i loved. I never imagined I would be the sort of person who would want to spend their day Skiing on trails! Learning a new skill set for these activities has shown me something i really enjoy, and for free, too. I can't conceive any other type of school giving me the opportunity to do this for me.

There is so much that Common Ground High School has given me that Branford High School could not have offered me. The opportunities and experiences I have gained from my time there have taught me so much about myself and the world around me. The educational experience is unlike anything else i have seen in my schooling so far. It really is an amazing place. However, the funding being given to Common Ground High School - and other charter schools - per student is minuscule in comparison to the amount that is being given to my town's schools per student. The fact that the school can do such an amazing job on a small budget makes me wonder what could be done if We, as a school, could have equitable funding per student. We could certainly make our opportunities even more widespread. More classes could be added to enhance what is already here on electricity or writing skills. We could take more students to experience the wonders of Cross-Country Skiing and Hiking. The school has the potential for much, much more than it's already doing, and all of Connecticut's other Charter Schools do as well. All that's needed is a bit more money to fund it.

I am asking that you support student-based funding to fund charter schools fairly and sustainably.

Thank You For Listening,

Sincerely,
Britta Gunneson