

Testimony of Laura Gunneson  
Parent 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:

Why would a family from a suburban town with good schools choose an off-beat urban high school to provide something as important as their child's education? Consider first that both parents in this family have a college degree. One parent is trained as an educator and knows how to recognize a quality educational program. This family also puts academics and education before all other hobbies or extracurricular activities.

The answer is because we wanted our child to receive the BEST education we could possibly provide. We are the Gunneson family of Branford and we set out to find the best. We considered our local school system, magnet schools and charter schools in our area. We talked to staff, looked at facilities and considered opportunities the schools offered beyond the classroom. Then we chose Common Ground High School. To say we made an informed decision is an understatement. Without school choice we would have been forced to accept what our town had to offer and though it is acceptable would have limited how far our child could go.

At Common Ground High School every student is provided the support they need to succeed and the opportunity to advance as far as they can during their high school career. Every student is provided healthy food that gives them the nutrition they need to learn and grow. Every student is seen as an individual whose academic needs are unique. Every student is given the opportunity to see new things, go to new places and explore the world beyond Connecticut by going on adventure trips, visiting colleges, and participating in national academic competitions. Many students get the opportunity to take classes at the university level through AP offerings and by taking classes on college campuses. Many also participate in summer programs that strengthen their academic abilities, leadership skills or help them make decisions about their future. If all this is not enough, my child goes to school every day in a place where everyone, from the grounds staff to the highest teachers and administrators knows her name and is there to support her success. The question I get from other parents after telling them about my child's school is, "Wow, how much does it cost?". When I tell them it is free they simply cannot believe it and very often go and take a look for themselves. Though Common Ground High School is not a perfect fit for every child, every child deserves a perfect fit. That is why we believe in and are thankful for school choice.

Until recently we never fully considered where the money for all this came from. The injustice of the fact that our child is funded at a much lower level than students in regular schools came as a shock to us. Common Ground High School does so much with so little in comparison with what my local public school has to offer my child but it should not have to. How much more would those dedicated and caring education professionals be able to do if this school were funded fairly? This situation can be resolved so that there is fairness given to every student because they deserve everything we can give them to succeed. You can fix this by supporting Student Based Funding to fund charter schools fairly and sustainably. We thank you for your consideration in this matter. We will be watching and hoping for a quick resolution.

Sincerely,

Lars and Laura Gunneson – Branford, CT