

Testimony of Keith Johnston
Teacher 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:

I would like to thank the Appropriations Committee for giving me the opportunity to speak on behalf of Common Ground High School in expressing my unwavering support of having funds follow our students throughout their educational experience. My name is Keith Johnston and I have taught Spanish and French at the high school level in CT public school systems for the last eleven years. During my first seven years working in a traditional public school district, I grew somewhat as an educator; however, in hindsight I had not reached proficiency in my effectiveness as a teacher. I found myself complacent and without any room or desire to grow. I worked hard enough to be considered effective, yet I was unchallenged and had only scratched the surface of my potential as an educator. I had arrived at a crossroad.

My last four years at Common Ground High School have awakened my potential as an educator and have given me the opportunity to work with a small group of extremely dedicated staff who genuinely believe in the school's mission. However, I've often wondered why we have to wear so many hats, assume so many responsibilities and play so many roles, which has always been the norm since I've been at the school. My spouse has also asked me on numerous occasions why I still work at a charter school that requires far more effort, hours and overall energy, and pays far less than at a traditional public school. My answer: I didn't become a teacher for the money or the job security. I became a teacher to educate our students, help them reach their academic potentials, follow their dreams, and make positive contributions to their surrounding community.

My colleagues and I have been sacrificing ourselves with minimal resources on a daily basis because we believe that we can make a difference. We've agreed to work under these conditions because we, as do other charter schools, haven't had a choice. We continue to do the best we can with what we are provided. The inadequate funding that charter schools receive compared to traditional public schools is preventing us and our students from reaching our potential and closing the achievement gap, which is so prevalent throughout Connecticut. Since charter schools have adhered to state standards and proven their worthiness as highly effective educational systems, I am perplexed as to why we receive approximately 75% less funding per student. Why must we, year after year, be faced with offering a reading class over physics, only offer two years' of World Languages, have a minimal Physical Education program, or only offer two AP? Why do we have to make these choices? Why doesn't the funding follow the students as it does in other states such as New York? Why does our state continue this type of underfunding that, indeed, leaves many children behind and allows the achievement gap to persist? Why is a public charter school student valued at three-quarters of a traditional public school student once they reach high school? Shouldn't the funding follow the students? I am asking you, the

Appropriations Committee, to consider our public charter school students equal to those attending traditional public schools by funding them equally. Thank you for listening.

Sincerely,

Keith M. Johnston