

Testimony of Myles Rey  
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:

Common Ground High School has taught me more than my town's High School. My experiences at Common Ground have provided me with a plethora of knowledge that has helped prepare me for the world.

Common Ground, academically, has provided me with opportunities that Branford High School never would. Every single year of my high school career, I have taken an AP Class. I was enrolled in Algebra 2 my freshman year as well. Common Ground recognized my skills from the very beginning and allowed me to strengthen them. At the same time, they gave me Writing Workshop, a class in which I learned to strengthen my writing abilities, as English, in general, was never my strongest skill. Common Ground has offered me unique courses as well. My freshman year, I took a Harvest course. The interesting and unique thing about this course was that it was a Science/Spanish block course. Every other day, we'd also go out to Common Ground's farm and help harvest the crops we grow and sell. That same year, I took another block course: Drama. In this, we worked with the Elm Shakespeare Company to perform a mixed play called *Thou Nature Art My Goddess* that had scenes from both *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and *The Tragedy of King Lear*. This class taught me to be confident when speaking publically. In just one year, my experiences at Common Ground taught me a variety of things.

My next two years have taught me and changed me in equally large ways. My sophomore year, I had a schedule that focused more on English and Science courses, further enforcing my abilities as a student. During that year, I learned about green architecture, discussed the interconnected system that is our Earth, analyzed *The Catcher in the Rye* by J.D. Salinger, and so much more. The whole way through, Common Ground continued to set high standards for me, knowing that I could accomplish it. And whenever I needed help, they were always right there for me. All of this prepared me for the encounters I faced this year. Every Tuesday, I took Pre-Calculus, AP European History, and Technology and Power, a junior-level College Course at Yale...at, literally, the same time. I had to leave class at high school to take my Yale course, while still being responsible for any work I missed in AP European History and Pre-Calculus. I had to juggle all three classes and divide my time very carefully in order to handle the workload. During the Yale Course in particular, I had to write a 20 research paper on an original thesis we made about any technology. The numerous English courses that Common Ground had consistently given me allowed me to succeed. In the end, I got a B- in the course altogether, which I consider pretty respectable, considering it is a class designed for students four to five years older than myself. I continue to be challenged every day at school by Common

ground. In can't even imagine the standards and opportunities that the school will give me in my Senior year...

Because of Common Ground, I am more independent. By this, I don't just mean because it has prepared me for the future. Before going to this school, I was always dependent on a ride if I needed to get there. Now, I understand how to get to places by myself. I not only rode bus for the first time in my life, but I understand the bus schedules. I take the train home 2-3 times a week. It may seem small to some, but this kind of independence is incredibly major; I don't have to depend on anyone else but myself in order to get somewhere. Later this year, when I get my driver's license, I will become even more independent.

I can't say that there haven't been times at Common Ground where the lack of finances haven't affected the opportunities they have given, though. Before this year, Pre-Calculus was never even taught at Common Ground. My freshman year, Algebra 2 was the first year. When students came around to taking those, they had to take them at Gateway Community College. Only this year do we have Chemistry teacher, albeit part-time and for one period only. Many after-school programs are reluctantly underfunded in order to finance the academic opportunities the school provides. Our school consistently has to look for grants from the outside to finance projects. Our drama club holds fundraisers in order to provide the minimal props and costumes that we use.

Common Ground is an amazing school by all accounts. It goes so incredibly far with a financial disadvantage. It has made dramatic increases in State Mastery Tests for the past 3 years, resulting in being designated Connecticut's "Most Improved High School" by ConnCAN last year. Common Ground, like all charter schools, deserves fair funding. If it manages to get by with all that it does with 3/4 of what public schools get, imagine the possibilities with even more. Every year, as the school's expenditure rises through even just inflation, it becomes more and more difficult for the school to provide all that it does and to even function.

I am asking that you support student-based funding to fund Charter Schools like Common Ground fairly and sustainably. I hope that you take this into consideration.

Myles Rey