

**Testimony of Byrute Johnson**  
**Parent at Common Ground High School,**  
**358 Springside Avenue, New Haven, CT 06515**  
**Testimony submitted to the Appropriations Committee**  
**March 1st, 2011**

Honorable Chairs, Members of the Appropriation Committee;

Good Evening, My name is Byrute Johnson and I'm here tonight to raise my voice and show my support for Common Ground.

Back in January 2009, when my daughter Bryanna was a middle school student, and preparing to pick classes for her freshman year at high school, she mentioned to me that she didn't want to go to the local high school in the town we live in, which consists of 2,500 students. I was so surprised because I thought she would miss her friends from middle school, but I could also hear the anxiety in her voice. We decided to explore our options and look at other high schools in surrounding towns. So Bryanna shadowed students at High school in the Community, Career High School, New Haven Academy, Coop Arts and Humanities, and at Common Ground. BUT, out of all these schools, Common Ground just clicked for her. She could not stop talking about how everyone made her feel so welcomed.

So my daughter is now a sophomore at Common Ground high school, I have seen a total transformation in her. She has flourished at Common Ground. Her study habits have improved and I am just amazed how focused she is and how positive she is about her work, her school and herself. My daughter is in a school that gives her a tremendous educational environment where she has many choices and is thriving as a student. These choices include an array of after-school programs like Cooking Club, Strategy Games, African and Hip Hop Dance, and even college student mentoring.

She truly enjoys getting up every day (on her own) and spending her whole day at Common Ground. And when I say all day, it's sometimes until 5:30. Not many high school students I know want to stay at school that long. She has told me on numerous occasions how she absolutely loves Common Ground. So I asked her: "What do you love about Common Ground?" She says, "Mom, I love the vibe I get from my fellow classmates, and the teachers at Common Ground give their all to the students."

Common Ground students are taught the importance of being involved in their local community and being active in caring for the environment. Students at Common Ground understand that as young adults their responsibility is extended back to the community.

As parents of our school children, we're asking that Common Ground students receive the same funding for each student. This is simple: that the money follows the student, no matter what school they choose to go to. As a whole, Common Ground has done more with less, we owe it to kids to have the same funding for all.

Common Ground High School is a special place. The school and it's faculty are family and their actions reinforce that description. The school simply is special and the students demonstrate a love of Common Ground that does "not" exist in every school. The majority of students' one opportunity in life and beyond is through school. Common Ground gives them and prepares them for that opportunity.

There are not enough great things to say about Common Ground: excellent, caring teachers, excellent administration, excellent supportive learning environment. . Thank you for your time, and I'm asking you to fix the funding for charter schools. Common Ground is truly a great school and it's the right choice for my daughter.

Byrute Johnson