

3-24-11

Dear State Legislators,

My name is Joe Lesiak and I work at Common Ground High School (CGHS). I am a founding member of the not-for-profit New Haven Ecology Project which sponsors CGHS, a State chartered high school. I have held various positions in the organization including president of the board of directors. Due to the needs of the organization and site, I began working at CGHS in 2002 as the manager of the organic gardens, construction manager for the third addition to our school building, and environmental educator. I am currently the site manager and part time school social worker.

Our students and staff are an integral part of the flora and fauna that is the community of Common Ground. We strive to be consciously inclusive of our whole environment when making choices affecting students and their educational needs in this setting. Students learn to value themselves, others, and all aspects of the natural environment as equal participants and indispensable aspects of life. They learn that their intentions and actions have effects in their daily lives and beyond this dynamic living community. They also come to understand how they are affected by the workings of the larger community through critical thinking skills.

Charter schools in Connecticut need to be funded at the level per student as other schools to demonstrate that they are valued and included as equally important members in our State's educational community. Students know what this means.

Some years back a student told me, "You can't fool us. We know that if it were not a law, we wouldn't even have schools". This student seemed to understand the underlying intentions of adults in the community as seen in continued cuts to funding for education.

Charter school legislation was meant to redress "separate and unequal", to give parents choices about where to educate their children. It appears that choosing a charter school is to choose an underfunded school that is unequal. Is this the underlying intention, the message you want to send?

I hope that our legislature will have the courage to consciously choose to include equal funding for Charter schools. This is an opportunity through action to send a message to students, parents, teachers and staff that they are valued and will be included equally in our State's educational community.

Thank you.

Joe Lesiak, LCSW



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