Explorations Charter School – Winsted,CT

February 21, 2012

Dear Appropriations/Legislative Members:

I have been the Executive Director and Principal at Explorations Charter School since 1999. To date, we have graduated 197 students. Many of them would not have made it to their senior year without us. These are young people who chose to come to a small high school. They left behind high schools with many extracurricular activities and lots of elective courses all within close proximity to their homes. So, why did they come to Explorations? They came because Explorations provides a learning community that supports students as individuals and works with them to develop their academic skills. Many students come here with good grades but low self-esteem; not fitting in to the cliques at their local school. A few join us, fleeing schools where they have been teased and bullied. Some come with academic skills well below grade level and a sense that no one cares about them. Other students come with IEPs, searching for a school where they truly are integrated with their peers and receive help without the stigma of being labeled.

Parents make a commitment when they make a choice in education for their child. In the case of charter schools that often means having to transport a child many miles back and forth as no transportation is provided for students who do not live in the town/city where the school is located. This year we have students coming, mostly via parent transportation, from Barkhamsted, Burlington, Canaan, Canton, Colebrook, Harwinton, Lakeville, Litchfield, New Hartford, Norfolk, Torrington, Sharon, Simsbury, West Hartford and Winsted.

Charter schools need to be taken seriously. We are public schools and yet we struggle to make ends meet. There is no way we can continue without meeting the increases in our operating budget that occur yearly. This year we had to limit our spending on major programs to develop a budget based on our per-pupil allotment. In addition, we rely on parents to bring in paper goods; toilet paper, paper towels, plastic silverware, etc. I spend a disproportionate amount of my time on seeking private and federal funds to help us function as we should.

We are at maximum size for our program now and do not wish to add more seats. Some charter schools wish to grow, and I believe should be allowed to, but our appeal largely is due to our small size. We can promise parents a small class size and individual attention to their child. Our graduates return every year to visit with us. They share stories of success in college, pride in their workplace or military service and tales of their transformation into adults. Please allow us to continue these healthy relationships with our students by supporting the goals of this proposed legislature. Call and schedule a visit with us anytime. I thank you for your time.

Respectfully,
Gail Srebnik

Gail Srebnik, Executive Director, Principal, Special Education Coordinator and College Counselor