

February 21, 2012

To the Members of the Appropriations and Legislative Committees:

I am writing to you as the proud mathematics teacher from Explorations Charter Schools, one of the first charter schools in Connecticut.

As educators we spend so much time making sure that we teach every child and adhere to the ideas and ideals of “No Child Left Behind”. I don’t think that anyone could disagree with the premise that we need to teach every child and help them reach their fullest potential. Unfortunately, the current funding formula has left our Charter School behind. With this formula, the only way for us to increase our income is to add seats (students). This is in direct contrast to the founding principles of Explorations. We were created to provide students with small class sizes, experiential learning environments, positive community/volunteer relationships and adventure based education, all designed to help our students become successful and well rounded members of society.

Students come to Explorations for a variety of reasons. Some have been “left behind” by their local district, some have been bullied and are seeking asylum in a small school environment, and some are looking for a new start and a way out of the mistakes and bad habits of their past. Regardless of the reason, the decision to attend a charter school is a choice. With this choice comes great responsibility for the students and their families. Students at Explorations sign a contract regarding attendance and grades, and parents commit to providing transportation for their child, as transportation is not covered in the Charter School Legislation. We have had students traveling an hour to school, because of the desire to leave their school district and come to our school.

On more occasions that you can even imagine I have had parents and students say to me “without Explorations, graduation would have never been possible. I never knew teachers cared about students until I came here.” Those comments are hard to quantify through data collection, but hearing those words of thanks lets us know that the commitment we have to student success is working.

Please allow us to continue making a positive impact by supporting the goals of the proposed legislation regarding charter schools. Our school would like to invite you to come for a visit so that you can have the opportunity to hear directly from the students what Explorations has meant to them and their families. Thank you for your time.

Sincerely,

Jill E. Bongiolatti

Mathematics Teacher
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FIRST® Robotics Team Mentor