



Cooperative Arts & Humanities Magnet High School
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<http://co-opartsandhumanities.org>

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Dear Members of the Appropriations Committee:

2/20/13

I'm writing to urge you not to cut funding from our afterschool program (<http://co-opafterschool.org/>). Our program is extremely successful, partly because our staff is committed to providing a diverse set of academically rigorous afterschool programs, but mostly because of the overwhelming student participation. More than half of our students stay after school! I teach the CAS afterschool newspaper club and I'm proud of the work that my student journalists do. You can view their work here: www.coopvoices.com.

As you well know, there is much gun violence in New Haven. Two years ago, my creative writing class decided to write and collect stories for a book commemorating people they had lost. We spoke frankly about the reasons people join gangs, commit crimes, and engage in violence. When I asked how grownups could help, the overwhelming answer was: provide safe places for teenagers to be after school and in the evenings so they have a safe alternative to the pressures of the street. A former student who was shot by a gang member initiate came to talk to our class as we began to write our book. He said that as a theater major, rehearsals and shows gave him a legitimate excuse to use when gangs tried to engage him. He said he felt that having a school-related place to go in the afternoons and evenings literally saved his life.

I have been an inner city school teacher for 15 years. The work that goes on inside the classroom is important, yes, but the afterschool program is different. Students *choose* to be there. They are motivated, grateful, and show up as their best selves. Please understand, 70% of our students are eligible for free and reduced meals. From a strictly financial perspective, so much research has shown that investing in early and supplemental education for disadvantaged children saves far more money in the long run than the exorbitant costs of prosecution and incarceration when these same young people aren't given the chance and support to thrive early on. We always hear that "education is the great American equalizer." Please don't let that be political rhetoric; please put our tax money where our kids are.

Sincerely,
Mindi Englart
Creative Writing Teacher / Literary Magazine and Newspaper Adviser