

Dear Appropriation Committee Members,

As a teacher in the New Haven Public School System I find few resources as valuable to our students as our after school program, appropriately named Coop After School. The New Haven School District, and more specifically Cooperative Arts and Humanities High School, is very unique for both the populations it serves and the success it is having in closing the achievement gap. Success is not an overnight process. Success depends upon the stability of vital institutions. Those institutions include, but are not limited to, breakfast, lunch, rigorous academics, access to technology, access to books, quality teachers, and days that do not end with the final bell – after school programming. While Coop After School (or CAS as we call it) attracts a variety of students with its numerous programs, I feel compelled to speak to the two programs I have been co-facilitating since I began teaching here in 2010-2011.

Cooperative Arts and Humanities High School attracts a magnet population far more dynamic than most local high schools. One of the most unique and inviting programs we offer is the Gay Straight Alliance. This club is a work-in-progress that offers students and allies alike a safe place to speak out or speak about issues of sexuality and sexual orientation. In the current climate of heightened bullying and growing public awareness, this club is a refuge for students of all kinds. For some students the most vital function of the after school club is to have a place to speak with one another and adults when family does not approve or when there is fear that they will not. During my tenure as co-facilitator we have participated in programs with Yale University, attended a *Pride Prom*, and this year we supported a school-wide production of *The Laramie Project*. One of the highlights of this particular club is its involvement within the immediate school community and throughout the larger city wide community.

Since our school does not offer varsity sports, our after school program (CAS) also sponsors a basketball club. The basketball club provides an outlet for teenage boys and girls who may not be fully satisfied with arts programming. At an urban high school in a low-income district, offering such a popular sport during inclement weather months provides a safe and secure environment for students. The program promotes leadership, health, and fun. It also reaches young men who have trouble finding motivation during vital secondary school years. As a coach of this club, I find it to be one of the more meaningful ways we have of reaching some of these young men and establishing a genuine rapport. It is learning beyond the classroom at its most authentic.

I would like to add one final note. While these are after school programs, their reach goes beyond the scope of punching a 2:30 to 4:30 clock. These programs even touch students and adults who are themselves not participating, when they perhaps stop by for a drop in. Often, teachers that know you have a relationship with a student due to the after school program ask for your help in communicating with the student. These anecdotes, while not immediately measurable, are real and valuable. The after school program benefits students, teachers, administrators, parents, and the greater community. This is no exaggeration. Each student and adult participant sends a ripple effect throughout their greater social and familial networks. These are the means of participation that often build the most personal investment in all who are involved in education.

Sincerely,

Daniel Wajnowski
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