

**Testimony of Larry Dome**  
**Teacher at Common Ground High School**  
**358 Springside Avenue, New Haven, CT 06515**  
**Testimony submitted to the Appropriations Committee**  
**February 21, 2013**

Honorable Chairs, Members of the Appropriation Committee:

I am a public school teacher at a charter school in New Haven called Common Ground High School. I teach mathematics and I have been at Common Ground for 5 years. Our hope is that we supplement the educational opportunities available students in the state of Connecticut. Common Ground focuses on sustainability issues and offers a unique learning environment of operating an organic farm in an urban setting.

Common Ground has always been focused on preparing students for college, with 96% of our graduating college last year. We also embrace state initiatives such as working to close the achievement gap that exists in our state, based on ethnicity and income level. In the 5 years I have been at Common Ground we have made great progress in our test scores and three years ago we were removed from the NCLB list and continued to make gains.

We want to continue with this mission and continue to make progress on many fronts such as closing the achievement gap. We have plans to build a new sustainable classroom building and increase the size of our student population from 165 to 225 students over the next few years. We have made these plans in part assuming we will have the funding delivered to us by last year's education bill. We also have expanded after school programs and increased school day support with more aides in classes. All these initiatives help students who are at any level, but are particularly focused on helping those with the most need. The Education Reform Bill enabled us to engage in this valuable work during the past year.

The funding increase last year enabled us to provide more intensive support to our students, but in my school, teachers still bear a heavy load in order to provide that support. Teachers like me are also charged with the additional work of implementing state initiatives such as the roll out the new common core national standards, which has required an entire curriculum revision. The curriculum writers at a charter school are the teachers themselves. Each year our staff is presented with one or more similar challenges that go beyond traditional teaching duties. Without fair funding for charter schools which provides more support to the instructional staff, this level of demand is not sustainable.

Each year our administration reviews our school budget for any interested member of the staff. Each year I have attended and fully understand the painful decisions that need to be made to try to provide the best services to our students. It has been difficult for Common Ground to appropriately compensate the teaching staff for the level work that is required. This is also not a sustainable model.

I am here to ask the appropriations committee to please support the Governor's budgeted per pupil amount of \$10,500 for next year and to honor the incremental increases for charters in future years promised in the Education Reform Law. Without your support we will be significantly handicapped in our ability to provide Connecticut students with a unique opportunity to become future leaders in our state.