

APPROPRIATIONS COMMITTEE PUBLIC HEARING

February 21, 2013

TESTIMONY OF CO-OP AFTER SCHOOL (CAS)

Good evening. My name is Kjerstin Pugh and I am the Education and Outreach Program Manager for CAPA and the Shubert Theater. As such I am the Co-Op After School Program Manager. Dwight Hall at Yale, the Shubert Theater and Co-Op High School partners to provide quality after school programming that is available at no cost to every Co-Op student.

In just four years, Co-Op After School (CAS) has grown from offering 5 after school programs to 40 per semester. The growth and success of this program can be directly attributed receiving state funding.

On average, 300 students participate in CAS each semester. These students come from over 20 towns and cities. They come from New Haven and as far away as Bridgeport, Waterbury, and Meriden. We offer an array of arts and enrichment programs, including, but not limited to, College Prep, performing and creative arts, Playwriting, physical and emotional fitness, and Debate.

Students rely on CAS to be not only a safe place to explore, learn, and grow, but also as a tool for their futures. They understand that all of these programs are extracurricular activities that they can include on college applications and resumes which would further their academic and employment opportunities in the future. Many see after school as a way to diversify their interests and experiences and gain more practical and specialized skills. At Co-Op, the school day is packed, but CAS offers 2 hours every day for focus, relaxation, socialization, and time to grow as artists, students, and young adults.

Data from student surveys given at the end of Fall 2012 CAS programming show that 34% of students felt that their grades improved because of CAS, 42% of students agreed that CAS was one of the main reasons they came to school, 62% reported that CAS positively affected the way they felt about Co-Op, and 70% felt safe and respected during CAS. One student wrote of her experience in the after school GSA Club: "I started [GSA] my freshman year and it really helped me come out of my shell. This is the only club where I feel accepted for who I am and I can be proud of myself... I have a lot of fun and honestly, if it was not for this club, I wouldn't have any friends who accept and love me as I am."

Students also develop professional skills. Take Terrence Dowdeye for example, he frequently participated in CAS theater tech programs which lead to a paid summer internship with CAPA where he received hands on training from technical theater professionals. This internship has resulted in a job at both the Shubert and Co-Op where he works side by side with union employees. What's even more impressive is that Terrance is now doing all of this while pursuing a degree at the University of New Haven. This is just one example of how a student's exploration through programs CAS offers can directly impact his or her future.

The state funding creates jobs for teachers, artists and school administrators, local nonprofit agencies, and members of the greater Co-Op community, such as alumni and parents. Other agencies and organizations have taken notice of our programming and partners such as Yale University, Cooking Matters, and the Co-Op Center for Creativity provide us with free instruction, which provides approximately 10% of our programming.

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Extracurricular activities, self exploration and growth are essential for students to get into college and gain experience that can be translated into job skills. State funding provides these experiences and opportunities to students who may not have other options for safe social and creative activities. Just as so many students rely on CAS as an outlet for after school activities, this program relies on state funding. Please reinstate funding for worthwhile programs like Co-Op After School. Thank you for your time and attention.