



# COMMON GROUND HIGH SCHOOL

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**Testimony of Lizanne Cox  
Director of Common Ground High School  
358 Springside Avenue, New Haven, CT 06515  
Submitted to Appropriations Committee  
February 24, 2014**

Honorable Chairpersons and respected members of the Appropriations Committee:

I am the director of the Common Ground High School, an environmental public charter school in New Haven, Connecticut. Thank you for this opportunity to testify on behalf of our small school and the thousands of children that charter schools educate across the state.

We thank Governor Malloy and the General Assembly for the investments you've made in public charter schools. We appreciate that Governor Malloy's modified budget proposal would leave intact much-needed funding increases for state charter schools like Common Ground. After last year's \$300 per pupil funding cut sent a shock into charter school budgets across the state, this funding could not come at a better time. With the funding cuts restored, our school will receive \$10,500 per pupil in state aid this year, and \$11,000 per pupil next year.

However, even after these increases take effect, our school will still receive far less funding than the traditional public schools in our city. About 70 percent of our students come from New Haven, and the school district spends about \$17,000 per pupil. Even with the additional federal aid we receive for our high-need student populations, the disparity in public funding between Common Ground and New Haven Public Schools is still about \$5,000 per pupil.

Why should public charter school students receive so much less public support than their friends and neighbors that attend district schools right down the street?

Every dollar counts at a small, homegrown charter like Common Ground. We have worked very hard over the years to build the strongest possible academic program for our students, and the increase in our per-pupil funding this year helped us strengthen that program and expand our upper-level academic offerings. With your support, we can now offer more of the upper level physics, chemistry, and Advanced Placement classes our students deserve. State support also helps us provide intensive support in math and reading to the students who need it most.

Our program is working: our 90% graduation rate is above the state average and far above the average for urban schools state wide. Moreover, 97% of our students gained admission to college in each of the last two years. Our students' academic progress earned Common Ground recognition as a Connecticut School of Distinction by the State Department of Education this fall, and the U.S. Department recognized Common Ground as a national Green Ribbon School last year.

But as our academic program becomes more rigorous, it also becomes more challenging to provide because we have real curricular demands that we must meet. We need to provide the science equipment and supplies required for Advanced Placement-level science classes. We need to provide the kind of intensive academic supports that we know help our disadvantaged students. And lastly,

like all public schools, we must meet the requirements of the new Common Core standards, teacher evaluations, and student support plan initiatives mandated by the state.

We have never expected more than fair funding that would allow us to offer our students the quality education they deserve. We pride ourselves on our efficiency, but the reality is that we can't do it all at our current funding levels. We can't keep slicing the existing pie into smaller and smaller pieces. Do we purchase the technology needed to support the new teacher evaluation system or do we provide laboratory equipment and books for our AP Environmental Science students?

That's why we thank you for your support and are committed to working with the General Assembly on this issue. You will recall that the nearly-unanimous 2012 education reform bill also promised charter schools continued increases to \$11,500 per pupil. We think this is a good place to start during next year's budget session and we kindly urge lawmakers to remember this promise in 2015.

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Thank you for your time, and you are always welcome to visit our school.