

Testimony for Education Committee: HB 1096

March 19, 2015

I am Larry Dome, a mathematics teacher at a public school in New Haven called Common Ground High School. I make a point of saying public school because we are publicly funded through the state, and we have a lottery system to determine who comes to our school. My school is only one type of educational opportunity for students in New Haven and its surrounding communities; students have other choices as well. They can attend their district school or they can apply to a magnet school. Having a diverse set of choices for school is very important as it allows a student to choose a school based on their learning styles and interests. Such a diverse set of choices is important to ensuring that students get the best opportunities to succeed as possible. Yes, Common Ground is a charter school, but we are a public school and one of many choices available to students in New Haven.

What does Common Ground offer a student? We are a college preparatory school and over the last 5 years 93% to 97% of our seniors have placed into college. The colleges have ranged from the likes of Yale and Oberlin to UConn, SCSU and community colleges, no matter what level institution, our students do attend college.

How do we get our students to college? We have been focused on curriculum development that is based on the common core standards and offers a rich environment of authentic learning opportunities. As an example, in my Algebra 2 class, each spring during the unit on logarithms the students test water and soil samples around our campus in West Rocks State Park, for pH changes to determine if our activities at the site are having a negative impact. Our campus is also an organic farm. We have many different classes that use our campus as a living lab and outdoor classroom that brings lessons to life for our students.

Common Ground also focuses its students on leadership and community service. During a student's 4 years at Common Ground, they amass an e-portfolio of their work at the school. This portfolio includes academic achievement and participation in programs or activities outside the classroom. In a student's senior year, they must defend their portfolio by discussing how their work has made a meaningful difference in their lives and how their experiences will influence their lives going forward.

I highlight these few aspects about Common Ground to help you understand that having such a diverse set of school choices in New Haven or in the State of Connecticut is so important. We work very hard and we are proud to have provided this opportunity to so many students in the New Haven area.

As a charter school, a public school, we ask that we be held to the same standards and oversight that any public school is held to. We have just completed our renewal process and we believe that the department of education will rule favorably on our renewal. The staff at Common Ground is ready to continue our mission to provide an alternative quality

education to students in the New Haven area. Therefore, I ask that bill (1096) not move forward out of this committee, as it would seriously impact the ability of families to access schools like Common Ground. Every type of public school can offer many wonderful opportunities to students. I ask that you treat each type of public school equally so that students continue to have choices that best suit their abilities and needs. Please do not move 1096 forward. Thank you for your time.