

Testimony of Kathy Hoyt to the State's Education Committee

Representative Flesichmann, Senator Slossberg, and Education Committee members, I am here today to you in regard to Senate Bill 1096.

My son, Logan is a sophomore at Common Ground High School in New Haven. Prior to this, he was a student in the Hamden Public school system. During that time, Logan struggled. Academically, Logan excelled. Socially and emotionally, his time in the Hamden schools was a struggle for him. He was bullied and ostracized. Logan has Asperger's syndrome. He was not accepted by his peers, and the staff struggled to understand his high learning level combined with his delayed emotional level, He didn't fit inside their box.

When we found Common Ground, I knew it would be a perfect fit for my son. And it was. Common Ground offers small classes, dedicated teachers and staff, and an educational experience that is exceptional. He is consistently challenged academically, and there is a variety of programs that offer new experiences and learning potential. Logan has thrived at Common Ground. Academically he is doing fantastic, and as importantly, has many friends. He is part of a community, and happy and well adjusted. Common Ground allows for students to learn outside the box.

An important component at Common Ground is the staff dedication. It is a small community, and the teachers develop a relationship with each child, acknowledging the learning style of the pupil. The staff goes above and beyond to make sure each student has success and is challenged. The teachers identify each students needs and am accommodates for that in the classroom.

I believe one of the most important aspects for me at Common Ground is the mutual respect within the school community. The staff respects each child, and this is reflected in their day to day interactions with the students. Because this is role modeled so clearly, the students have high regard and respect for the teachers. Within this comes an environment rich in learning, ideas, and successes both students and staff. It is an environment where students can and do excel. Logan has excelled. He feels safe, accepted, and part of the school community. Logan is now a typical high school student. He is happy. He loves school. And I quietly rejoice.

Common Ground is not typical of a traditional school setting. It is a place where learning happens through partnership between staff, students and families. It exemplifies what how learning should come alive for all students. The school environment engages each student to challenge themselves academically, in the community, and most importantly , in the journey of self-discovery. These students will become strong leaders, productive members of the community, innovative business people, and most importantly goal oriented adults. And I am ever so happy to say thanks to Common Ground, my child, Logan, is thriving both academically and socially. In a more traditional school setting this would not have happened.

There are other Logans out there – thousands of them. That doesn't mean they have Asperger's, or that they're being bullied. It means there are kids who don't fit in at their current school, and its hurting their chances at a successful future. Every one of those kids, as well as the students who are happy in their current school, deserve more school options so they have the opportunity to attend a school that fits them.

A moratorium on new charter schools is the exact opposite of a world where we're giving kids the opportunities that will help them succeed. I urge you to oppose this bill, and support the creation of more school options for families around Connecticut. The other Logans and their families cannot wait another year.

Thank you.