

# VII.D.

## Connecticut State Board of Education Hartford

### **To Be Proposed:**

March 6, 2024

**Resolved**, That the State Board of Education, pursuant to subsection (g) of Section 10-66bb of the Connecticut General Statutes, renews the charter of Common Ground High School, New Haven from July 1, 2024, through June 30, 2027, subject to the conditions and recommendations set forth in the Commissioner's March 6, 2024, memorandum to the State Board of Education, and directs the Commissioner to take the necessary action.

Approved by a vote of \_\_\_\_\_, this sixth day of March, Two Thousand Twenty-Four.

Signed: \_\_\_\_\_  
Charlene M. Russell-Tucker, Secretary  
State Board of Education

**Connecticut State Board of Education  
Hartford**

**To:** State Board of Education  
**From:** Charlene M. Russell-Tucker, Commissioner of Education  
**Date:** March 6, 2024  
**Subject:** Renewal of State Charter: Common Ground High School, New Haven

**Executive Summary**

**Introduction**

In accordance with Section (§)10-66bb (g) of the Connecticut General Statutes (C.G.S.), charters may be renewed, upon application, in accordance with the provisions for the granting of new charters. The State Board of Education (SBE) may renew a charter for a period of up to five years. The SBE makes renewal decisions based on evidence of the following performance standards:

1. *School Performance:* Is the school a successful model resulting in strong student outcomes and a positive school climate?
2. *Stewardship, Governance, and Management:* Is the school financially and organizationally healthy and viable?
3. *Student Population:* Is the school promoting equity by effectively attracting, enrolling, and retaining students, particularly among targeted populations?
4. *Legal Compliance:* Is the school acting in compliance with applicable laws and regulations?

The Connecticut State Department of Education (CSDE) and the SBE carefully evaluate qualitative and quantitative evidence and longitudinal data aligned to the four performance standards outlined above when making charter renewal decisions. The charter performance framework drives the CSDE's charter school accountability systems and processes, including initial approval decisions, annual monitoring, and renewal determinations. From inception to renewal, charter schools must abide by the CSDE's charter school accountability procedures and performance framework. Charter monitoring takes place through annual reporting, meetings, correspondence, data submissions, and site visits, as appropriate. In accordance with C.G.S. §10-66bb(g), a charter may be renewed upon application if the charter school has demonstrated satisfactory performance relative to the four performance standards.

## **History/Background**

Common Ground High School (Common Ground) opened in the fall of 1997. Common Ground has the maximum approved student enrollment of 230 seats. The latest CSDE audited student enrollment data from 2022-23 reports 226 students in Grades 9-12 with 74.3 percent residing in New Haven (the host district) and 25.7 percent residing in 19 area towns. Of those students, 69.0 percent qualify for free or reduced-price meals and 28.8 percent receive special education services. Table 1 on page 16 of the attached Charter Renewal Report provides the latest available audited 2022-23 student enrollment and demographic data. The mission of Common Ground is to “graduate students with the knowledge, skills, and understanding to live healthy, powerful, and productive lives.”

On March 4, 2020, Common Ground received a three-year charter renewal with a condition. The condition stated in the 2020 renewal required Common Ground to develop a corrective action plan to improve student achievement. Due to implications of the pandemic, the SBE approved a one-year extension on July 14, 2020; the school’s charter will expire June 30, 2024.

## **Charter Renewal Process**

*Application for Renewal of Charter:* The CSDE accepted an application for the renewal of Common Ground’s charter on September 8, 2023. The application detailed the charter school’s progress, operations, and achievement in relation to the CSDE’s charter school performance standards: (a) school performance; (b) stewardship, governance, and management; (c) student population; and (d) legal compliance. Common Ground submitted data and evidence to substantiate the charter school’s written responses.

A renewal team comprised of the CSDE staff with expertise in curriculum, assessments, special education, English Learners/Multilingual Learners (ELs/MLs), school management, finance, and school governance reviewed the renewal application and requested clarification and additional information where necessary.

*Renewal Site Visit:* On November 2, 2023, the CSDE renewal team conducted an onsite visit at Common Ground. The purpose of the onsite visit was to observe Common Ground programs, policies, practices, and procedures to assess their efficacy and fidelity to the school’s charter and aligned operating systems. Evidence was collected through onsite visit observations, document reviews, interviews, and focus groups. The team spoke with board members, administrators, staff, students, parents, and community members. The team used this process to ensure that the school is functioning in compliance with the law and the school’s mission. The team verified the responses detailed in the renewal application regarding compliance with the law and the CSDE’s performance framework and accountability plan.

*Invitation for Written Comment:* The CSDE solicited written comments on the renewal of Common Ground from the Superintendent of New Haven Public Schools (NHPS) and from contiguous school districts: East Haven, Hamden, North Haven, Orange, West Haven and Woodbridge. The CSDE received a letter from Vonda J. Tencza, Superintendent, Woodbridge School District (see Attachment A), which provided no reason or comment that reflects poorly on the school. The CSDE received no letters against the renewal of the school’s charter.

*Public Hearing:* Mr. Erik M. Clemons, member of the SBE, and the CSDE staff held a public hearing on January 30, 2024, in the City of New Haven, and heard from individuals on the potential charter renewal of Common Ground and the impact it is having on the community. Public hearing participants included members of the Common Ground community, including governing board members, family members, students, school staff, and community members. Over 84 people attended the public hearing. Thirty-one individuals offered testimony supporting the school's efforts and the renewal of the charter. Two students spoke out against the renewal of the school's charter and were critical of administration at the school and teacher turnover.

### **Review of Documents and Site Visit Findings**

The most recent available data and information contained in the Charter Renewal Report and the state student data (beginning on page 8) indicates Common Ground's performance according to the four performance standards. The report highlights the school's strengths and areas for continued growth.

#### **Areas of Strengths Include:**

- Common Ground's Mathematics Performance Index – All Students experienced an increase of 0.5 index points, from an index of 37.1 in 2021-22 to an index of 37.6 in 2022-23.
- Common Ground's 2021-22 Four-Year Adjusted Cohort Graduation Rate of 88.2 percent exceeded the host district's 75.8 percent by 12.4 percentage points and was within 0.7 percentage points of the state average of 88.9 percent.
- Common Ground's 2018-19 Six-Year Adjusted Cohort Graduation Rate of 90.9 percent exceeded the host district and state averages.
- Common Ground's suspension rate of 7.4 percent in 2019-20 decreased 3.1 percentage points during the midst of the pandemic to 4.3 percent in 2021-22, below the host district and the state. The rate of suspension then increased 2.7 percentage points to 7.0 percent in 2022-23, below the host district and equal to the state average.
- A review of Common Ground's chronic absenteeism rates of 20.5 percent in 2019-20 showed they were 0.6 percentage points below the host district and 8.3 percentage points above the state. In 2021-22, during the midst of the pandemic, the school's chronic absenteeism rate experienced an increase of 33.1 percentage points to 53.6 percent, 4.5 percentage points below the host district of 58.1 percent and 29.9 percentage points above the state average of 23.7 percent. In 2022-23, the school achieved a 29.3 percentage point reduction to 24.3 percent, 12.3 percentage points below the host district average of 36.6 percent and 4.3 percentage points above the state average of 20.0 percent. It is important for the school to continue in its efforts to identify and address barriers that negatively affect student attendance.
- Common Ground's 2022-23 Discipline Tier, Based on Suspension/Expulsion Data was Tier 1, which is below the host district and below the state. Tier 1 designates a school with a low suspension rate and low disproportionality.
- Common Ground demonstrates strong community support as evidenced by over 84 people attending the public hearing. Thirty-one individuals offered testimony supporting the school's efforts and the renewal of the charter.
- Parents interviewed during the site visit were also supportive of the school and its efforts to serve children and families.
- Common Ground is in compliance with the Teacher Education and Mentoring (TEAM) Program and Educator Evaluation and Support Plan (EESP).

**Areas for Continued Growth Include:**

- While Common Ground's 2022-23 Accountability Index score of 58.7 percent outperformed the host district score of 57.6 percent by 1.1 percentage points, it is 10.6 percentage points below the state average of 69.3 percent.
- Common Ground's ELA Performance Index – All Students has decreased 2.9 index points from an index of 43.4 in 2018-19 to an index of 40.5 in 2022-23, and has performed below the host district and the state in each of the three years reported 2018-19, 2021-22, and 2022-23.
- Common Ground's ELA Performance Index – High Needs Students has decreased 5.3 index points from an index of 41.1 in 2018-19 to an index of 35.8 in 2022-23, and has performed below the host district and the state in each of the three years reported 2018-19, 2021-22, and 2022-23.
- Common Ground's 2022-23 Mathematics Performance Index – All Students has decreased 0.7 index points from an index of 38.3 in 2018-19 to and index of 37.6 in 2022-23, and has performed below the host district and the state in each of the three years reported 2018-19, 2021-22, and 2022-23.
- Common Ground's Mathematics Performance Index – High Needs Students has decreased 2.5 index points from an index of 37.4 in 2018-19 to an index of 34.9 in 2022-23, and has performed below the host district and the state in each of the three years reported 2018-19, 2021-22, and 2022-23.
- A review of Common Ground's employee roster and state certified staff file of February 26, 2024, determined that the school met the statutory requirement of having at least 50 percent of its staff with a Full Certificate. However, 3 staff are not properly certified and have no active certificate/permit on file.
- A review of Common Ground's state certified staff file and employee roster on February 26, 2024, identified 3.0 staff as not properly certified.
- Common Ground's latest 2022-23 certified financial audit found three internal control weaknesses that the school is addressing through planned corrective actions.
- The school's Accounting Policies and Procedures Manual (APPM) does not include policies and procedures for establishing and maintaining assets purchased with federal funds. The school anticipates updating and amending its APPM to address these issues and will be submitting it to the governing board for approval at its annual meeting in June 2024.
- The Common Ground governing board and its Finance and Audit Committee does not formally document in a Board Policies and Procedures Manual (BPPM) specific roles and responsibilities for oversight of school operations, including financial management and management team. The BPPM must document processes such as budget development/approval, budget monitoring, and overall financial monitoring. By doing so, Common Ground will ensure consistent practice and timely completion of critical Board monitoring functions. The school anticipates updating and amending its BPPM to address these issues and will be submitting it to the governing board for approval at its annual meeting in June 2024.

- A review of Common Ground's financial viability by the CSDE staff using the school's latest certified financial audit raised concerns. The CSDE recommends that Common Ground's administration and governing board be mindful of its revenue and expenditure projections when developing/approving future budgets, especially with federal COVID relief grants being phased-out. The governing board must monitor the approved budget throughout the year to ensure that the school remains on-track and is making budget adjustments as necessary. The board should investigate opportunities for increasing revenue. The governing board and Finance Committee must develop a periodic review process to monitor the overall financial health of the school.
- Some students interviewed during the site visit shared that they did not feel that school administrators were responsive to their needs. Two students spoke out against the renewal of the school's charter and were critical of the administration's attention to student needs and teacher turnover at the school.

## **Conclusion**

Common Ground provides a public-school choice option focused on environmental and social justice learning. The school also serves a sizable and growing population of students with special needs. A review of the school's suspension rate over the three reporting periods show it above the host district and state in 2019-20, decreasing 3.1 percentage points during the midst of the pandemic in 2021-22, below the host district and the state, then increased slightly in 2022-23, to 7.0 percent, below the host district and equal to the state average. Common Ground's Tier 1 Discipline designation in 2022-23, is representative of a school with a low suspension rate and low disproportionality.

The school's chronic absenteeism revealed that while it increased significantly during the midst of the pandemic in 2021-22 to well above the state average, in 2022-23, it achieved a significant decrease to a rate above, but on par with, the state average. To meet student needs, school administration and staff have developed systems and support to identify and assist students and families with attendance issues. It is important that the school continues to refine and develop systems and resources to identify and address barriers that negatively affect student attendance.

A review of the school's most recently reported Four-Year Adjusted Cohort Graduation Rate was above the host district and slightly below the state average. In addition, the school's most recently reported Six-Year Adjusted Cohort Graduation Rate surpassed the host district and state.

On March 4, 2020, Common Ground received a three-year charter renewal with the condition that the school develop a corrective action plan that includes measures to improve student academic achievement. A review of the school's student achievement performance indicators in ELA and Mathematics – All Students and High Need Students show that since its last renewal in the spring of 2020, the school continues to be challenged with the development and provision of an educational model that results in improved academic achievement of the students it serves. While Common Ground's Mathematics Performance Index – All Students increased slightly between 2021-22 and 2022-23, the school's ELA Performance Index – All Students and High Needs Students and Mathematics Performance Index - High Needs Students decreased between the same time period and remain below the host district and the state over the three years reported.

A review of Common Ground's financial viability by the CSDE staff using the school's latest certified financial audit raised concerns. It is recommended that the school's administration and governing board analyze and monitor the school's financial position and take the appropriate steps to ensure the financial viability of the school is improved and maintained. The school is out of compliance with teacher certification having 3 staff members with no active certificate/permit on file.

### **Charter Renewal Recommendation**

Acknowledging that Common Ground’s academic performance indicators are not without weakness, and Common Ground is also out of compliance with teacher certification, the CSDE recommends that the SBE renew the school’s charter for a period of three years, subject to the following conditions:

1. By April 8, 2024, Common Ground shall submit a revised corrective action plan to improve student academic achievement acceptable to the Commissioner of Education. Common Ground shall engage in a root cause analysis utilizing the CSDE [Needs Assessment Toolkit \(ct.gov\)](#). The corrective action plan must include revisions to the identified strategies and action steps in the 2020 corrective action plan to improve student academic achievement. Additionally, Common Ground must utilize the CSDE Acceleration Cycle as a framework for developing and implementing an improvement plan to address learning acceleration, learning recovery, and student enrichment because of the pandemic. The school must convene a team to develop and monitor the implementation of the revised plan that intentionally addresses unfinished learning while focusing on the teaching of prioritized, essential content, and maintaining a high level of rigor for all learners. Common Ground shall submit to the CSDE, on a bi-monthly basis beginning October 2024, a report monitoring its year-to-date progress of improving student academic achievement. The plan shall be developed in consultation with the CSDE Turnaround Office. Common Ground shall implement the corrective actions within thirty days following the Commissioner of Education’s acceptance of the plan.
2. By April 8, 2024, Common Ground shall submit a corrective action plan for the CSDE review and approval to bring its staff into certification compliance by October 31, 2024, by: (a) ensuring staff responsible for hiring clearly understand the certification requirements of each position; (b) providing a clear pathway and support to certification with established milestones and timelines; (c) including monitoring and interventions for non-compliance; and (d) reporting of non-compliant staff including certification targets, schedules, and action steps, including responsible school staff, on August 1, 2024, to ensure compliance. The plan shall be developed in consultation with the CSDE Talent Office. Common Ground shall implement the corrective actions within thirty days following the Commissioner of Education’s acceptance of the plan.
3. In October of 2024, Common Ground administrative staff will meet with the Accountability and Support Committee of the SBE and provide a status update of its corrective action plan to address student achievement and teacher certification. At that time the Accountability and Support Committee members and department staff will analyze the performance data and teacher certification data to determine if the prioritized strategies in the corrective action plans are making a positive impact on student outcomes, teacher practice and that all staff providing instruction are properly certified. Dependent upon the status of the issues discussed, Common Ground administrative staff may be called back to meet with the Accountability and Support Committee to provide a second update in the spring of 2025, and bring forth an analysis of performance data and other metrics specific to each corrective action plan.

Common Ground must adequately address student achievement and teacher certification through corrective actions, pursuant to Section 10-66bb(h) of the C.G.S., and the Commissioner of Education may, at any time, place a charter school on probation if the school has failed to demonstrate student progress or comply with applicable laws and regulations.

The CSDE will notify Common Ground of action taken by the SBE following its meeting on March 6, 2024. The school will be advised of relevant technical assistance opportunities designed to improve its educational program. The CSDE will conduct follow-up visits to ensure Common Ground is addressing the issues raised in this memorandum.

Prepared by: Robert E. Kelly, Charter School Program Manager  
Turnaround Office

Reviewed by: Irene E. Parisi, M.Ed.  
Chief Academic Officer

Approved by: Charles E. Hewes, Ed.D.  
Deputy Commissioner for Academics & Innovation



## CHARTER RENEWAL REPORT | 2022-23

Charter School Information		
Charter School Name:	Common Ground High School	
School Director/ Principal:	Cherry Pacquette-Emmanuel	
School Board Chairperson:	Alexis Smith	
Location (City/Town):	New Haven	
Rating Key		
<b>Meets</b>	The school demonstrates effective policies and practices, resulting in positive outcomes.	
<b>Pending Action</b>	The school requires minor modifications to its policies and/or practices. The school is taking satisfactory measures to remedy and address these issues in a timely manner.	
<b>Does Not Meet</b>	The school falls below performance expectations with significant concerns noted, which require immediate attention and intervention.	
Standard 1: School Performance Indicators	Points/Max	% Points Earned
Accountability Index:	851.7/1450	58.7
Notes and Evidence:		
<p>Common Ground High School (Common Ground)'s 2022-23 Accountability Index of 58.7 percent is 10.6 percentage points below the state's Accountability Index of 69.3 percent. Schools that meet <b>Standard 1:</b> are schools earning an accountability index score from 85 to 100 (<b>Category 1</b>), schools earning an accountability index score from 70 to 84.9 percent (<b>Category 2</b>), and schools earning an accountability index score of 69.9 percent or lower and have not been identified as a Turnaround or Focus School (<b>Category 3</b>). Common Ground's Accountability Index score of 58.7 percent places its performance in Category 3, <b>which earns a does not meet for Standard 1.</b> Common Ground's 2022-23 Next Generation Accountability Report is shown in detail on the next page.</p>		

# Next Generation Accountability, 2022-23 – Common Ground High School (Grades: 9-12)

School Category: 4

Indicator	Index/Rate	Target	Points Earned	Max Points	% Points Earned	State % Points Earned
1a. ELA Performance Index - All Students	40.5	75	81.0	150	54.0	85.2
1b. ELA Performance Index - High Needs Students	35.8	75	71.6	150	47.7	72.1
1c. Math Performance Index - All Students	37.6	75	75.1	150	50.1	79.6
1d. Math Performance Index - High Needs Students	34.9	75	69.9	150	46.6	65.2
1e. Science Performance Index - All Students	39.3	75	52.4	100	52.4	82.1
1f. Science Performance Index - High Needs Students	35.4	75	47.2	100	47.2	68.2
2a. ELA Academic Growth - All Students	.	100%	.	.	.	57.2
2b. ELA Academic Growth - High Needs Students	.	100%	.	.	.	52.5
2c. Math Academic Growth - All Students	.	100%	.	.	.	61.8
2d. Math Academic Growth - High Needs Students	.	100%	.	.	.	55.5
2e. Progress Toward English Proficiency - Literacy	.	100%	.	.	.	55.3
2f. Progress Toward English Proficiency - Oral	.	100%	.	.	.	56.1
4a. Chronic Absenteeism - All Students	24.3%	<=5%	11.5	50	23.0	39.8
4b. Chronic Absenteeism - High Needs Students	26.3%	<=5%	7.5	50	15.0	6.0
5. Preparation for CCR - Percent Taking Courses	98.9%	75%	50.0	50	100.0	100.0
6. Preparation for CCR - Percent Passing Exams	38.0%	75%	25.4	50	50.7	59.0
7. On-track to High School Graduation	86.2%	94%	45.9	50	91.7	87.7
8. 4-year Graduation: All Students (2022 Cohort)	88.2%	94%	93.9	100	93.9	94.6
9. 6-year Graduation: High Needs Students (2020 Cohort)	94.1%	94%	100.0	100	100.0	91.1
10. Postsecondary Entrance (Graduating Class 2022)	51.0%	75%	68.0	100	68.0	88.2
11. Physical Fitness (estimated participation rate = 100.0%)	3.6%	75%	2.4	50	4.8	60.6
12. Arts Access	72.8%	60%	50.0	50	100.0	90.9
<b>Accountability Index</b>	.	.	851.7	1450	58.7	69.3

## Gap Indicators

Indicator	Non-High Needs Rate	High Needs Rate	Size of Gap	State Gap Mean +1 Standard Deviation	Is Gap an Outlier?
ELA Performance Index Gap	.	35.8	.	16.6	
Math Performance Index Gap	.	34.9	.	18.0	
Science Performance Index Gap	.	35.4	.	17.8	
Graduation Rate Gap (2020 Cohort)	.	94.1	.	8.7	

If the Non-High Needs Rate exceeds the ultimate target (75 for Performance Index and 94% for Graduation Rate), the ultimate target is used for gap calculations. If the size of the gap exceeds the state mean gap plus one standard deviation, the gap is an outlier.

## Assessment Participation Rates

Indicator	Participation Rate (%)
<i>ELA - All Students</i>	91.7
<i>ELA - High Needs Students</i>	92.1
<i>Math - All Students</i>	91.7
<i>Math - High Needs Students</i>	92.1
<i>Science - All Students</i>	81.3
<i>Science - High Needs Students</i>	78.9

Minimum participation standard is 95%.

Standard 2: Stewardship, Governance, and Management Indicators:	Rating
2.1. Fiscal Management	<input type="checkbox"/> M <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> PA <input type="checkbox"/> DNM
2.2. Financial Reporting and Compliance	<input type="checkbox"/> M <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> PA <input type="checkbox"/> DNM
2.3. Financial Viability	<input type="checkbox"/> M <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> PA <input type="checkbox"/> DNM
2.4. Governance and Management	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> M <input type="checkbox"/> PA <input type="checkbox"/> DNM
2.5. School Facility	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> M <input type="checkbox"/> PA <input type="checkbox"/> DNM
<b>Notes and Evidence:</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li> <p><b>Indicator 2.1:</b> Common Ground’s latest 2022-23 certified financial audit found three internal control weaknesses that the school is addressing through planned corrective actions. The three internal control weaknesses are in the areas of payroll, cash reconciliation, and accounts payable. The school’s administration agrees with the auditors’ findings and recommended procedures have been implemented to correct the internal control issues going forward. The CSDE will await the results of the 2023-24 certified financial audit due December 31, 2024, to determine if the internal control weaknesses have been corrected.</p> </li> <li> <p><b>Indicator 2.2:</b> The CSDE site visit staff reviewed Common Ground’s last three certified financial audits, Accounting Policies and Procedures Manual (APPM), Board Policies and Procedures Manual (BPPM), budgets, and interviewed the school’s staff, interim executive director, principals, director of operations, and governing board members. Staff from the CSDE’s Office of Internal Audit determined the APPM contained the standard sections of an APPM. However, the APPM does not include policies and procedures for establishing and maintaining assets purchased with federal funds. The school anticipates updating and amending its APPM to address these issues and will be submitting it to the governing board for approval at its annual meeting in June 2024. The Common Ground governing board and its Finance and Audit Committee have specific roles and responsibilities for oversight of school operations, including financial management and management team. However, the roles and responsibilities are not formally documented in a BPPM to ensure consistency and continuity. The BPPM must document processes such as budget development/approval, budget monitoring, and overall financial monitoring. This will ensure consistent practice and timely completion of critical Board monitoring functions. The school anticipates updating and amending its BPPM to address these issues and will be submitting it to the governing board for approval at its annual meeting in June 2024. A review of the school’s Staff Handbook determined it had not been reviewed, updated, and approved by the governing board since 2020. The school and its governing board understand their responsibility to update, and approve all school policy manuals annually, including the Staff and Student Handbooks, APPM, and BPPM. The reviewers determined that Common Ground completed on-time submission of certified audits and annual budgets.</p> </li> <li> <p><b>Indicator 2.3:</b> Staff from the CSDE’s Office of Internal Audit reviewed Common Ground’s latest certified financial audit and determined its debt-to-asset ratio (total liabilities/total assets) meets or exceeds the ranges recommended by the National Association of Charter School Authorizers (NACSA). However, the Office of Internal Audit expressed concerns about other ratios used to determine overall financial viability of the school including, current asset ratio (current assets/current liabilities), days of unrestricted cash (unrestricted cash/ ((total expenditures – depreciation)/365)), and cash flow. It is recommended that the school’s administration and governing board analyze and monitor the school’s financial position and take the appropriate steps to ensure the financial viability of the school is improved and maintained. The CSDE recommends that Common Ground’s administration and governing board be mindful of its revenue and</p> </li> </ul>	

expenditure projections when developing/approving future budgets, especially with federal COVID relief grants being phased out. The governing board must monitor the approved budget throughout the year to ensure that the school remains on track and is making budget adjustments as necessary. Increasing revenues will help and should be investigated. The governing board and Finance Committee must develop a periodic review process to monitor the overall financial health of the school. The use of the ratios that the CSDE considers when evaluating school financial viability may prove helpful in this work.

- **Indicator 2.4:** A review of Common Ground’s school policies regarding conflict of interest and nepotism were found to comply with the CSDE administrative oversight guidelines. Common Ground’s policies and procedures regarding background checks of staff and board members, open governing board meetings, board membership, and membership training were reviewed and found to comply with state and federal laws, rules, and regulations. A review of Common Ground’s bylaws found them to comply with state and federal laws, rules, and regulations.
- **Indicator 2.5:** As evidenced during the site visit, Common Ground has safe and well-maintained school facilities to support teaching and learning. The facilities have been approved by the appropriate Fire Marshal and Building Departments. The school has proof of property insurance.

Standard 3: Student Population Indicators	Rating
3.1. Recruitment and Enrollment Process	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> M <input type="checkbox"/> PA <input type="checkbox"/> DNM
3.2. Waitlist and Enrollment Data	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> M <input type="checkbox"/> PA <input type="checkbox"/> DNM
3.3. Demographic Representation	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> M <input type="checkbox"/> PA <input type="checkbox"/> DNM
3.4. Family and Community Support	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> M <input type="checkbox"/> PA <input type="checkbox"/> DNM
3.5. School Culture and Climate	<input type="checkbox"/> M <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> PA <input type="checkbox"/> DNM
<b>Notes and Evidence:</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● <b>Indicator 3.1:</b> The latest CSDE audited student enrollment data from 2022-23 reports 226 students in Grades 9-12 with 74.3 percent residing in New Haven (the host district) and 25.7 percent residing in 19 area towns. A review of the school’s student enrollment policy and interviews with school staff, board members, and parents determined all students are admitted through a blind lottery.</li> <li>● <b>Indicator 3.2:</b> A review of Common Ground’s waiting list information (Table 5, page 17) determined that the school maintains a waiting list of families beyond the available number of seats. The waiting list has included more than 261 students each year for the past three years.</li> <li>● <b>Indicator 3.3:</b> A review of Common Ground’s latest CSDE audited Public School Information System (PSIS) data from 2022-23 reported 69.0 percent of students qualify for free or reduced-price meals. The percentage of special education students is 28.8 percent. Common Ground’s English Learners/Multilingual Learners (ELs/MLs) population is 5.8 percent.</li> <li>● <b>Indicator 3.4:</b> Common Ground demonstrates strong community support, as evidenced by parent interviews conducted by the CSDE renewal team on the day of the site visit. The parent focus group described various communication methods between the school and families, including texts, phone calls, emails, and written communication including translations in second languages, when necessary. Currently, parents report receiving regular updates from the school that detail student academics and behavior. Parents expressed support for what they perceive is a good educational model that prepares their children for high school and beyond. Parents indicated they were satisfied with the school’s commitment to serving students with diverse needs while providing a safe and nurturing environment. Thirty-one individuals offered testimony supporting the school’s efforts and the renewal of the charter. Two students spoke out against the renewal of the school’s charter and were critical of the administration’s attention to student needs and teacher turnover at the school.</li> <li>● <b>Indicator 3.5:</b> Common Ground’s suspension rate of 7.4 percent in 2019-20 decreased 3.1 percentage points during the midst of the pandemic to 4.3 percent in 2021-22, below the host district and the state; and increased 2.7 percentage points to 7.0 percent in 2022-23, below the host district and equal to the state.</li> </ul> <p>A review of Common Ground’s chronic absenteeism rate of 20.5 percent in 2019-20, show they were 0.6 percentage points below the host district and 8.3 percentage points above the state. In 2021-22, during the midst of the pandemic, the school’s chronic absenteeism rate experienced an increase of 33.1 percentage points to 53.6 percent, 4.5 percentage points below the host district of 58.1 percent and 29.9 percentage points above the state average of 23.7 percent. In 2022-23, the school achieved a 29.3 percentage point reduction to 24.3 percent, 12.3 percentage points below the host district average of 36.6 percent and 4.3 percentage points above the state average of 20.0 percent. It is important for the school to continue in its efforts to identify and address barriers that negatively affect student attendance.</p> <p>Common Ground’s 2022-23 Discipline Tier based on Suspension/Expulsion Data was Tier 1, which is below the host district and below the state. Tier 1 designates a school with a low suspension rate and low disproportionality.</p>	

Standard 4: Legal Compliance Indicators	Rating
4.1. Open Meetings/Information Management	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> M <input type="checkbox"/> PA <input type="checkbox"/> DNM
4.2. Students with Disabilities	<input type="checkbox"/> M <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> PA <input type="checkbox"/> DNM
4.3. English Learners	<input type="checkbox"/> M <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> PA <input type="checkbox"/> DNM
4.4. Rights of Students	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> M <input type="checkbox"/> PA <input type="checkbox"/> DNM
4.5. Teacher/Staff Credentials, TEAM and EESP	<input type="checkbox"/> M <input type="checkbox"/> PA <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> DNM
4.6. Employee Rights	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> M <input type="checkbox"/> PA <input type="checkbox"/> DNM
<b>Notes and Evidence:</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li> <p><b>Indicator 4.1:</b> The school’s website and governing board documents demonstrated that the governing board meetings are open and accessible to the public. The governing board’s meeting schedule for the year and meeting agendas are posted on the school’s website. Education records and testing data are kept in locked file cabinets in a secure room.</p> </li> <li> <p><b>Indicator 4.2:</b> A review of Common Ground’s latest audited 2022-23 Public School Information System (PSIS) data reported the percentage of special education students at the school was 28.8 percent. At the time of the site visit there were 67 students with Individualized Educational Plans (IEPs) attending Common Ground. The majority of the 67 students reside in New Haven. The remaining students reside in four additional sending school districts. To meet the needs of identified students, the school employs three social workers and four special education teachers. The school also has a paraeducator, provided by the district of residence, who provides support services per the student’s IEP. Speech and language services, school-based counseling, and occupational and physical therapies are provided by the sending districts to deliver related services in accordance with student IEPs. The sending districts also provide services as necessary by their school psychologist. Related service providers sign in and out at the main office. Service logs were not being kept. The school must implement a related services tracking log to be completed by the related services providers. This will ensure the school tracks services and monitors the need for any missed/make-up sessions. The school will need to provide evidence of their tracking system to satisfy this requirement.</p> <p>Students are provided special education services through co-taught classes as well as resource support. Lesson plans are shared and include a section for differentiated instruction to be provided by the general education and special education teacher as well as support staff or paraprofessionals that may be in a classroom. Instruction within the resource room is specific and targeted to the students’ IEP goals and objectives. If a student scores below 200 on NWEA MAP, they receive reading intervention support. NWEA MAP data is also used to provide bands and guide small group instruction and differentiation in the classroom.</p> <p>Planning for co-taught classrooms includes differentiation, modifications, and modified assessments. The special education teachers regularly collaborate with the general education teachers in scheduled common planning times and other times when available.</p> <p>General education and special education teachers provide reading instruction to students. Specialized instruction in reading is provided by the special education teachers. The 11<sup>th</sup> grade seminar class is a co-taught ELA class. The 12<sup>th</sup> grade capstone is also co-taught with a special education teacher.</p> </li> </ul>	

The IEPs were neatly organized, kept in locking file cabinets in a secure office, and contained completed sign out sheets. Special education staff meet with general education teachers to review IEPs. General education and special education teachers collaborate regularly at grade level and core meetings. There are master sheets for each grade level that provide classroom teachers with the necessary information for their students with special education and related services.

Planning and Placement Team meetings (PPTs) are scheduled by the sending district/LEA who also created the PPT invitation. Common Ground uses the CT-SEDS system. Special education teachers and related service providers input student information directly into the system in collaboration with the LEA. The sending district finalizes the IEP. The Common Ground staff that attend the PPT meetings include the general education teacher, the special education teacher, school social worker, administrator if needed, and related service providers as applicable. An administrative representative from the LEA also attends the PPT.

The school is aware of their Child Find responsibilities. Their student support services team (Triple ST) meets regularly to review and plan for regular education students that are struggling academically or behaviorally. The team reviews previous interventions and strategies, student background, attendance, grades, and parent communication. They identify a focus area, brainstorm with support team members, set goals, and collect data. Each plan has a clear indicator of success. The team reconvenes every four weeks. If a student continues to struggle, the team considers the need for a 504 plan or a referral to special education through the sending district.

- **Indicator 4.3:** A review of Common Ground's latest audited 2022-23 PSIS data reports indicated that the percentage of students identified as English Learners/Multilingual Learners (ELs/MLs) at the school is 5.8 percent. The school is not required to provide a bilingual program as it does not enroll 20 or more ELs/MLs with the same non-English native language. It appears that Common Ground is committed to ensuring the success of ELs/MLs. The school is commended for providing the EL/ML forms, procedures, and assessment information in its Charter Renewal Application materials and for contracting a professional development consultant to provide ongoing training on serving ELs/MLs. The school is required to make some policy changes which have been conveyed to the school. The school has revised its EL/ML policies per the CSDE's recommendations. The school must submit its revised policies to the governing board for approval.
- **Indicator 4.4:** Common Ground student rights policies and procedures include admissions, handling of student information, due process protections, and state nondiscrimination laws. Interviews with parents and staff at the school supported the proper implementation and use of the policies.
- **Indicator 4.5:** A review of Common Ground's staff file of February 26, 2024, reported 90.6 percent of staff are in compliance with certification. It is the responsibility of the school to take steps to ensure that 100 percent of the staff hold appropriate certificates, permits, or authorizations for their positions. Of the 32 staff members requiring certification, 29.0 staff members, or 90.6 percent hold a valid certificate or other temporary certificate, permit, or authorization. The school met the statutory requirement of having at least 50 percent of its staff with a Full Certificate. However, 3 staff members, or 9.4 percent, are not properly certified having no active certificate/permit on file.

Common Ground is in compliance with the Teacher Education and Mentoring (TEAM) Program and Educator Evaluation and Support Plan (EESP).

- **Indicator 4.6:** A review of legal actions brought against Common Ground determined that no government agency alleged the violation of any law by the school or has undertaken any investigation of any violation of law by the school.

<b>Prepared by:</b>	<b>Reviewed by:</b>
Robert E. Kelly Charter School Program Manager	Irene E. Parisi Chief Academic Officer



**COMMON GROUND HIGH SCHOOL DATA TABLES**

Grades served:	9-12
Total enrollment:	226
Percentage of students eligible for free or reduced-price meals:	69.0
Percentage of students with disabilities:	28.8
Percentage of students identified as English Learners:	5.8
Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander	*
Percentage of Asian students:	*
Percentage of Black or African American students:	30.3
Percentage of Hispanic or Latino students:	46.4
Percentage of Two or More Races:	2.7
Percentage of White students:	20.5

Indicator	2018-19			2021-22			2022-23		
	School	Host District	State	School	Host District	State	School	Host District	State
<b>Accountability Index</b>	65.2	64.7	74.2	58.6	60.9	69.7	58.7	57.6	69.3
<b>ELA-All Students</b>									
<b>Performance Index (Target 75)</b>	43.4	57.8	67.7	42.9	51.3	64.2	40.5	50.8	63.9
<b>Math-All Students</b>									
<b>Performance Index (Target 75)</b>	38.3	50.6	63.1	37.1	42.0	58.6	37.6	43.0	59.7
<b>Graduation – All Students</b>									
<b>Four-Year Adjusted Cohort Graduation Rate (Target 94%)</b>	91.5	80.9	88.5	88.2	75.8	88.9	N/A	N/A	N/A

\*N<=5. Data suppressed to ensure student data privacy.

In 2019-20, Connecticut received a waiver from the U.S. Department of Education (USDOE) to be exempt from administering state academic assessments and holding schools and districts accountable using the Next Generation Accountability System.

In 2020-21, Connecticut secured a waiver from the USDOE to be exempted from implementing the Next Generation Accountability System for schools and districts; and while districts made their best effort to assess as many students as possible, there was not a requirement to test at least 95 percent of students as in past years. Additionally, school learning models changed throughout the school year and students were remote to varying degrees due to factors beyond educator control. Also, some students tested remotely, which was a new construct. As such, 2020-21 testing data is not being used as part of this analysis.

Table 3: School Performance-High Needs Students									
	2018-19			2021-22			2022-23		
Indicator	School	Host District	State	School	Host District	State	School	Host District	State
<b>ELA-High Needs Students</b>									
Performance Index (Target 75)	41.1	54.9	58.1	41.8	48.2	54.2	35.8	47.8	54.1
<b>Math-High Needs Students</b>									
Performance Index (Target 75)	37.4	47.8	52.7	35.7	39.0	47.7	34.9	40.0	48.9
<b>Graduation High Needs Students</b>									
Six-Year Adjusted Cohort Graduation Rate (Target 94%)	90.9	83.6	85.2	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A

In 2019-20, Connecticut received a waiver from the U.S. Department of Education (USDOE) to be exempt from administering state academic assessments and holding schools and districts accountable using the Next Generation Accountability System.

In 2020-21, Connecticut secured a waiver from the USDOE to be exempted from implementing the Next Generation Accountability System for schools and districts; and while districts made their best effort to assess as many students as possible, there was not a requirement to test at least 95 percent of students as in past years. Additionally, school learning models changed throughout the school year and students were remote to varying degrees due to factors beyond educator control. Also, some students tested remotely, which was a new construct. As such, 2020-21 testing data is not being used as part of this analysis.

Table 4: School Culture and Climate									
	2019-2020 <sup>1</sup>			2021-2022			2022-2023		
Indicator	School	Host District	State	School	Host District	State	School	Host District	State
Chronic Absenteeism Rate (%)	20.5	21.1	12.2	53.6	58.1	23.7	24.3	36.6	20.0
Suspension Rate (%)	7.4	4.6	4.9	4.3	6.1	6.5	7.0	7.7	7.0
Discipline Tier	2	2	3	1	1	1	1	2	3

Table 5: Common Ground Student Wait List and Mobility Information			
Performance Metric:	2021-2022	2022-2023	2023-2024
Waiting number:	286	322	262
Number of enrolled students who left during the school year:	26	29	N/A
Number of students who did not re-enroll the next year and had not completed the highest grade at the school:	11	10	N/A

<sup>1</sup> In the 2019-20 school year, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, in-person classes were cancelled in mid-March; all districts switched to fully remote instruction for the remainder of the school year.



# WOODBIDGE SCHOOL DISTRICT

40 Beecher Road – South  
Woodbridge, Connecticut 06525

Vonda J. Tencza – Superintendent

[vtencza@woodbridgeps.org](mailto:vtencza@woodbridgeps.org)

November 15, 2023

Mr. Robert Kelly  
Charter School Program Manager  
Connecticut State Department of Education  
P.O. Box 2219  
Hartford, CT 06106

Dear Mr. Kelly:

I am responding to the request soliciting comments on the charter application of the Common Ground High School. I know of no reason nor can I provide any comments, which reflect poorly on the Common Ground High School. If I can be of further assistance, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Sincerely,

Vonda J. Tencza  
Superintendent