



COMMON GROUND
HIGH · SCHOOL



2013-14 Annual Report

Common Ground High School

Lizanne Cox, Director

358 Springside Avenue

New Haven, Connecticut 06515

(203) 389-4333

cghs@commongroundct.org

Mission Statement

Mission:

Common Ground High School will graduate students with the knowledge, skills, and understanding to live healthy, powerful, and productive lives. We do so through authentic learning that develops academic excellence, ecological literacy, strong character, and commitment to community.

Common Ground High School takes the urban environment as its organizing focus. Common Ground uses three sites as laboratories for learning: the urban farm that is the school's campus, the natural environment of the adjacent West Rock Ridge State Park, and the urban setting of New Haven, Connecticut. Close study of these places develops understanding of local and global issues. Through this study and core academic work, students experience a rigorous high school curriculum that prepares them for competitive colleges, meaningful careers, and purposeful lives.

Common Ground High School is a program of the New Haven Ecology Project, a non-profit center for environmental learning and leadership, whose mission is *to cultivate habits of healthy living and sustainable environmental practices within a diverse community of children, young people, adults, and families.*





Contents

Letter from the Director of the School and
Governing Board Chairperson 4

About Our School..... 6

Curriculum Design and Instructional
Method and Modification 10

School Goals..... 12

Efforts to Attract, Enroll, and Retain Students from Among
High Need Populations 27

Financial Information 29

Best Practices 34

Status of Charter Renewal Findings and Follow-Up
Activities 37

Governance..... 38

Summary of Other Key Accomplishments 39

Attachments..... 43

of one of our seniors to gun violence. This is the first time one of our current students has died, and is the most challenging thing our small community has ever faced.

Javier Martinez was, in many ways, a model for what Common Ground hopes for our students. Javier had entered high school a curious but distracted student – and, over the course of four years, developed a commitment to learning that was earning him daily emails from competitive 4-year colleges. He wrote powerfully about Oedipus Rex in Western Literature this fall, and brought his papers home to show his parents. The student who sat next to him in physics says he was always struck by the mathematical insights and problem-solving strategies that came out of Javi’s mouth. Javi was going somewhere.

Javi was also a really decent young man, and a strong member of our Common Ground family. His kindness, and his constant smile, are what his friends and teachers remember most about him. He checked in with his friends to make sure they were on track in their classes – telling one classmate he would teach her how to drive, but only if she earned honors. During lunch, he would make the rounds of every lunch table, checking in to make sure everyone was o.k.

Javier was growing into a powerful environmental leader, as well. He displayed his certificate from a Water Careers Boot Camp on his wall at home. He spent last summer interning with The Nature Conservancy on Block Island. Brigitte Griswold, who has led this national, competitive internship program for more than a decade, said it simply: “Javier was one of our best and brightest.” Last fall, he was out every week monitoring water quality on the West River. Two weeks after his death, the Yale Forestry School staff who worked with Javi during a year-long urban forestry internship showed up with postcards, listing the address of every tree that Javi planted last year, and sharing a quote from the recommendation that they wrote on his behalf:

“We were impressed by his passion for learning and his deep sense of commitment and responsibility to his family and to serving the community where he lives ... Javi has tremendous potential as a leader and a teacher. He is patient, conscientious, and attentive to the needs of others and to the needs of the team as a whole.”

Over the nine months since Javi’s death, we have learned a lot. We have learned how to take care of one another, and Javier’s family, in the face of our shared loss. We have learned the capacity of our students to look out for one another, and watched them “do school” with an intensity and commitment unlike anything we’ve seen before. As difficult as it has been, we have been incredibly proud to see our community’s capacity to stand together in the face of something so wrenching.

We also have realized what a strong community of support we have, beyond our staff and students. Our new mayor showed up and spent an hour with our students on the day after her inauguration. Every one of The Nature Conservancy’s 6,000 world-wide staff learned Javi’s story, as did everyone listening to Richard Blumenthal as he spoke about Javi on the floor of the Senate and on CSPAN. As you know, the State Department of Education and New Haven Public Schools offered to do everything and anything they could to support us – and followed through on that commitment with social workers, buses, the presence of their leaders, and more. We are incredibly grateful for this support.

As the healing process continued, we have been called to take action, as individuals and as a community. Our seniors’ capstone projects addressed the challenge of neighborhood violence

head on – organizing family-style dinners among students from different neighborhoods, planting trees and community gardens as resources for community peace and resilience, producing remarkable videos about their work. Hundreds of students, staff, family members, and community volunteers helped us to create a new educational wetland on our campus, a lasting memorial for Javi and a peaceful oasis on our campus.

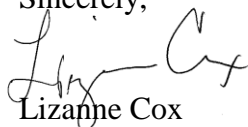
This work is not done. We can no longer stand apart from the movement to address violence in our city, nor can we pretend that our commitment to school reform and environmental leadership is separate from the violence that our students and their families face.

Common Ground is a different place than it was a year ago. At the same time, the things that are at the core of Common Ground’s culture – our relentless commitment to do right by our students, our small and tight community, our belief in our students’ capacity to learn and lead, our roots in the larger community – are what has allowed us to weather this storm. We will continue to hold tight to those things, as we continue to work to help every one of our students live a powerful, productive, healthy, long life.

We enter the 2014 school year a stronger community, looking forward to a full year ahead. Our board, staff, students, and communities are revisiting the values and vision that guide our work. We are pushing to finish our new school building, to give our students the learning environment they deserve as quickly as possible. We have ramped up our work to build an equitable, inclusive community, and to address the achievement gap head on. And we look forward to demonstrating to the State Department of Education that our school deserves a full 5-year renewal of our charter, so that we can continue to push our students to become powerful leaders and successful college students.

Thank you for making our work possible, and for holding our school to the highest standards.

Sincerely,


Lizanne Cox
Director


W. Frank Mitchell
Chair



- Counselors are contacted by phone and in person to explain the school’s mission and program. They are also invited to an informational session about the school in the fall.
- We mail brochures and follow-up postcards directly to eighth graders in Branford, East Haven, Hamden, New Haven, North Haven, and West Haven, and other out of district schools, and post brochures and information about the school at area libraries, community centers, and youth service organizations.
- We staff a booth in the annual New Haven Magnet School Fair, and publicize the lottery and open house dates through local newspapers, our website, and electronic and actual bulletin boards. We also present at a recruiting open house sponsored by parochial schools in the area. In 2013, for the first time, Common Ground participated in a fair organized by New Haven Public Schools for all 8th graders at SCSU. We also present at a recruiting open house sponsored by parochial schools in the area.
- The school conducts open houses after school and on Saturdays between November and February.
- Students are encouraged to acquaint themselves with the school either individually (scheduled on any day convenient for families), or as part of a day-long group shadow offering (held each fall for 8th graders, and each spring for 7th graders).

TRANSPORTATION

Students who reside in New Haven are given bus passes provided by the New Haven Public Schools’ Department of Transportation, which allow them ten rides each week on CT Transit buses. There is no provision for transportation for students residing outside of New Haven, although Common Ground helps to facilitate carpools for non-New Haven students.

Student Information

2013-2014 School Year

For the 2013-14 school year, Common Ground received applications from 150 prospective students to fill 67 open seats. This total includes all suburban applicants, as well as all New Haven residents who submitted a preliminary application directly to Common Ground. It also reflects the number of students admitted through the New Haven magnet school lottery. The chart below shows the breakdown of applications by grade:

	Total number of applications received by grade for the 2013-14 school year lottery	Total number of applicants who received seats through the 2013-14 lottery	Number of students on waiting list after the 2013-14 lottery
9th	138	63	75
10th	7	2	5
11th	6	2	3
12th	0	0	0
Total	150	67	83

2014-2015 School Year

The number of applications for 2014-15 increased to 222, while the number of open seats decreased to 51. Application counts reflect number of applications received directly by Common Ground (including all suburban applications and some New Haven applications), as well as the number of students admitted through the New Haven Magnet School lottery. Complete application numbers for 2014-15 have not yet been provided by New Haven Public Schools. Wait list numbers reflect the difference between the number of applications and the number of admitted students; the exact number of students on the NHPS waiting list is difficult to determine, given the data provided by New Haven Public Schools.

	Total number of applications received by grade for the 2014-15 school year lottery	Total number of applications received by grade for the 2014-15 school year lottery	Number of students on waiting list after 2014-15 lottery
9th	190	44	146
10th	14	5	9
11th	11	1	10
12th	7	1	6
Total	222	51	171





Curriculum Design and Instructional Method and Modification

Brief Summary

Common Ground’s curriculum is designed to foster authentic learning – learning that is real, relevant, and meaningful for students – in an intensive, college-prep environment. Authentic learning at Common Ground is achieved through a mix of semester-long, 60-minute courses and interdisciplinary block classes. Interdisciplinary courses meet for two hours each day and are team-taught. Our inquiry-based, experiential curriculum encourages students to become mentally and physically active as they engage in real tasks that help them to understand fundamental concepts, reason carefully, draw connections, and pose new questions. Across courses, the local environment – natural and built, cultural and physical – is a laboratory for student learning. Common Ground’s urban farm, West Rock Ridge State Park, and the greater New Haven community all act as essential learning laboratories for Common Ground students.

Throughout the curriculum, our focus is on helping students master the core academic competencies that will prepare them for success in college, civic life, and employment. In classrooms, students take on long-term projects and challenging tasks that are aligned both with the immediate requirements of state mastery testing and the demands of competitive colleges. Common Ground’s guidance program emphasizes college readiness beginning in the freshmen year. Many juniors and seniors take Advanced Placement and dual enrollment college courses to advance in specific subjects and to prepare for higher education, and we consistently connect students with out-of-school learning opportunities that further stretch their capacity to learn. Our guidance curriculum affords all students comprehensive college and career exploration opportunities, as well, and all juniors explore careers through off-site job shadows. Seniors complete capstone service learning senior projects through a required Senior Seminar.

Common Ground has continued to push forward with work to align our curriculum, teaching strategies, student assessment, and teacher evaluation systems with a clear goal: that every student master challenging Common Core standards, building the academic capacities that will prepare them for college success. We continue to develop clear skill progressions that help build students’ core academic capacities over time. We see this curriculum revision work as a constant, ongoing process. School-wide benchmark assessments aligned with SBAC released items, as well as daily formative assessments, help us measure and promote standards mastery. By developing these assessments in house, we could maximize their impact as opportunities for school-wide work around issues directly related to our environmental mission and issues of relevance to our student body.

An integrated, comprehensive academic intervention system supports all students as they work toward mastery of challenging Common Core standards. Teaching assistants partner with certified classroom teachers, providing support to struggling students and making it possible consistently and quickly to use formative assessments to diagnose student learning needs. In 2013-14, Common Ground focused energy on strengthening after-school academic interventions; students committed a schedule of structured, ongoing after-school activities for one third of the school year. Academic advisors and our after-school team work with each student to create a set

of after-school commitments that meets their academic needs, and also pursue their passions for the arts, careers, outdoor adventures, or other offerings.

Common Ground’s inclusive and diverse learning community integrates special education students into regular courses. Collaborative learning groups, hands-on and project-focused courses, differentiated curriculum, and team-teaching provide individualized support for students with different learning styles, challenges, and skills. Our successful students are active learners who become motivated and responsible for their own educational growth.

Technology continues to be an area of increasing focus at Common Ground. By the end of the 2013-14 school year, Common Ground was poised to make the transition to 1:1 computer to student correspondence and “smart” technology in every classroom. Students and teachers use a variety of instructional technology applications daily, ranging from Google applications, to a learning management system, to specialized programs intended to extend specific academic content topics. NETS-S standards and technology components are mapped into all courses.

Embedding academic skills and concepts within serious environmental contexts in the classroom promotes the school’s environmental mission and fosters student engagement through study couched in real world and relevant contexts. The school’s Environmental Leadership strategy helps to promote meaningful environmental learning opportunities for all students and ensures that leadership development components are consciously mapped through all aspects of the high school, including the curriculum, guidance, extracurricular offerings and employment opportunities. As such, all teachers map leadership opportunities into their courses and all students collect leadership artifacts to include in a student portfolio intended to reflect the student’s mastery of 21st Century Learning Skills. Students must successfully defend their Leadership Portfolio before a panel during their senior year in order to graduate.



School Goals:

I. EDUCATIONAL PROGRESS

GOAL A: Critical Reading Skill Development – *Students will grow in their ability to critically read academic material, including close reading of literature and non-fiction.*

OBJECTIVE 1: *Students will demonstrate increased proficiency in reading each year as measured by Common Ground benchmark reading assessments, aligned with Common Core standards and SBAC assessments, and by standardized measures of reading levels.*

Benchmark 1: The percentage of students achieving goal on the school wide reading benchmark assessments will increase by 20 points from the beginning of the year to year end.

Measurement Tool: School-wide SBAC-aligned benchmark assessment.

Progress in Meeting the Goal: *School-wide, the percent of students reaching “goal-level” performance on our English/Language Arts benchmark assessment increased by 22 points – from 19% to 41%. Students made significant gains at every grade level:*

CGHS 2013-2014 English/Language Arts SBAC-aligned Performance Task Benchmark

Grade	Percent At Goal		
	Semester 1	Semester 2	Point Increase
9	5	22	17
10	18	49	21
11	35	48	13
12	27	54	27
Total	19	41	22

In the transition between CAPT and SBAC tests, Common Ground has had to rely on internally developed benchmark assessments in both reading and math. These internal benchmarks reflect strong alignment with Common Ground’s mission; for instance, ELA benchmarks challenge students to demonstrate argumentative writing skills in response to a set of sources focused on a community environmental issue. However, we would much prefer to use these in-house benchmarks in combination with externally validated assessments, and look forward to the availability of released SBAC items and reliable SBAC tests that would allow us to do so.

Benchmark 2: Each grade level cohort will advance at least one grade level on the Nelson-Dennie reading assessment.

Measurement Tool: Nelson-Dennie reading assessment, administered at the start and end of the school year.

Progress in Meeting the Goal: *Over the course of the 2013-14 school year, the average Common Ground student made 1.25 grade levels of progress in reading. Freshmen and sophomores made the greatest progress – likely the result of intensive reading intervention programs, reading workshops, and a restructured freshmen and sophomore English curriculum.*

2013-14 Nelson-Dennie Reading Assessment

	Grade Level Equivalent		
Grade	Fall	Spring	Grade Level Increase
9	7.58	8.89	1.31
10	8.82	10.69	1.87
11	10.17	10.92	.75
12	10.07	10.95	.88
Total	8.89	10.143	1.25

Improvements Planned for 2014-15: In the coming school year, Common Ground will continue to increase implementation of research-based reading and writing strategies, across all courses and subject areas. This effort builds on intensive, year-long professional development work with consultants from the Area Cooperative Educational Services in 2013-14, which increased our faculty’s capacity to implement Common Core-aligned reading and writing work in all their courses. In addition, Common Ground is moving intensive reading and writing support programs into the school day; every student will participate in four 45-minute intervention blocks each week, working in small groups to with teachers and teaching assistants to work on attaining learning targets they are having difficulty mastering during regular academic classes.

GOAL B: Math Skills Development – *Students will grow in their ability to critically solve and analyze challenging math problems.*

OBJECTIVE 1: *Students will demonstrate increased proficiency in mathematics as measured by the Common Ground math benchmark assessment.*

Benchmark 1: The percentage of students achieving goal on the school-wide math benchmark assessment, aligned with SBAC and Common Core, will increase by 20 points from beginning to year end.

Measurement Tool: Common Ground course-specific problem sets, aligned with SBAC and Common Core math standards.

Progress in Meeting the Goal: Students demonstrated significant progress on school-wide math benchmarks this year. *At the start of the year, only 1% of students reached goal-level performance; by spring, 23% had reached goal, a 22 point increase.* The gains were greatest among students taking Algebra 1 and Algebra 2; our most struggling math students, who needed to take Pre-Algebra as high school students, did not make significant gains in mastery of Common Core standards.

**CGHS 2013-2014 Math Benchmark:
Course-Specific Problem Sets**

Grade	Percent At Goal		
	Fall	Spring	Percentage Point Increase
Pre-Algebra	0	0	0
Algebra 1	2	39	37
Geometry	0	11	11
Algebra 2	3	26	23
Total	1	23	22

Improvements Planned for 2014-15: While we are happy with the progress indicated by gains on math problem sets, we recognize that there is still significant room for improvement – particularly in our work with our most struggling math students, and in our ability to measure math progress accurately. In 2014-15, we are:

- Implementing a full redesign of our remedial math course – developing a team-taught, two-period block class to support dramatic progress for students who are not ready for high school-level math.
- Integrating math interventions into the school day – assigning students identified by teachers and assessments as needing additional help with either or two days of small group math support beyond their regular math course.
- Replacing in-house math benchmarks with externally developed, SBAC-aligned materials as soon as they are available – recognizing that we do not have the capacity to develop accurate and reliable math benchmarks on our own.

II. ACCOMPLISHMENT OF MISSION, PURPOSE, AND SPECIALIZED FOCUS

Goals in this section are grouped in four categories: environmental learning and leadership, college success, school climate, and professional development/school improvement.

GOAL A: ENVIRONMENTAL LEARNING AND LEADERSHIP

OBJECTIVE 1: *Students will demonstrate growth and proficiency as environmental leaders over their four years at Common Ground.*

Benchmark: 100% of seniors will successfully defend portfolios of leadership before graduating high school.

Measurement tool: School-wide environmental leadership portfolios, and oral defenses of these portfolios before a committee of Common Ground staff.

Progress in Meeting the Goal: *100% of Common Ground seniors successfully defended portfolios demonstrating their growth of environmental leaders.* This was the first year that portfolio defense was a graduation requirement; every senior stepped up to this new challenge, completing an electronic portfolio that included leadership artifacts and reflections aligned with Common Ground's POWER leadership framework: Pride, Ownership, Wonder, Effort, and Respect. Three seniors required a second opportunity to defend before demonstrating proficiency on a comprehensive rubric that judged their mastery of school-wide leadership standards, the quality of their written reflections, and a formal 20-minute long presentation. The remaining members of the senior class met or exceeded expectations on their first attempt.

Improvements Planned for 2014-15: Common Ground will build on the lessons and successes of our initial year of portfolio defense implementation – with a focus on:

- Integrating updated school-wide leadership standards, revised by faculty in summer 2014, into all academic courses.
- Strengthening support for students in developing and refining their e-portfolios before their senior year, through structured activities as part of Common Ground's four-year guidance curriculum.
- Developing outcome measurement tools to track students' environmental leadership progress in advance of their culminating senior portfolio defenses.

OBJECTIVE 2: *Students will choose to participate in environmental learning and leadership opportunities outside of classes and the normal school day.*

Benchmark: At least 50% of students will voluntarily choose to participate in substantive environmental learning and leadership opportunities on and beyond Common Ground's campus.

Measurement Tool: Participation in voluntary environmental learning and leadership roles on and off of Common Ground's campus.

Progress in Meeting the Goal: *At least 79% of Common Ground students chose to participate in substantive, voluntary environmental learning and leadership experiences during the 2013-14 school year.* For instance:

- 8 students participated in an ocean science internship that culminated in a week-long study and service trip to the Dominican Republic in partnership with Amistad America.
- 4 students completed summer-long competitive internships through The Nature Conservancy in North Dakota and Connecticut.
- 40 students completed paid environmental jobs through Common Ground's Green Jobs Corps.
- 30 students helped to run small businesses through Environmental Ventures.
- 13 students joined Common Ground's team for the national Envirothon competition.
- 37 students participated in school-wide Presentations of Learning, sharing major projects from classes like Food & the Environment and Environmental Justice.

In addition, 100% of students joined in environmental learning and leadership opportunities as part of academic classes and school-wide events. For instance:

- 100% of students took courses that integrated Common Ground's school-wide environmental leadership standards.
- 100% of students were involved in the creation and/or dedication of Common Ground's new educational wetland, and the groundbreaking of Common Ground's new model green school building.
- 100% of entering students participated in orientation activities that build understanding of Common Ground's environmental mission and site.
- 100% of students completed a school-wide benchmark SBAC-aligned benchmark assessments that focused on environmental and community issues.

Improvements Planned for 2014-15: Common Ground will continue with implementation of a four-year progression of environmental leadership opportunities – focused on exposure to leadership freshman year, deepening inquiry and identifying individual passions sophomore year, significant independent work junior year, and culminating group projects and portfolio defenses senior year. In addition, Common Ground will provide ongoing all-faculty professional development related to environmental leadership development, with a particular focus on incorporating community-based leadership opportunities and social/environmental justice themes.

GOAL B: COLLEGE SUCCESS

OBJECTIVE 1: *All seniors will graduate with a clear and thoughtful plan for their lives after high school, and make successful transitions to college and careers.*

Benchmark: At least 90% of seniors will gain admissions to college or another appropriate post-high school placement. The percentage of graduates who enroll in college immediately after high school will increase to at least 75%.

Measurement tool: College acceptance and enrollment, and participation in other post-high school programs.

Progress in Meeting the Goal: *This year, 93% of our students were accepted to college or other post-high school educational programs. Students were admitted to colleges including Quinnipiac University, Hampshire College, Mount Ida College, Lesley University, Newbury College, Mass School of Pharmacy and Health Sciences, Wheelock College, Salve Regina University, Southern Connecticut State University, University of Connecticut, Central Connecticut State University, Fairfield University, Sacred Heart University, Baypath College, University of Maine, Green Mountain College, University of St. Joseph's, Lincoln College, Sterling College, University of Vermont, University of New England, and Le Moyne College. In all, 75% of 2014 graduates enrolled immediately in post-secondary education programs. Members of the class of 2014 are now studying at the University of Connecticut, Southern Connecticut State University, Wheelock College, Green Mountain College, Lincoln College, University of New Haven, Sterling College, Curry College, the University of Bridgeport, and Gateway Community College.*

Year	% accepted to college or other substantive post-high school program	% enrolling in college or other post-high school program directly after graduation
2011-2012	100%	72%
2012-2013	100%	71%
2013-2014	93%	75%

Improvements Planned for 2014-15: Increasing college enrollment and success is one of Common Ground’s top priorities and most important measures of success. To increase our capacity in this area, Common Ground has increased the hours of our Manager, Post High School Planning & Recruitment to make this a full time position, and welcomed a new Americorps VISTA member focused entirely on alumni success. These two staff members, along with other members of our college success team, are moving on a number of new strategies to promote college success, in order to:

- Monitor and increase number and depth of college and career exposures for all students.
- Provide wrap around college and career counseling/services to all students via guidance classes, a new college and career curriculum implemented during intervention periods, and parent workshops.
- Provide consistent and formal updates to students, teachers, and families on alumni progress – including persistence rates, rates of student enrolled in meaningful post-secondary activities, and degree/credential attainment.
- Ensure all students who require it are enrolled in college readiness courses: including college readiness math, senior writing, senior seminar, and home-grown Real World 101 curriculum.
- Increase communications with and structured support for alumni via email, phone, social media, the web site, and a leadership opportunity database for alumni.

GOAL C: SCHOOL CLIMATE

OBJECTIVE 1: *Students will take on leadership roles within the school community.*

Benchmark: 50% of student body will be members of a student leadership group.

Measurement Tool: Number of students elected to student government, appointed to the school’s Board of Directors, completing Green Jobs Corps youth employment program, and/or serving as Peer Tutors, Peer Mediators, Peer Mentors, Orientation Leaders, Student ambassadors and Geek Squad members.

Progress in Meeting the Goal: At least 58% of students (98 individual students, some of whom played multiple leadership roles) assumed significant school leadership positions this year. For instance:

- 7 were elected to student government
- 11 stepped up as Orientation Leaders

- 4 maintained Common Ground technology as Geek Squad members
- 62 participated in Common Ground's peer mentoring program
- 13 were trained as peer mediators
- 6 served as peer tutors
- 40 participated in Green Jobs Corps youth leadership program
- 13 operated small Environmental Ventures
- 1 student served on Common Ground's Board of Directors.

Improvements Planned for 2014-15: Over the next year, Common Ground will transition from a traditional student government model – in which a handful of students are elected to represent the entire student body – to a progressive town hall model that engages every student in leadership roles. At the same time, Common Ground is fully implementing a two-tiered peer mentoring program that expands the number of students involved in mentoring roles, and builds the capacity of mentors through workshops and networking opportunities with college students and professionals. All students will be expected to identify and document at least 4 experiences per year – half in classes, half outside their academic experiences – that demonstrate their growing capacity as leaders. Students will assemble artifacts and reflections on these leadership experiences in their electronic leadership portfolio, and – as described above – will need to defend these portfolios in order to graduate high school.

OBJECTIVE 2: *Students will be actively involved in activities that promote student identification with and ownership of the school.*

Benchmark 1: 100% of student body will participate in school climate activity to promote school ownership.

Measurement tool: Participation in Mix It Up Day, All-School Hike, Class Adventure Trips, Step Up Day, and Power Assemblies.

Progress in Meeting the Goal: *100% of Common Ground students took part in a year-long progression of activities designed to build shared ownership of our school.*

Specifically:

- In October, the groundbreaking for Common Ground's new school building engaged the entire student body in launching the creation of a more effective learning environment (93% participation).
- Also in October, Common Ground's annual all-school hike provided a chance for students from all grades to explore West Rock State Park and build community together (92% participation).
- In November, Common Ground's Mix It Up Day engaged students in a full day of activities focused on diversity, equity, and community-building. Activities were planned (96% participation)
- Two family-style lunches – using ingredients from Common Ground's farm – brought together all staff and students, thanks to a plan for accommodating our entire community in our cafeteria created by Geometry students. These lunches were particularly important in 2013-14, since the growth of Common Ground's

student body required that the school move to two separate lunch waves (96% participation).

- In May, all students took part in the creation and dedication of Common Ground's new educational wetland, dedicated to Common Ground senior Javier Martinez (92% participation).
- In June, Common Ground students planned and led the annual Step Up Day, at which students officially move up to the next grade, and present gifts and lessons to other students (96% participation).
- In June, Common Ground's graduation took place – for the very first time – on our own campus, right next to the Javier Martinez Educational Wetland.

Benchmark 2: 53% of student body (at least 96 individuals) will participate in after school activities on school campus approximately once per week (30 hours per year).

Measurement tool: After school activity attendance.

Progress in Meeting the Goal: *In 2013-14, 76% of students (136 individuals) attended after school activities at least weekly (30 hours per year).* Nearly every one of our 180 students engaged in after-school programs in some way – 98% were in one or more after-school programs, and 41 students participated in after school activities 60 or more of the days they were offered.

Common Ground offered all Tier 2 and 3 intervention services after school during 2013-14. Other academic offerings, such as AP study groups, a student-run writing help center, and a two-hour Homework Center were offered after school as well – along with more than two dozen other programs, ranging from robotics, to drama, to Envirothon. These programs were made possible through grants through the 21st Century Learning Communities program and State After-school Grant Program, as well as through a grant through the AT&T Foundation.

Improvements Planned for 2014-15: Common Ground's top after-school priority for the coming school year is to fully integrate academic interventions into the school day – through the creation of an all-school intervention period four days per week. This will allow after-school programs to function as a space in which students can explore their passions, develop new skills, and engage in academic enrichment for all students, rather than a setting for mandatory academic intervention and support.

OBJECTIVE 3: *Students will provide service that contributes to the well-being of the community.*

Benchmark: 75% of students will provide 10 or more hours of community service a year.

Measurement tool: Community service hours completed.

Progress in Meeting the Goal: *Ninety-six percent of students completed ten or more hours of service during the 2013-14 school year.* All Common Ground students are required to participate in community service in order to earn credit in their guidance classes and to graduate. Students are encouraged to engage in service opportunities that involve repeated and long-term commitments to a project or organization, that make a

measurable community impact, and that allow them to explore issues and careers of personal interest. Common Ground helps to facilitate these types of experiences by offering ongoing service opportunities on our own site, in our community environmental programs, at Downtown Evening Soup Kitchen, via a tutoring partnership with Katherine Brennan Elementary School, and through school-wide service days. In 2013-14, Common Ground expanded service opportunities for younger students within our Green Jobs Corps, engaging 12 students in long-term volunteer positions as a gateway to paid environmental jobs. Through their own initiative, students also built community gardens, worked at homeless shelters, provided technology support, worked in a therapeutic riding program, and assisted at senior centers, among hundreds of other service experiences. Many students choose to include artifacts and reflections on their service experiences in

Common Ground continued to push students to take greater ownership of two annual school-wide service days, as well. In Spring 2014, for instance, a team of students from Common Ground's Environmental Justice course organized the major activity for our school-wide service day: a large-scale cleanup and invasive species removal project at Pond Lily Preserve, a natural area along New Haven's West River that is currently the focus of a community-wide restoration effort.

Improvements Planned for 2014-15: Common Ground will:

- Sustain the commitments to student-designed service experiences, whole-school service days, and the universal service requirement described above.
- Continue to integrate our school-wide service requirement with our environmental leadership portfolio system and our environmental leadership strategy, so that students have opportunities to reflect on their experiences and deepen academic knowledge through service-learning experiences.
- Seek new partnerships with community organizations opportunities that expand the range of service opportunities available to our students, with a particular focus on organizations that serve racially and economically diverse neighborhoods.

OBJECTIVE 4: *Students will demonstrate behavior that promotes academic progress and citizenship.*

Benchmark: Detentions will decline 15% a year.

Measurement Tool: Number of lunch and after-school detentions.

Progress in Meeting the Goal: *There were a total of 675 detentions (lunch detentions and after-school detentions combined) in 2013-14, down from 713 the year before – representing a 5% decline. In order to provide comparable data for 2013-14 and 2012-13, we have excluded detentions given for skipping required after-school academic interventions in 2013-14; 233 additional detentions were assigned for this purpose. This is the result of moving academic interventions out of the school day, and requiring participation for many more of our students.*

Benchmark: Suspensions will decline 15% a year.

Measurement tool: Number of suspensions.

Progress in Meeting the Goal: The total number of suspensions increased from 2012-13 (11 suspensions) to 2013-14 (23 suspensions). We attribute this increase to the challenges of helping our freshman class – the largest in Common Ground history – meet Common Ground’s behavioral expectations.

Improvements Planned for 2014-15: Common Ground is committed to reversing the increase in disciplinary referrals during the 2013-14 school year – a departure from our long-term track record, which has reduced discipline issues dramatically over the last six years. We are working toward this goal by

- Re-emphasizing the progressive, restorative, and positive discipline practices that have helped us build a strong school culture – including work with our school-wide POWER leadership model, student-family-staff conferences, etc.
- Instituting the progressive town hall meeting structure described above, to ensure that students have ownership over their school culture.
- Ensuring we have the staff capacity and clear accountability necessary to focus energy on positive school culture and restorative discipline – by promoting an existing staff person to the position of Assistant Director, taking primary responsibility for all climate and discipline issues.
- Growing our student body at a sustainable rate, so that we are not in a position where a third of our student body are new to Common Ground’s behavioral expectations.
- Revisiting our student handbook during summer 2014 to re-write expectations around dress code and electronic devices, to ensure these expectations are both clear and reasonable.
- Creating an all-school academic intervention period during the school day, eliminating a large number of referrals made for skipping mandatory after-school academic labs.

GOAL D: PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT/SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT

OBJECTIVE 1: *All faculty will complete an individual professional development plan in cooperation with the school director and will attend at least one week of a teacher’s summer planning institute.*

Benchmark: 100% of faculty complete professional development plans and 100% participate in summer faculty institute.

Progress in Meeting the Goal: All teachers completed professional development plans aligned with school goals and mission, and with new teacher evaluation standards developed by the State Department of Education. All teachers attended a week-long summer institute, focused on Core Six Essential Strategies for Achieving Excellence w/ The Common Core: Writing Strategies, Reading Strategies, Inductive Reasoning, Vocabulary, Compare and Contrast, and Circle of Knowledge. Sessions at Summer Institute also focused on integrating Common Ground’s site and the upcoming building project into academic courses; 100% of teachers planned lessons, units, and performance tasks that included place-based learning on Common Ground’s site.

Improvements Planned for 2014-15: Common Ground is already deep into implementation of a new teacher goal-setting and professional development planning process, in accord with Connecticut's teacher evaluation requirements. These teacher evaluation goals – aligned with Common Core and with Common Ground's environmental mission – will drive professional development plans for the coming year. Summer Institute for the 2014-15 school year returned to important themes in Common Ground's ongoing school improvement work: achieving equitable outcomes for all students, building common academic culture, developing course web sites to hold curricula for all courses, improving formal assessment in courses, text selection, integrating community-based learning and leadership opportunities into academic courses, differentiation, building shared understanding of Common Ground's vision and values, and revising Common Ground's environmental leadership standards.

OBJECTIVE 2: *All faculty will engage in professional development activities aligned with school goals and mission, and with the standards for high-quality professional development identified by the Connecticut State Department of Education.*

Benchmark: 100% of faculty will attend training in 18 or more hours of professional development in research-based best practices aligned with school improvement goals and mission.

Measurement tool: Individual logs of professional development successfully completed.

Progress in Meeting the Goal: *100% of teachers and school leaders participated in 18 or more hours of professional development aligned with Common Ground's school improvement goals and mission. The average Common Ground teacher completed 51 hours of professional development in 2013-14.* All teachers participated in on-site, ongoing, embedded professional development focused on fully integrating Common Core, including (1) Core Six Strategies for Achieving Excellence with the Common Core, (2) Depth of Knowledge, (3) CCSS lesson planning, and (4) SBAC testing formats. All teachers joined in mandated training focused on bullying and harassment, restorative discipline, universal precautions, mandated reporting, and building positive relationships with students. All teachers took part in a series of workshops focused on using Common Ground's site and building project as learning laboratories, including sessions led by staff from Common Ground and The Nature Conservancy. All math faculty worked intensively with a consultant from ACES throughout the year, and all English, Science, and Social Science faculty participated in ongoing Common Core-aligned literacy work with another ACES consultant. In addition, individual faculty participated in professional development including:

- Teacher evaluation 5-day proficiency workshop (3 participants)
- Teacher Quality Program – Using school gardens, schoolyards, and school resource issues to build Common Core mastery (5 participants)
- AP Language and Composition trainings & teacher meetings
- Cornell Ornithology Lab on-site workshops
- Approaching Walden – week-long place-based education seminar
- ACES Math, Social Studies Council

- Islam & Slavery in America
- Beyond Diversity 101 (5 participants)
- PIMMS Lab Safety
- CT Educators Computer Association Conference
- Connecticut Council for the Social Studies Fall Conference
- Yale Rep: Teaching Hamlet with Common Core
- Yale University Art Gallery
- Differentiating Instruction
- Community Leadership Program, supported by the Graustein Memorial Fund

In addition, teachers and staff planned and led professional development opportunities for educators from other schools:

- Turning Problems into Solutions & Campuses into Learning Tools, presented at the Green Schools National Conference
- National Retreat of The Nature Conservancy's LEAF Educators Network (Common Ground staff co-planned and facilitated the retreat)
- Building a New, Diverse Generation of Environmental Leaders: A day-long workshop at Common Ground
- No Compromises: Combining Challenging Academic Standards & Active, Authentic Environmental, presented at the New England Environmental Education Alliance annual conference
- Planning Projects & Assessments That Use The Local Environment to Develop Standards Mastery; School Gardens in the Curriculum – Part of the CT Green Leaf Schools Teacher Quality Program Professional Learning Community
- Digging Into Diversity: Cultivating Culturally Responsive Practice, the first state-wide school gardens & outdoor education conference, co-organized by Common Ground's School Garden Resource Center and the Connecticut Outdoor and Environmental Education Association

Improvements Planned for 2014-15: The expectations for professional development – ongoing and cumulative, integrated with evaluation and school improvement goals, embedded in our school, using teacher leaders and certified evaluators to provide ongoing coaching – remain steady in 2014-15. In the coming year, Common Ground will:

- Create learning communities committed to continuous improvement, collective responsibility, accountability and goal alignment.
- Prioritize, monitor, and coordinate resources tied to goals/objectives and evidence-based feedback provided as part of the evaluation process
- Align job-embedded professional learning with school goals and priorities, curriculum and assessments.
- Develop well-supported and effective coaches, teacher leaders, and principals who are strategically selected based on valid indicators of effectiveness; empowered to support and monitor teacher learning; and provide meaningful, evidence-based, actionable feedback that supports teachers' reflection and analysis of their practice.
- Create structures and systems that enable teams of educators to engage in job-embedded professional learning on an ongoing basis.

We are also expanding our commitment to support teacher quality at other schools, offering a year-long calendar of professional development opportunities designed to build professional learning communities focused on using active, authentic, place-based learning to develop mastery of academic standards.

III. EFFORTS TO REDUCE RACIAL, ETHNIC, AND ECONOMIC ISOLATION AND INCREASE RACIAL AND ETHNIC DIVERSITY OF THE STUDENT BODY

GOAL A: REDUCE THE RACIAL, ETHNIC, AND ECONOMIC ISOLATION of Common Ground students by providing an opportunity for integrated schooling.

OBJECTIVE 1: *Ensure that students from the City of New Haven and students from surrounding suburban communities are learning side-by-side.*

Benchmark: Sustain a student body that is approximately 70% from the City of New Haven, and 30% from surrounding suburban communities.

Measurement Tool: Percentage of students from the City of New Haven, and who are from surrounding towns.

Progress in Meeting the Goal: *In 2013-14, 35% of Common Ground students came from suburban communities, and 65% from the City of New Haven. The percentage of suburban students increased slightly (from 33%) in 2012-13.*

Common Ground uses a variety of strategies to ensure the geographic diversity of our student body. Brochures and letters were mailed to counselors and contacts at over 75 area schools and youth organizations in both New Haven and surrounding districts. An information session for guidance counselors was held in the fall. In addition, conversations with guidance counselors who could not attend the session were initiated to build connections and to continue correcting misconceptions about the school program and mission. Recruitment visits were made to several out-of-district schools; however, gaining access to some districts continues to be difficult. The lack of funding for transportation from suburban districts continues to be an obstacle for students and families who live outside of New Haven.

Improvements Planned for 2014-15: Common Ground is fully committed to sustaining a student body that creates opportunities for students from New Haven and surrounding communities to learn together and overcome isolation. This year, above and beyond the recruiting strategies described at the start of this Annual Report, Common Ground's Post-High School Planning and Recruiting Manager is taking the lead on several new approaches to engaging a diverse mix of prospective students:

- Identifying local K-8 schools that do not currently send schools to Common Ground, and develop specific outreach strategies for these target schools.

- Hosting professional development workshops for guidance counselors and middle school science teachers from the City of New Haven, helping them get accurate information about the school, and helping to ensure we maintain a student body that is approximately 70% from the City of New Haven.
- Nearly doubling the number of open houses for prospective students, to better meet the decision-making timelines and schedules of students and their families.

OBJECTIVE 2: *Sustain a racially diverse student body, where minority and non-minority students are learning together.*

Benchmark: Sustain a student body that is approximately 80% students of color and 20% Caucasian students.

Measurement Tool: Percentage of white and non-white students enrolled.

Progress in Meeting the Goal: *The percentage of minority (78.3%) and non-minority (21.7%) students reflects our goal of educating a racially diverse student body and reducing racial isolation. In 2013-14, Common Ground’ student body was approximately 42% Hispanic, 32% African-American, and 22% white, with 57% of students qualifying for free or reduced price lunch – creating a variety of opportunities for interactions among students of different racial and economic backgrounds. These statistics make Common Ground one of Connecticut’s most racially diverse charter schools, according to analysis by Connecticut Voices for Children.*

Improvements Planned for 2014-15: The same strategies that aim to sustain a geographically diverse student body will help ensure that our student body brings together students from different racial and ethnic backgrounds. In addition, Common Ground will (1) continue to offer recruiting materials in both English and Spanish, (2) offer translation services as open houses, and (3) focus paid and earned media outreach on channels that reach racially diverse communities (e.g., the Inner City News, La Voz), among other strategies.

OBJECTIVE 3: *Involve minority and non-minority youth and adults in substantial, positive interactions.*

Benchmark 1: 100% of minority students involved in sustained, substantive interaction with non-minority youth and adults.

Measurement Tool: Percentage of minority students in substantive interactions with non-minorities.

Progress in Meeting the Goal: *In 2013-14, Common Ground employed a range of strategies to ensure that 100% of our students are involved in meaningful, positive interactions with students and adults from backgrounds different that their own.*

Every Common Ground classroom, after-school program, and guidance group brings together students from diverse racial and ethnic backgrounds. The school sets annual

targets for increasing the number of minority students involved in Advanced Placement and honors courses, to ensure that all students have access to a college-ready curriculum.

Common Ground's work as a community environmental non-profit creates many additional opportunities to overcome racial, economic, and geographic isolation. Common Ground students acted as volunteers, paid staff, and participants in the programs of our environmental education center, which last year engaged nearly 15,000 children and adults from a variety of racial, cultural, and economic backgrounds (approximately 44% are from outside the City of New Haven; approximately 32% are white). Students also have the opportunity to interact with a diverse mix of adults through our Green Jobs Corps, which places students in environmental jobs throughout the community, and which provides opportunities to participate in job shadows and career field trips.

Common Ground also initiated and sustained a number of intentional efforts to address race and equity issues, and supported students' participation on community-based forums on these topics. Mix-It-Up Day and Day of Silence activities engaged our entire school community in structured discussions, challenge activities, and meals focused on bridging divides and ending discrimination. An 8-week mini-course on social justice encouraged our students to face race and equity issues head on. Light It Up Blue day raised awareness about autism. Common Ground's guidance curriculum includes explicit opportunities to build community and celebrate differences.

At the organization-wide level, Common Ground's staff diversity committee worked throughout 2013-14 to help the school build a culture of equity and inclusiveness, and helped to make equity a major organizational priority for 2014-15. Common Ground has also redoubled its commitment to encourage a racially diverse pool of candidates for all new job openings; as a result, three of our five newest full-time teachers are people of color.

Benchmark 2: At least 80% of students agree or strongly agree with the statement, "the school is safe and accepting regardless of race, gender, sexual orientation, or ability."

Measurement Tool: Student responses to school-wide climate survey.

Progress in Meeting the Goal: 79% of students agreed (35%) or strongly agreed (44.5%) that Common Ground is safe and accepting regardless of race, gender, sexual orientation, or ability.

Improvements Planned for 2014-15: Continuing to build an equitable and inclusive school community is, as just noted, one of Common Ground's top priorities in 2014-15. Over the next year, Common Ground's entire staff will work with a nationally-known expert in work to promote equity and end oppression to build our capacity in this area, and to ensure that all of our organizational practices – including employment policies, curriculum, and organizational culture – reflect our commitment to diversity and equity.



Efforts to Effectively Attract, Enroll, and Retain Students from Among High Need Populations

Common Ground encourages students of all educational backgrounds to become our students, and is fully committed to educating and graduating every student who walks through our doors. We attract and enroll students who belong to the populations described in Section 10-66bb(g) by:

- A comprehensive student recruiting plan that includes (1) mail to all students and families in surrounding districts, (2) visits to all schools who offer us the opportunity to meet with prospective students, (3) open houses and opportunities to shadow at Common Ground, (4) bilingual recruitment brochures, and (5) translators available for all student interviews, shadows, and open houses. These opportunities actively engage all interested students, regardless of educational background.
- Close cooperation with special educators, guidance counselors, and middle school teachers from sending schools and districts in order to support the smooth transition of students with specific learning needs into the Common Ground community.
- An intake process – including informational interviews, mandatory family orientations, and benchmark testing – that welcomes all students and provides the information we need to meet their educational needs.

The results of these efforts are measurable. As a small charter school, the percentage of students in the subgroups identified by Section 1066bb(g) varies significantly from year to year. At the same time, Common Ground serves a significant number of students in these populations:

- **Special Education Status:** In 2013-14, the percentage of Common Ground students who qualify for special education services was 17%, significantly exceeding sending district and state averages.
- **Free and Reduced Lunch:** In 2013-14, the percentage of students qualifying for free/reduced lunch was approximately 57% – significantly above the state average.
- **History of Low Academic Performance:** In 2013-14, the average Common Ground 9th grader entered high school 1.5 years below grade level in reading, according to results of the Nelson-Dennie assessment. Before entering high school, only 42% of Common Ground’s Class of 2014 had demonstrated proficiency on all four sections of the middle school CMT.

The number of Common Ground students who are classified as English Language Learners has been historically small; only 1 student was officially designated ELL in 2013-14. Common Ground has, however, taken a number of steps to welcome families whose native language is not English: including translating recruiting materials into Spanish, and offering translation services at recruiting and family events.

We believe that every one of our students can reach high academic standards and grow into powerful environmental leaders. We use a variety of strategies to retain students who face barriers to academic success, and to ensure that they overcome these barriers:

- Special education services are planned in close partnership with sending school districts; Common Ground’s full time certified special educator works with aides, part-time staff, and district staff to ensure that students’ educational needs are met.
- Common Ground’s Student Support Team – including social workers, student affairs staff, and school nurse – develop, implement, and monitor individual support plans for all students who face barriers to educational success, in order to promote their retention.
- Intensive academic intervention programs provide support to 100% of students during the school day, with additional opportunities for academic support after school.
- Small advisory group support students from grades 9-12.
- Green Jobs Corps, a year-long youth employment and leadership development program, connects 35 of our students with paid work placement opportunities, a year-long career and leadership curriculum, and a range of wraparound supports, including one-on-one mentoring with a college student or young professional. 20 of the 35 spaces in Green Jobs Corps are specifically reserved for students who face multiple barriers to educational success – including family income significantly below the poverty line, history of behavioral and social difficulties, low academic performance, etc.

These strategies make a measurable difference in the educational outcomes of Common Ground students:

- In 2013, Common Ground’s 4-year graduation rate (89.5%) was significantly above the state average.
- In 2012, the last year for which subgroup graduation rates were statistically significant according to the state, special education and ELL 4-year graduation rates were both 100%.
- As we noted above, only 42% of Common Ground’s Class of 2014 had earned proficient scores of all sections of the middle school CMT. By comparison, 58% earned proficiency on all four sections of the high school CAPT test when they took that test as 10th graders -- an indicator that students with a history of low academic performance are making significant gains.
- In the class of 2013, 93% of students were accepted to college.

We will continue to work, concertedly and tirelessly, to ensure that we recruit and retain high needs students – and that we help all students reach high academic standards, regardless of the barriers they face.

Financial Information

COMMON GROUND HIGH SCHOOL 2014-2015 BUDGET

INCOME		
Direct Contributions		
	Individual Giving	61,500
	Fundraising Events	14,563
Total Donation Income		76,063
Rev from Non-Gov Grants¹		
	Business/Corporation/Sponsorships	-
	Private Foundation	80,000
Total Rev from Non-Gov Grants		80,000
Federal Grants		
	21C/Workforce Investment Act	45,357
	Child Nutrition Grants	7,000
	Title 1 Regular	62,000
	Title 2 PD	10,000
	Breakfast	9,000
	Lunch	35,000
	USAC	14,320
	USDA Risk Management	
Total Federal Grants		182,677
Local Gov Grants		0
Total Local Gov Grants		-

¹ A significant amount of private and corporate grant funding received in 2013-14 for use in 2015-16 is included under Transfers In, below.

State Grants		
	Enrollment Grant	1,980,000
	After School Program	155,694
Total State Grants		2,135,694
Other Revenue		
	Transfers between NHEP/CGHS	36,756
	Misc	5,000
Total Other Revenue		41,756
Investment Revenue		
	Interest	1,000
Total Investment Revenue		1,000
Other Sources of Revenue		
	Special Ed Fees	125,000
	Student Activities	15,000
	Product Sales	13,000
Total Other Sources Revenue		153,000
TOTAL REVENUE		2,670,189
Transfers In		
	PCLB Foundation	275,000
	Other Foundations	40,000
TOTAL REVENUE PLUS TRANSFERS IN		2,985,189
PERSONNEL EXPENSE		
Salaries & Wages		
	Salaries + Stipends	1,662,350

	Wages	71,096
	GJC Wages (Double Counted)	
	Y@W Wages	
Total Salary & Wages		1,733,446
Employee Benefits		
	Health	200,111
	Life	3,072
	Dental	23,011
	Disability	13,023
Total Employee Benefits		239,217
Payroll Taxes		
	Medicare @ .0145	25,135
	Social Security @ .062	107,587
	Unemployment	17,353
Total Payroll Taxes		150,075
Total Personnel Expense		2,122,738
OTHER EXPENSE		
Contract Services		
	Accountant	15,000
	Legal	5,000
	Outside Contract Services	63,140
	NHEP/CGHS	272,063
	Purchased Prof Svs (ASP)	15,428
Total Contract Services		370,631
Non-Personnel Expenses		
	Advertising/Publicity/Printing/Mailing Service	10,000

	Internet	14,300
	Internal Connections Basic Maint	5,304
	Hardware	28,000
	Software	3,000
	License Fees	7,040
	Office Supplies	12,500
	Kitchen Supplies	3,500
	Cleaning/Rest Room Supplies	3,500
	Telephone	4,400
	Postage	2,200
	Copy Machine Lease & Copies/Photo Copies	12,000
	Misc Fees/Fingerprinting	2,000
Total Non-Personnel Expenses		107,744
Facilities		
	Rent	12,000
	Oil	10,000
	Water	1,200
	Electricity	10,000
	Trash & Recycling	1,500
	Alarm	1,200
	WPCA	1,000
	Propane	1,500
Total Facilities		38,400
Equipment and Maintenance		
	Building/Site Maintenance	5,000
	Bldg Materials, Supplies	1,000

	Equipment Rental & Maintenance	1,000
	Site Improvement Projects	2,000
	Vehicle Maintenance	3,000
	Capital Improvements	
Total Equipment & Maintenance		12,000
Depreciation		
	Buildings	30,156
	Leasehold Improvements	4,981
	Furniture/Equipment	25,000
Total Depreciation		60,137
Travel & Meeting Expenses		
	Travel	2,000
	Conferences & Meeting Expenses, includes lodging	1,500
Total Travel & Meeting Expenses		3,500
Instructional and Program Supplies		
	Instructional Supplies	22,200
	Textbooks	10,000
	Periodicals/Subscriptions	250
	Assessment	4,000
	Professional Development	5,000
	Program & Festival Supplies	
	Food	3,000
	Garden Supplies	
	Animals	
	Farmstand	
	Activity/Field Trip Fees	500
	Buses/Transportation	3,500

	Equipment & Rentals	1,500
	Tools, Bldg & Project Supplies	
	Transaction/Registration Fees	
	Financial Aid/Scholarships	2,500
	Cost of Goods Sold	1,500
	Program Stipends	2,500
Total Instructional and Program Supplies		56,450
Breakfast, Lunch, Snack		
	Breakfast	15,000
	Lunch & Snack	75,000
Total Breakfast, Lunch, Snack		90,000
Insurance		
	Commercial & Liability	30,000
	D & O	1,600
	Workers Comp	31,500
Total Insurance		63,100
Other Expenses		
	Association/M'ship Dues	5,000
	Misc/Other	5,000
Total Other Expenses		10,000
Student Services		
	Student Activities/Stipends	15,000
	Parent Activities	
	Pupil Services	
Total Student Services		15,000
Event Expenses		
	Feast from the Fields	

	Rock to Rock	
	Common Table	
	Campaign Events	
	Other Event Expenses	
Total Event Expenses		-
Debt Reduction		6,986
Total Other Expenses		833,948
Total Operating Expense		2,956,686
TOTAL ALL EXPENSES		2,956,686
NET REVENUE		28,503



Best Practices

Standard 1: Monitoring, Accountability, and Assessment

Over the past six years, Common Ground students have made some of the state’s most dramatic test score gains – moving from a school in need of improvement in 2007 to a Connecticut School of Distinction in 2014. Our students have also graduated at rates far above the state average, and almost universally gained admissions to college – even though the majority do not have an immediate family member who has graduated college. A variety of factors have led to this record of educational progress: work around school culture and student leadership, strong teacher development and retention strategies, tireless work on behalf of students and staff.

A decisive factor in our students’ academic growth is a strong system of assessment and accountability that holds all students and staff to high standards, drives continuous improvement, and helps us meet the needs of individual students. Student growth and achievement goals, reflected in this annual report and in our school improvement plan, are developed by faculty and drive our work over the year. A variety of assessments – including school-wide benchmarks, summative course and unit assessments, significant performance tasks, and daily formative assessments – are all standards aligned. Strong data teams and weekly faculty meetings provide a context for analyzing assessment results and planning improvements. Assessment, teacher evaluation, curriculum, and intervention systems are all tightly coordinated.

While many parts of Common Ground’s assessment system reflect universal good practice, we have also built an approach to monitoring and supporting student growth that reflects our unique environmental mission. Here are several assessment practices that we are ready to share with other schools:

1. Performance tasks, aligned with academic standards, challenge students to do create real products and performances for public audiences.

Many Common Ground units and courses culminate in challenging performance tasks that push students to rise to both Common Core standards and real-world standards of quality. Students in our Drama course work with professional actors to perform Shakespeare for whole-school and public audiences. Our Food & the Environment course culminates in 30-minute formal presentations to students’ families, in which students answer the course’s essential questions. Calculus students have produced a video that uses a variety of mathematical approaches to calculating the volume of Common Ground’s compost pile. Biodiversity students publish the results of their research on the impact of habitat restoration efforts in publications of the Long Island Sound Study and U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service. In every case, students’ work is judged using rubrics aligned with Common Core standards – and also held to a high level of accountability by the authentic audiences for which student work is created.

2. Benchmark assessments, using an SBAC-like format, address real-world issues, and inspire community dialog and learning

Common Ground’s English-Language Arts benchmark assessment – administered three times each year – uses the SBAC argumentative writing format as its starting point. By developing these assessments in house, we can choose to focus the students’ sources on issues that hit close to home. Recent assessments, for instance, have challenged students to analyze media coverage in the wake of Michael Brown’s death in Ferguson, consider whether corporations have the responsibility to sell healthier foods, and argue whether a development in downtown New Haven should be halted to ensure architectural remains are preserved. Students are grappling with issues of real significance, not just preparing for a test – and so these assessments become a learning opportunity, as well as a way to monitor student progress.

Perhaps most importantly, Common Ground uses these benchmark assessments to start community-wide conversations. Each year, every student in our school sits down to read the same set of sources, form a position, and communicate that position clearly and powerfully. Why not ask them to share that opinion with their peers, or to consider the positions of others? Why not push them to join in conversation with members of the bigger community — policy-makers, concerned citizens, their parents? These conversations can start small: students turn and talk to their peers before writing their own essays, so that they consider other points of view before taking a stand. The conversations continue after students are done writing, as well. Last year, for instance, students presented their opinions on corporate responsibility for healthy food at a conference hosted by Yale University, and helped to facilitate a discussion among community experts on this topic. Students also shared their writings at a spring awards banquet, and invited their parents to join the conversation. In 2014, students shared their essays with advocates for archaeological preservation. This fall, students’ writing on Michael Brown will lead into a community-wide conversation about race and policing.

3. School-wide leadership portfolios measure students’ 21st Century Skills and capacities essential to academic, career, and life success.

Just as we are convinced that every student can reach high academic standards, we believe that every student can grow into a powerful community and environmental leader. Home-grown leadership standards – aligned with 21st Century Learning Skills, and with Common Ground’s school-wide POWER framework (Pride, Ownership, Wonder, Effort, and Respect) – are embedded alongside academic standards in all Common Ground courses. Courses build in projects and performance tasks that help students master these leadership standards. At the end of each semester, Common Ground holds school-wide Presentations of Learning that give students opportunities to share these course-based leadership experiences with peers across the school.

Over the course of four years, Common Ground students assemble electronic portfolios that combine these course-based leadership experiences with acts of leadership from extracurricular, employment, and community-based experiences. These portfolios – build on a Google Sites template – include artifacts and reflections on these leadership experiences, written in classes and refined with the support of their guidance teachers. At the end of sophomore year, a portfolio review using a common rubric helps ensure that on students’ work reflects a high level of quality and mastery of leadership standards. During winter of senior year, students must defend their portfolios in a 20-minute long presentation to a panel of adults and an audience of peers. Portfolio defenses are assessed using a rubric that evaluates both the portfolios and students’ formal presentations to measure their growth as leaders.

Status of Charter Renewal Findings and Follow-Up Activities

Issues requiring corrective action after the 2009 site visit with follow-up:

1. **Finding:** Common Ground does not have staff qualified to provide teacher evaluation
Follow-up: Common Ground Contracted with certified staff at the local RESC to conduct evaluations during the 2009-2010 school year. The school director obtained 092 certification the subsequent year, and two additional staff obtained administrator certification in 2013-14.
2. **Finding:** Common Ground staff are performing school counseling functions, which require state certification.
Follow-up: All job descriptions were rewritten and positions filled to ensure only certified staff perform counseling functions. Two staff members now have 092 certifications, one of whom acts as Assistant Director.



Governance

Board Meetings held in 2013-2014

June 23, 2014
May 28, 2014
April 28, 2014
April 7, 2014 (rescheduled from March)
February 24, 2014
January 6, 2014
November 25, 2013
October 25, 2013
September 30, 2013
July 30, 2013

Summary of Major Policy Decisions

Approved a revised non-discrimination policy

Approved a revised Health & Wellness policy

Approved an employee leave and policy

Approved employee classification policy

Approved policy to protect homeless students

Approved policy to prevent the use of physical activity as a disciplinary tool

Approved revisions to the state-required teacher evaluation plan

Approved updated Safe School Climate Policy

Approved updated Free and Reduced Meals Policy

Approved Healthy Food Certification

Approved 2014-2015 School Budget



Summary of Other Key Accomplishments

Academic Challenge & College Success

In 2013-14, Common Ground continued to increase the level of academic rigor across courses, while also continuing to build student's ability to make successful transitions to college. For instance:

- Common Ground's test score gains and graduation rates earned the school recognition as Connecticut School of Distinction, and put Common Ground on ConnCAN's list of 10 Connecticut schools with the largest academic gains.
- A school-wide focus on distinguishing provisional and polished writing, reinforced by common rubrics, held student writing to higher standards across the board.
- Academic rigor was a focus across all disciplines. Students in Physical Education engaged in weekly, substantive reading and writing activities, and developed personal fitness plans, for instance. Art courses culminated in public shows and exhibitions. Students in Western Literature were pushed to synthesize eight or more sources in argumentative essays.
- More than a dozen students enrolled in courses at Southern Connecticut State University, Gateway Community College, and Yale University, and 46 students took on Advanced Placement courses.
- Every student was required to complete a new summer reading assignment, with a different book assigned to each grade level.
- A new "Real World 101" curriculum was developed and piloted with all seniors, focusing on college readiness and persistence.
- A major college trip to Boston, a Southern Connecticut State University "Takeover Day" specifically for Common Ground students, and panels on a variety of career and college choices meant that students were exposed to college options in an ongoing and intensive manner.
- Common Ground launched an official alumni network for the first time, with a focus on supporting our graduate's college success. Four alumni events, ongoing communication via email and social media, and our first formalized alumni induction celebration helped connect alumni with the resources they needed for post-high school success.

Environmental Learning & Leadership

As we noted already, 2013-14 was the first year in which every Common Ground senior needed to defend a portfolio that demonstrated their growth as leaders before they could receive their high school diploma. In fact, every Common Ground student developed portfolios artifacts and reflections documenting environmental learning and leadership experiences over the last year. Here are some of the experiences that they chose to include:

- Students in Common Ground's Green Jobs Corps completed 147 environmental work placement opportunities – monitoring water quality and exploring water careers, growing and selling produce, conducting outreach for New Haven's mobile farm market, planting

100 street trees, helped to lead educational programs for more than 1,500 younger students, and more. They helped to create and lead educational programs connected to school gardens across New Haven. They also joined in field trips, job shadows, and career exploration opportunities focused on land surveying, alternative energy, and a range of other fields.

- Six students participated in a research science, community service, and cultural immersion program in the Dominican Republic, created in partnership with Amistad America and Yale Geosciences professor Ruth Blake.
- From pre-algebra to pre-calculus, math courses used environmental problems to teach content – determining the full cost of producing an egg, graphing soil pH on campus, modeling sea level rise, and calculating the impact of bottled water consumption.
- In the team-taught Environmental Justice course, students took on significant community-based research and action projects. For instance, students monitored water quality in New Haven’s three rivers, analyzed how differences in water quality correspond to income levels of the neighborhoods through which these rivers pass, and shared their data in presentations to peers at three other high schools. Other groups presented to City Hall officials and the Chamber of Commerce board on opportunities to improve recycling city-wide, created a video Toxic Tour of a New Haven neighborhood,
- Common Ground co-organized New Haven’s second annual Youth Earth Day Summit, at which two groups of seniors presented their efforts to use greenspaces and street trees as violence prevention strategies.
- The Class of 2013-14 took on major environmental and community issues through their culminating senior projects. Groups developed and implemented environmental education curricula for pre-school students, developed improved marketing materials and educational resources for New Haven’s single stream recycling program, organized a community dinner and basketball games to bring together young people from different neighborhoods, created community gardens, planted street trees, researched and debunked negative stereotypes of New Haven’s homeless population, and produced short documentary videos profiling their work.
- 30 students operated farm-based business ventures through Common Ground’s Environmental Ventures program – producing, marketing, and selling compost, microgreens, eggs, and other products to the Common Ground community and general public. More experienced students took on new roles as business managers. Ventures students presented at a conference of the Northeast Organic Farming Association.
- Four students participated in month-long internships through the Nature Conservancy program, Leaders in Environmental Action for the Future. They completed habitat restoration, environmental science research, and stewardship projects on Nature Conservancy lands in Connecticut and North Dakota.
- Common Ground’s Envirothon team hosted a state-wide workshop on sustainable agriculture for more than 100 young people and adults.
- In Spanish and French classes, students took on a range of environmental and site-based projects – presenting about plans for Common Ground’s new school building, translating school fliers and interpretive signs, working in and cooking from Common Ground’s garden – all creating opportunities to learn and practice their foreign language skills.
- Environmental integration efforts continued across core academic classes. Teachers rebuilt the English 10 course to include a long-term focus on sense of place. History courses looked at land use on Common Ground’s site and participated in neighborhood walking tours. Senior writing included a series of guest speakers on local environmental

and community issues. Chemistry students studied the chemistry of maple syrup production, and presented what they learned at Common Ground's annual syruping festival.

- In the team taught Biodiversity class, students collected data through Project Frog Watch, a citizen science effort; worked with professional landscape architects and soil scientists to restore habitat at our new educational wetland; and designed interpretive materials for Common Ground site.
- Students contributed to city-wide efforts to grow the urban forest and establish one of the nation's first urban wildlife refuges: speaking out at public hearings, starring in videos about urban forestry for The Nature Conservancy, helping to create schoolyard habitats at three New Haven K-8 schools, researching the impact of habitat restoration efforts, etc.

Small School Supports, Big School Opportunities

In 2013-14, Common Ground worked to give students a wide range of opportunities to develop academic skills, grow as leaders, and explore their passions – while also creating a positive school culture and personalized learning environment possible because of our small size. For instance:

- Common Ground continued to expand our academic and enrichment after-school programs to include more than 3 dozen offerings – from fishing, to yearbook, to business of art – complementing opportunities during the school day. Our video club created short PSAs and documentaries about our new school building. Students participated in a unique mentoring program with participants in the Yale Psychiatry Residents Program, meeting over meals at Miya's Sushi. Medical Career Club participants gained CPR certification and interacted with a variety of medical professionals. Expanded climbing and basketball teams gave many more students opportunities for competitive athletics.
- Common Ground also supported expanded learning opportunities during the summer months, helping every student access a comprehensive database of summer learning and employment programs compiled by Common Ground staff. As a result, Common Ground connected close to 75% of students with significant summer learning opportunities. On campus, we offered summer extended math and literacy camps for more than 30 of our students. Through our Green Jobs Corps, Common Ground created 66 summer jobs for students and recent graduates. Other students engaged in summer college prep programs like Green Light Academy and Aspirations at Southern Connecticut State University.
- Common Ground students had the opportunity to talk with and hear from Senator Richard Blumenthal, Commissioner Stefan Pryor, Mayor Toni Harp, and Representative Toni Walker, all of whom made visits to Common Ground's campus in 2013-14. Common Ground hosted workshops by Def Jam poet Lemon Anderson and the LA-based Contra Tiempo dance company. Edwin Matthews, co-founder of Friends of the Earth and other environmental organizations, spent a week as Environmental Leader in Residence. Civics students presented to Scot X. Esdaile, president of the Connecticut NAACP.
- Both during the school and after school, Common Ground worked to give students opportunities to express themselves in a variety of artistic media. For instance, actors from the Elm Shakespeare Company joined our Drama class for a semester-long residency, culminating in performances for community members and our entire student body, as well as publication of student essays and guides to Shakespeare's work for public audiences. Our after-school drama club wrote and performed a mystery dinner

theater production. A new school band was formed and led by a math teacher who is also a professional musician.

Growing Impact – On Campus & Beyond

We are committed to the vision of charter schools as laboratories for educational innovation. While Common Ground is not interested in replication via the traditional Charter Management Organization model, we are committed to growing our impact on and beyond our campus. Toward this goal, in 2013-14, Common Ground:

- Expanded our student body from 165 to 180.
- Launched work on major improvements to our campus, which will allow us to grow to engage 225 students.
- Led workshops for more than 300 educators from other schools across Connecticut, New England, and the country.
- Joined with Eastern Connecticut State University and other partners to launch a professional learning community among the Connecticut Green LEAF schools, funded through a Teacher Quality Program grant from the State of Connecticut.
- Hosted three day-long workshops for educators from across Connecticut and New England, focused using active, authentic learning to develop standards mastery.
- Acted as a leader among the 28 schools in The Nature Conservancy's national LEAF network of urban, environmentally themed public schools – co-planning and co-facilitating the network's annual leadership retreat.
- Launched the Connecticut School Garden Resource Center, providing intensive support to school gardening efforts at schools state-wide, and co-organizing a state-wide school gardens conference.
- Advised the development of a new Common Core-aligned curriculum, developed to accompany [American Earth](#), a collection of non-fiction environmental literature from Thoreau to the present published by Library of the Americas.



Attachments

Common Ground Media Highlights, 2013-14

Bolded articles are attached

“Don’t Forget Charter School Successes.” Hartford Courant. August 8, 2014. http://articles.courant.com/2014-08-08/news/hc-op-charter-schools-not-all-bad-20140808_1_state-charter-law-fuse-side-charter-school

“Connecticut Charter School Graduate Works to Reduce Violence In Her Community.” June 30, 2014. National Alliance for Public Charter Schools. <http://www.publiccharters.org/2014/06/connecticut-charter-school-graduate-works-reduce-violence-community/>

“New Haven, State Officials Create ‘Urban Oases’ at 4 City Parks.” New Haven Register. August 8, 2014. <http://www.nhregister.com/general-news/20140808/new-haven-state-officials-create-urban-oases-in-4-city-parks>

“Four ‘Urban Oases’ Created at City Parks.” New Haven Independent. August 11, 2014. http://www.newhavenindependent.org/index.php/archives/entry/4_urban_oases_created_in_city_parks/

“New Haven Schools Create Habitats for Outdoor Learning.” New Haven Register. June 6, 2014. <http://www.nhregister.com/lifestyle/20140616/new-haven-schools-create-habitats-for-outdoor-learning>

“Making the Grade: Common Ground High School.” NBC Connecticut. June 25, 2014. http://www.nbcconnecticut.com/on-air/as-seen-on/Making-the-Grade-Common-Ground-High-School_Hartford-264572111.html

“Common Ground High School Celebrates 2014 Graduates.” Northeast Charter School Network. June 18, 2014. <http://www.necharters.org/blog.aspx#65>

"New Haven Citywide Student Cabinet Shares Ideas with School Board." New Haven Register. June 9, 2014. <http://www.nhregister.com/general-news/20140609/new-haven-citywide-student-cabinet-shares-ideas-with-school-board>

"Free Foraging Garden Rises." New Haven Independent. May 15, 2014. http://www.newhavenindependent.org/index.php/archives/entry/gleaning_garden_to_open_in_wooster_square/

“Javier’s Garden Grows in the Heights.” New Haven Independent. May 12, 2014. http://www.newhavenindependent.org/index.php/archives/entry/javiers_tree_grows_in_the_heights/

“Wetlands at Common Ground dedicated for Javier Martinez.” New Haven Register. May 23, 2014. <http://www.nhregister.com/general-news/20140523/wetlands-at-common-ground-dedicated-for-new-haven-shooting-victim-javier-martinez>

"New Haven High School Honors Murdered Student." NBC Connecticut. May 23, 2014. <http://www.nbcconnecticut.com/video/#!/on-air/as-seen-on/New-Haven-High-School-Honors-Murdered-Student/260473101>

“Common Ground Students Get Opportunity To Bike To Class.” New Haven Register. May 22, 2014. <http://www.nhregister.com/general-news/20140522/new-havens-common-ground-high-school-students-get-opportunity-to-bike-to-class>

“Common Ground Honors Slain Student Through Wetland, Tree Plantings.” New Haven Register. May 10, 2014. <http://www.nhregister.com/general-news/20140510/common-ground-high-school-in-new-haven-honors-slain-student-through-tree-plantings-educational-wetlands>

“Local Food Brings Local Security.” New Haven Register. April 14, 2014.
<http://www.nhregister.com/opinion/20140414/letters-to-the-editor-local-food-brings-local-security>

“New Haven Student Named Boys & Girls Club Youth of the Year.” New Haven Register. April 13, 2014.
<http://www.nhregister.com/general-news/20140413/new-haven-student-named-boys-girls-club-youth-of-year>

“Report Warns of 'Hyper-Segregated' Charters.” New Haven Independent. April 9, 2014.
http://www.newhavenindependent.org/index.php/archives/entry/ct_voices_for_children_report/

“Blumenthal Speaks to Classmates of New Haven Shooting Victim.” WSHU. March 31, 2014.
<http://wshu.org/post/blumenthal-speaks-classmates-new-haven-shooting-victim#.UznoUGmf-k4.twitter>

“Blumenthal Meets with New Haven Students to Talk About Violence.” New Haven Register. March 31, 2014.
<http://www.nhregister.com/government-and-politics/20140331/blumenthal-meets-with-new-haven-students-to-talk-about-violence>

“Blumenthal Vows Sentencing Reform.” New Haven Independent. March 31, 2014.
http://www.newhavenindependent.org/index.php/archives/entry/blumenthal_sentencing/

“Public Again Talks Beauty and Truth To Power People.” New Haven Register. March 3, 2014.
<http://www.nhregister.com/opinion/20140308/randall-beach-public-again-talks-beauty-and-truth-to-power-people>

“Lights Up for Javier.” New Haven Independent. January 10, 2014.
http://www.newhavenindependent.org/index.php/archives/entry/lights_up_for_javier/

“Javier Martinez Shooting Death Sparks Senate Call to Action.” New Haven Independent. January 9, 2014.
http://www.newhavenindependent.org/index.php/archives/entry/javier_martinezs_shooting_death_sparks_senate_call_to_action/

“Senator Blumenthal Talks of New Haven Violence on Senate Floor.” New Haven Register. January 9, 2014.
<http://www.nhregister.com/general-news/20140109/sen-blumenthal-talks-of-new-haven-violence-on-senate-floor>

“Javier Martinez Laid to Rest.” New Haven Independent. January 3, 2014.
http://www.newhavenindependent.org/index.php/archives/entry/javier_martinez_laid_to_rest/

“Common Ground Mourns the Loss of A Friend and Leader.” New Haven Independent. December 31, 2013.
http://www.newhavenindependent.org/index.php/archives/entry/javier_martinez_common_ground/

“Report: Youth Centers Need A Boost.” New Haven Independent. December 26, 2013.
http://www.newhavenindependent.org/index.php/archives/entry/report_youth_centers_need_a_boost/

“ESUMs, Common Ground Earn Distinction.” New Haven Independent. December 16, 2013.
http://www.newhavenindependent.org/index.php/archives/entry/esums_common_ground_earn_distinction/

“Federal Wildlife Officials Laud New Haven Project. New Haven Register.” October 20, 2013.
<http://www.nhregister.com/environment-and-nature/20131030/federal-wildlife-officials-laud-new-haven-project>

“New Haven School To Grow In Size And Sustainability.” New Haven Register. October 15, 2013. October 15, 2013.
<http://www.nhregister.com/general-news/20131015/new-haven-school-to-grow-in-size-and-sustainability>

“Expansion Begins at Common Ground.” WNPR News. October 15, 2013.
<http://wnpr.org/post/expansion-begins-common-ground>

“Local School Breaks Ground.” Yale Daily News. October 15, 2013.
<http://yaledailynews.com/blog/2013/10/16/school-breaks-ground/>

“Common Ground Broken.” New Haven Independent. October 15, 2013.

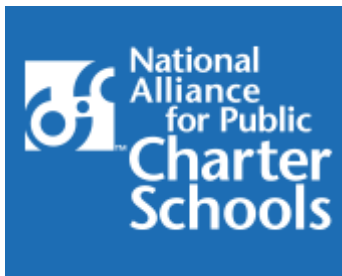
http://www.newhavenindependent.org/index.php/archives/entry/common_ground_expands_but_ma/id_62175

“State Dollars To Fund City After-School Programs.” Yale Daily News. September 19, 2013.

<http://yaledailynews.com/blog/2013/09/19/state-dollars-to-fund-city-after-school-programs/>

“Nature Conservancy Teaches New Haven Kids About Conservation.” New Haven Register. August 11, 2014.

[http://www.nhregister.com/articles/2013/08/11/news/new_haven/doc52083bbbadb09669912910.txt?viewmode=def
ault](http://www.nhregister.com/articles/2013/08/11/news/new_haven/doc52083bbbadb09669912910.txt?viewmode=default)



Connecticut Charter School Graduate Works to Reduce Violence in Her Community

Jun 30, 2014 2:23pm | by [NAPCS Pressroom](#) | [0 Comments](#)

Ariana Rodriguez recently graduated from Common Ground High School in New Haven, CT. She says she is very proud of her accomplishments throughout her four years of high school, and one project of which she is most proud is a video honoring friend and classmate Javier Martinez who died in a shooting in December, 2013.

Part of her video includes research on the correlation between tree cover and violence rates. This research, done by Yale University, shows that violence goes down as tree cover and green spaces go up. Part of that research is included in the video, which shows students and friends planting a tree in remembrance of Javier. Ariana says it is both important to remember her friend, and be a good steward of the environment.

Ariana says, “My school helps guide kids not only to a bright future but a meaningful one as well. I started off as a free spirited person coming into Common Ground and left as a leader ready to change the world.”

Ariana has also organized projects at Common Ground such as Trees for Peace, and other healing activities as students coped with the loss of their friend. Common Ground was one of the first charter schools approved in Connecticut in the nineties. The school focuses on caring for the environment, sustainability, and connecting the students to the land.

Ariana says she has had numerous opportunities for internships at places such as the Nature Conservancy, and has been taking college courses since her sophomore year.

She will be attending Southern Connecticut State University, majoring in nursing and minoring in environmental science. She wants to continue to promote goodwill and peace in the world. She says, “I plan to go to third world countries or places that have had disasters and work to set up health tents.”

A link to her recent work: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2Nr0H7-ZS6U&feature=youtu.be&noredirect=1>

This story is part of an ongoing series in the month of June highlighting the success of charter school graduates and schools across the country. Click [here](#) to view the latest from #30DaysOfGrad.

Making the Grade Common Ground High School

By Todd Piro , Dan Lee | Jun 25, 2014



View video at http://www.nbcconnecticut.com/on-air/as-seen-on/Making-the-Grade-Common-Ground-High-School_Hartford-264572111.html

Students at the Common ground High School in New Haven are taking on standard subject matter, but in a unique way that uses nature as their classroom.

NEW HAVEN REGISTER

**Wetlands at Common Ground dedicated
for New Haven shooting victim Javier Martinez**

By [Mercy A. Quaye](#), *New Haven Register*



A tree and educational wetlands were planted in honor of Javier Martinez, an 18-year-old Common Ground High School student who was shot and killed in New Haven in December 2013. *Mercy A. Quaye*

— *New Haven Register*



Family members of Javier Martinez, an 18-year-old Common Ground High School student who was shot and killed in New Haven in December 2013, plant a tree in his honor at the New Haven charter school. *Mercy A. Quaye* — *New Haven Register*

NEW HAVEN >> Students, staff and officials gathered Friday at Common Ground High School to celebrate and memorialize Javier Martinez, a senior who died in a shooting in the city.

Martinez was 18 when he was [shot multiple times](#) in the area of Hemingway Avenue and Russell Street on Dec. 28, 2013.

More than 50 people joined the students in dedicating an educational wetland area to the memory of their [deceased friend](#).

Students and faculty at [Common Ground](#) were joined Friday morning by Martinez's family, U.S. Sen. Richard Blumenthal, D-Conn., state Education Commissioner Stefan Pryor, Police Chief Dean Esserman and state Rep. Toni Walker, D-New Haven.

[PHOTOS: Common Ground dedicates wetlands in Javier Martinez's honor](#)

Melissa Spear, director of the environmental project, said "we must make sure his death becomes a powerful catalyst."

Blumenthal stood before a teary-eyed crowd and told students that it's OK to cry.

"There should have been 29 students graduating this year," he said. "Now there will be 28."

Blumenthal said the students should hold his generation accountable for not providing an explanation for violence, and safety from it. He said he has visited the school several times and is impressed with the strength of the family and students.

"Other students will be here over their years," he said, "And they will always have that memory of Javi that they will see through the beautiful educational wetlands that will honor him."

Students and staff at the charter high school worked with landscape architect Mark Papa and soil scientist David Lord [to design and plant the wetlands](#). It includes spaces for reflection, a memorial tree and plaque, a boardwalk and viewing platform for children's and community educational programs and more than 300 trees, shrubs and wetland plants.

Common Ground officials said Pryor reached out to the school after hearing about Martinez's death, offering to help with the tragic shooting death, the first the school has had to deal with.

"One of the things that you've done with the wetland memorial is allow for his light to continue to radiate," Pryor said. "There can be beauty from the ashes. Thank you for making it happen."

After brief words from Esserman, who told the students it is unfortunate that New Haven has lost another young person, the students presented their senior project along with a documentary about making a safer community. The documentary was also made in Martinez's honor.

[Click here to watch a draft of the students' documentary.](#)

The hourlong ceremony ended with the attendees circling the wetlands and watching the Martinez family grab shovels alongside Blumenthal, Pryor and Esserman. One by

one, students and officials helped place Martinez's memorial tree, which stands at the top of the wetland.

"Planting a tree is something that represents him," said Linnette Mendoza, a 17-year-old senior and friend of Martinez, "The bright color of this tree sticking out against all the green here is something that would stand out like Javi would."

Friends and family [said at Martinez's funeral](#) that he had a love for the environment. He was a bright student looking forward to college. Martinez took part in a competitive summer internship on Block Island that was run by the Nature Conservancy. The program takes only 120 students from across the country each year.

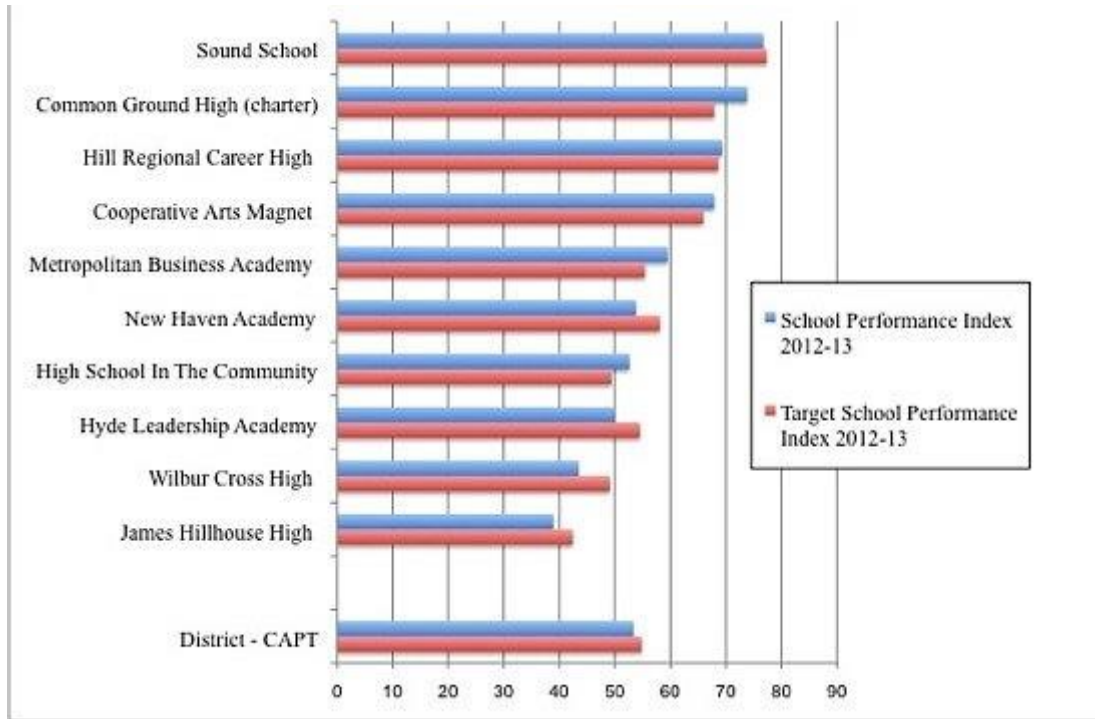
Esserman did not speak about the progress of the investigation but police have not yet made an arrest in the shooting. Police have not confirmed a motive for the shooting, but previously confirmed rumors that the it may have been the result of a robbery.

Sound, Hooker Top New Rankings *ESUMS, Common Ground Earn Distinction*

By Melissa Bailey

No New Haven schools are “excelling.” Two are making enough progress to earn “distinction.”

That’s the conclusion of the state’s new effort to grade schools.



... Two New Haven schools—Common Ground High, an environmental-themed charter school, and Engineering and Science University Magnet School (ESUMS), a fast-expanding district school [now serving grades 6 to 11](#)—earned distinction in the state’s ratings.

Common Ground and ESUMS both landed on the state’s top 10 list for making the most progress among schools scoring lower than an SPI of 88. ESUMS was graded as a middle school, because its high school hadn’t been around long enough to establish a baseline of scores.

Common Ground was rated as “progressing,” the fourth level of the five-point scale. The score was based on 44 sophomores who took the CAPT, as well as a 90-percent graduation rate for the Class of 2012...

NEW HAVEN REGISTER

New Haven school to grow in size and sustainability

By Rachel Chinapen, New Haven Register - Tuesday, October 15, 2013



NEW HAVEN >> Common Ground celebrated the first step in its transformational vision with the groundbreaking of a largely sustainable facility Tuesday.

"It's just the beginning," said Common Ground Board Chair Frank Mitchell. We're going to "keep transforming lives; keep hanging on with us."

Mitchell thanked supporters of the environmental charter school, including state Rep. Toni Walker, D-New Haven, and Education Commissioner Stefan Pryor for their roles in securing state support for the \$10.2 million project. The project includes \$8.1 million

coming from the state and \$1.5 million from the city and private donors. Common Ground is in the midst of a campaign to raise the remaining \$600,000 through small fundraising and private conversations about donations.

The 13,000-square-foot facility will consist of two science labs, a community space for athletics and performances, and an art classroom. The building will use solar panels to generate 70 percent of its electricity, a geothermal system for heating and cooling and wood framing and paneling systems to reduce the building's global warming impact by 40 percent. The facility will allow the high school to accommodate 225 students, up from about 180 now, and will accommodate 2,000 additional community members for programs held on site. The campus already allows for community programs and field trips from other schools.

While the growth is exciting, Common Ground junior Mettao Feliz said he has reservations about the changes eliminating the tight-knit, "family" feel the school has, but that the changes align with what the school stands for: sustainability. Feliz said the juniors and seniors are already adjusting to having two lunch waves instead of one due to a larger freshman class this year.

"The atmosphere here is very delicate, I can see that already changing," Feliz said.

The money also will be used to complete the overall vision, including changes to the Common Ground building, creation of a wildlife habitat for birds and pollinators, outside classrooms and better welcoming entrances.

Pryor, who was involved in getting the school approved in the first round of charter schools in 1996, said the school is now the "oldest environmental charter school" in the nation. The school's first class in 1997 graduated three students, while last year the school graduated about 40 students. Common Ground received the U.S. Department of Education Green Ribbon award this year, an award given to schools that promote strong environmental education.

In celebration of the school's next phase of development, Pryor read an excerpt from state Board of Education member Terry Jones, ending on the note, "A new crop is off to a successful beginning."

"You're literally generating energy here." Pryor added.

Common Ground students typically embark on various paths, most with the next step being college, according to Common Ground Director Lizanne Cox. Last year the high school had a 97 percent college-acceptance rate, Cox said. Students study areas such as environmental law, environmental science or environmental education, others go on to study medicine or law.

"They leave us with a solid understanding of what it means to live in a sustainable manner and they are able to articulate that," Cox said.

The new facility is expected to be completed by December 2014.