

**Testimony in Support of Common Ground High School's Charter Renewal
Submitted to the Connecticut State Board of Education
& State Department of Education
January 2024**

In the body of your testimony, please:

- » Ask the State Department of Education & Board of Education to renew Common Ground's charter.
- » Explain who you are, and describe your relationship with Common Ground (for example, how you came to be part of our school community, and how you've been involved over time).
- » Explain why you think Common Ground matters -- to you, and to the Greater New Haven community. Your perspective matters most -- share ways you've grown and excelled, opportunities to learn and lead that have made a difference for you, staff who you value, ways you've been challenged and supported.
- » Thank the State Board of Education and the charter renewal team for their time and support of Common Ground.

You can share your completed testimony with Joel Tolman -- jtolman@commongroundct.org -- who will submit it to the State Department of Education on your behalf.

Please submit testimony by Friday, January 26th at the latest. And please join us at the public hearing on our charter renewal -- Tues, Jan 30th, 6-8pm in Common Ground's MPR!

Darlenne Cazarin Berrios
Testimony in Support of Common Ground High School's Charter Renewal
Submitted to the Connecticut State Board of Education & State Department of Education
07 October 2019

I ask of you, the State Department of Education and Board, to renew Common Ground's charter. My name is Darlenne Cazarin Berrios, a junior and a latina young woman born and raised in New Haven. I want it to be known that I have Mexican and Puerto Rican roots intertwined within me and that it is a part of my identity because there was a time period where I was ashamed of my golden skin laced with hair and and the broken English I spoke, but when I honor the roots that my hard-working and beautiful parents passed down to me, it gives me power that I can wield. The community at Common Ground aided me with that.

My relationship with Common Ground High-School is, what I like to say, a serious 3 year relationship going on to 4 years next year. When I arrived at Common Ground my freshman year I was to say the least very overwhelmed mainly because of the fact that I plan ahead. I was worried about what my future would hold going to this school and how I will be shaped. I picked this school without shadowing and only going to one open house and it was the only time I picked something without doubting it. Throughout the years I grew as the person that I admire and look up to. I hung out with friends more and stopped watching the clock mocking me. I grew into my voice, using it to advocate for myself and others.

In my sophomore year I decided to take a SCSU class and AP Language and Composition to further challenge myself, however I did not fully comprehend the level of responsibility and late nights I would spend for each of the classes. These classes took part in molding me into the person I am today and taught me how far my stress level can go which is pretty high.

Common Ground is an environment where you are not told who to become and pushed into their definition of a leader, but instead gives you the materials to come up with your own definition of a leader and pushes you to admire who you are and will become in the future. For example, I am one of the co-leaders for SPEAK club, a club that meets once every month with a large range of diverse 1st or 2nd immigrant students. The purpose of SPEAK is to empower each individual and to be there when they want to talk about their struggles.

CGHS staff and students push me and encourage me everyday to become my better self and to not carry the universe on my chest, causing shorter breath. CGHS has been a sanctuary for students, where they can be themselves freely and proudly where they might not be able to do outside of school. It grants community members to learn more about their environment and to eat fresh and healthy produce we grow on the farm.

Thank you for taking the time in hearing this testimony.