



COMMON GROUND

HIGH SCHOOL, URBAN FARM, AND ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION CENTER

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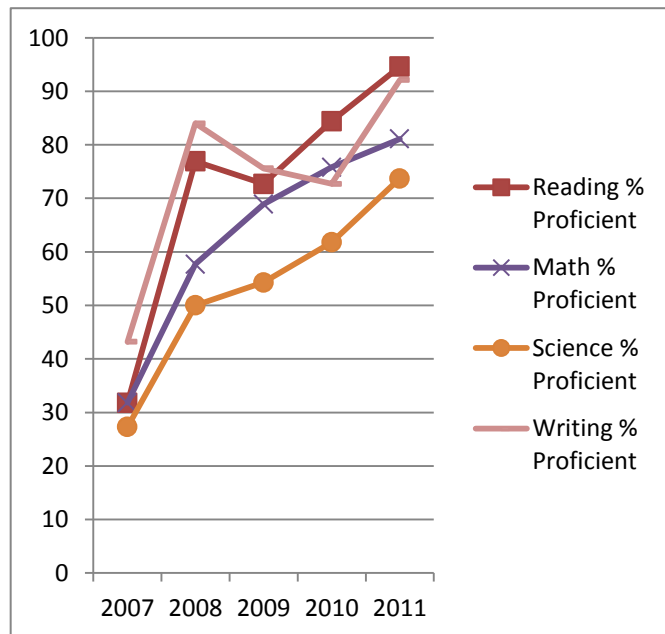
Common Ground Students Make Fourth Straight Year of Dramatic CAPT Gains

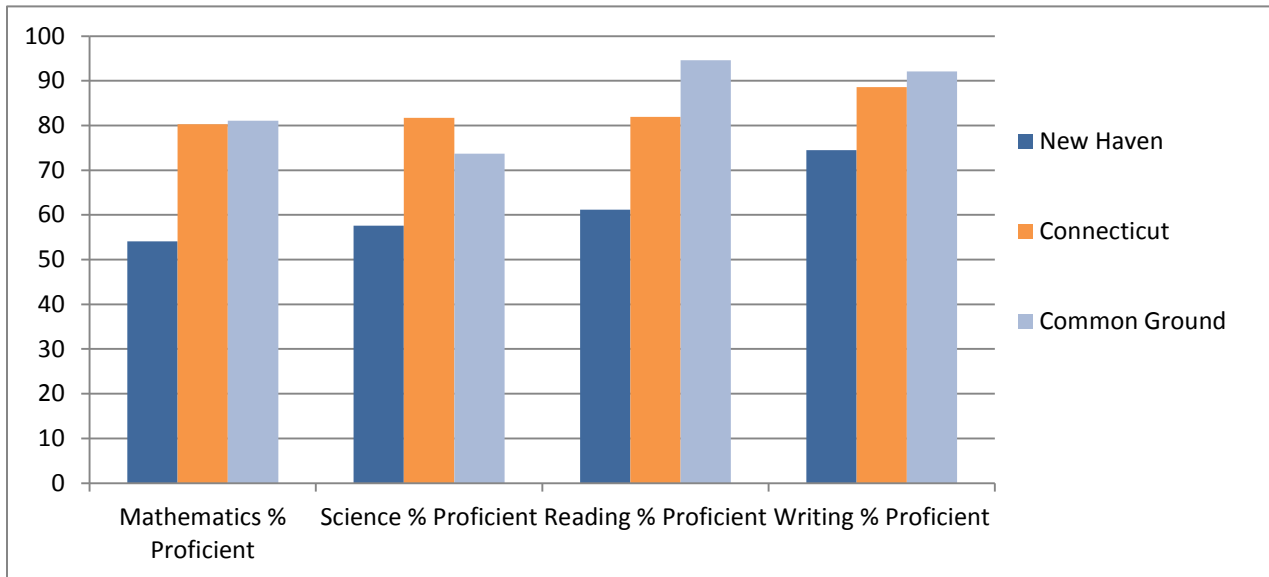
New Haven, CT, July 12, 2011 – For the fourth year running, students at Common Ground High School have posted significant gains on every section of the state-wide Connecticut Academic Performance Test. In every subject area, the percentage of students scoring “proficient” or better increased at least five points – growing from 84 to 95 percent in reading, from 76 to 81 percent in math, from 62 to 74 percent in science, and from 73 to 92 percent in writing. As a result of these gains, Common Ground’s proficiency rates now surpass the state average in reading, math, and writing.

This year’s results build on three previous years of dramatic test score gains. Three years ago, the percentage of students scoring “proficient” or better doubled or nearly doubled in every subject area – for instance, from 32% to 77% in reading. Two years ago, Common Ground’s sustained gains made us the state’s only high school to exit No Child Left Behind “in need of improvement” status. Last year, Common Ground students made larger gains than their peers at every other Connecticut high school, according to analysis by the ConnCAN.

“We’ve been doing the work, and it is making a difference,” says Liz Cox, Director of Common Ground High School. “Common

Ground has always been committed to creating active, authentic, environmental learning opportunities for our students. Over the last four years, we have learned to combine our unique focus on the urban environment with a consistent focus on universally high academic standards, data-driven decision-





making, and research-based effective teaching strategies. Our teachers and our students knew we could achieve, and did the hard work necessary to make it happen.”

A number of concerted changes and initiatives have contributed to Common Ground students’ sustained growth. These strategies have been driven by several common features: the use of data to drive decisions, a focus on state and national academic standards, the use of Common Ground’s unique environment as a learning lab, and opportunities to do real work for a public purpose and audience. For instance, a year ago, Common Ground students’ achievement in writing was flat or declining. In response, Common Ground faculty initiated a new school-wide rubric for evaluating students’ written work. They dramatically increased the number of times students write each week, and created new projects where students write for audiences in New Haven and around the world. Teachers implemented a common strategy of identifying and supporting individual students’ improvement in focused correction areas, such as thesis-writing and making effective transitions. A year later, the percentage of students demonstrating proficiency in writing increased nearly 20 points.

“We will not stop working,” continues Cox, “until every one of our students is meeting or exceeding high academic standards. We are convinced that every student can succeed, move on to higher education, and take real leadership in their community. We aren’t there yet, but we are absolutely moving in the right direction.” In particular, Cox cites the need to continue to grow the number of students who reach “state goal,” one level above proficient on CAPT. Last year, the percentage of Common Ground students reaching goal doubled and tripled in every subject area; this year, the percentage of students reaching “goal” once again went up in reading and writing, but down in math and science.

Test score gains are one of a number of indications of students’ progress at Common Ground. In each of the last four years, more than 94% of Common Ground graduates are accepted to college. This year, more than one third of our students plan to pursue an environmental field in college. Earlier in the year, the school was recognized as one of three national winners of the Green Prize in Public Education, awarded for the nation’s most sustainable public schools. Individual Common Ground teachers have

been recognized with the top prize in the ING Unsung Hero Award Program, Fulbright Teacher Exchange awards, the Toyota Tapestry Grant Program, and the Raytheon MathMovesU award.

About Common Ground

Common Ground High School was founded by the New Haven Ecology Project in 1997 as the nation's first public charter school focused on the urban environment. It is a small college preparatory high school, where students experience a combination of individual support and high expectations that help them achieve academic success. With only 155 students, Common Ground is able to challenge and support each individual, linking them with on- and off-campus opportunities that push them as far and as fast as possible. We use our three campuses – the forested ridge of West Rock State Park, our 20-acre educational farm, and the city of New Haven – to engage students and provide challenging, relevant learning experiences. Our students master state standards as they design new green buildings on our site, partner in the research of university scientists, launch successful environmental business ventures, and create outdoor museum exhibits.

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