



# COMMON GROUND HIGH SCHOOL

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### Common Ground State's Only High School to Exit "In Need of Improvement" Status

New Haven, CT, September 2, 2009 – After two years of major gains in student achievement, Common Ground High School became the state's only secondary school to exit "In Need of Improvement" status in 2009. The change in status marks a significant and sustained turnaround in student performance on the Connecticut Academic Performance Test, and means that Common Ground has met the goals for student achievement set forth under the federal No Child Left Behind Act.

Over two years, students at Common Ground High School have made and sustained double-digit gains in every section of the state-wide CAPT Test. In 2008, Common Ground students posted major gains on CAPT – doubling or nearly doubling their proficiency rates in every subject area. A year later, scores are up another 11 points in math, and four points in science. The number of Common Ground students scoring proficient in reading and writing declined somewhat between 2008 and 2009. However, student scores in each of these subjects are still up over 30 percentage points since 2007.

These CAPT score gains mean that Common Ground students have met U.S. Department of Education benchmarks for "Adequate Yearly Progress" for two years in a row. As a result, Common Ground exits the long list of Connecticut schools designated as "In Need of Improvement" under U.S. Department of Education standards. No other Connecticut high school achieved significant enough gains to merit this change in either 2008 or 2009.

Complete proficiency results are shown in the table below:

	Percent Proficient		
	2007	2008	2009
Math	31.8%	57.7%	68.9%
Science	27.3%	50.0%	54.3%
Reading	31.8%	76.9%	72.7%
Writing	43.2%	84.0%	75.6%

Common Ground's director, Liz Cox, sets the bar still higher. "These results are good. But we know that our students can still achieve at higher levels. We still have a lot of work to do. Our students and teachers are ready to prove that they are Connecticut's best."

Common Ground attributes its two-year gains to a mix of high academic expectations, small school support, and a unique environmental mission. Increasingly, Common Ground has developed a rigorous, standards-based, college-prep curriculum, while maintaining a focus on the urban environment. Teachers start with state standards when planning all courses, meet regularly to examine data on student achievement and plan responses, and employ a common set of research-based teaching strategies. Students who enter high school behind in core subjects are connected with more time in reading and math classes, after-school academic enrichment, and other supports – all designed to accelerate their academic progress.

This standards-based reform is paired with authentic learning and opportunities for environmental leadership. Common Ground students design permanent museum exhibits on Common Ground's site, work with professional actors to perform Shakespeare outdoors, develop small business ventures, and take on senior projects on environmental and social justice issues. For Common Ground, preparing students for competitive colleges and environmental leadership are closely connected goals, not competing priorities.

Now, Common Ground is setting its sights on additional gains across all subjects – particularly in the percentage of students reaching state goal on the CAPT test. This year, Common Ground teachers will meet weekly in subject area and school-wide "data teams," and students who are struggling will be matched with individual support plans. According to Liz Cox, "The focus now will be on stronger data analysis and on strategic interventions. Our aim is to know where every student stands, and make rapid changes to help them make real progress."

**About Common Ground.** Common Ground High School is Connecticut's only charter school focused on the environment. It is also a small college preparatory high school, helping students develop the skills and knowledge to succeed after graduation. Last year, about 93% of Common Ground seniors were accepted to college. Through hands-on inquiry, research, and investigation, students develop academic accomplishment, ecological literacy, commitment to community, and strong character. Students contribute to the building and operating of Common Ground's urban farm and environmental education center. Raising plants and animals, studying environmental issues, and investigating the dramatic ridge environment are part of the academic courses. Common Ground is located on the New Haven Ecology Project's 20-acre site at the base of West Rock Ridge in New Haven, CT.

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