

Georgia Graham
Appropriations Committee Public Hearing
Thursday, February 13, 2020

Good evening members of the Appropriations Committee, my name is Georgia Graham. I am the Senior Accounting Manager at Odyssey Community School, a public charter school in Manchester.

I am here this evening to ask this committee to restore the charter school funding cut in the Governor's budget and to provide equal funding to our state charter schools. Charters are great schools that provide support and positively influence academic outcomes for students. I believe that a good education is what helps us to do our daily life activities the best way possible. It helps us to gain new skills and knowledge that impacts our journey in life. But as you know, public charter schools face a huge funding challenge. We serve a high need community of children, some are from low-income families, many are English learners (I will talk more about this later). Yet, in spite of the needs of our students, our schools do not receive equitable per-pupil funds simply because their parents chose our charter school. And now, the administration wants to balance the state budget at the expense of our children. I have balanced many budgets in my life and I know how challenging it can be. So I am here today before you to ask you not to make additional cuts when we already do not get the amount of funding we need to educate a child.

When students attend Odyssey, we strive to support their academic success, instill a desire to improve and persevere, and promote the internalization of our CIRCLE values (**Courage, Integrity, Respect, Curiosity, Leadership, and Excellence**) which is the vehicle in developing our students into successful, well respected members of their community through academic excellence and self-confidence.

Odyssey's student demographic has been rapidly diversifying. In response, we have hired a certified TESOL teacher to ensure that our linguistically diverse students receive English Language support as they embark on their educational journeys. Odyssey has been

highlighted in the CT Charter Schools Best Practices Annual Report for our dedication to ensuring that students are promptly and properly identified as English Learners and that they also receive appropriate academic support. With equitable funding for Charter School students, we can continue to curate challenging and culturally responsive curriculums that focuses on language and content development, provide educational technology and classroom libraries while supporting our English Learners and their families, who may lack the linguistic ability and/or resources to advocate for and participate in their child's education.

At Odyssey, we believe that students need to be intelligent consumers of information in this ever-changing information age and we educate them with that in mind. We currently have a need for a World Language Curriculum, but with not enough funding we are unable to acquire the tools needed to help students enhance their education and have a greater understanding of other students and cultures. A world language curriculum would open doors of communication, learning about other cultures, making connections to additional areas of knowledge, developing insight into the nature of language by comparison and the concept of culture.

I am here this evening to urge this esteemed committee to equitably fund Charter Schools and not just brush this issue aside. At the end of the day, we are all here for the same reason, for our state's future, which is our children. I ask you to keep Odyssey's public charter school students at the forefront of your mind as you make financial decisions on behalf of all Connecticut families.

Thank you for your time this evening.