



COMMON GROUND
HIGH SCHOOL, URBAN FARM, AND
ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION CENTER

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June 2019

Lisa Packard
Ecology Learning Center
PO Box 34
Montville, ME 04941

Dear Lisa,

Common Ground High School, Urban Farm, and Environmental Education Center is happy for the opportunity to support the application of the Ecology Learning Center to become a Maine charter school, and is ready to collaborate with your school team as you build and launch a new school. Specifically, Common Ground is able to:

1. *Welcome staff, students and other stakeholders from the Ecology Learning Center into an annual summer curriculum development workshop, hosted by Common Ground, and open to environmentally themed high schools across the northeast United States.* This curriculum workshop -- which will take place for 3-4 days each in summers 2019, 2020, and 2021 -- is an opportunity for a team from the Ecology Learning Center to bring courses, units of study, and overall school curricula in progress for consultation and design with peers from like-minded schools.
2. *Invite members of the Ecology Learning Center community to an annual mid-year School Summit, also bringing together environmental high schools from across the region.* These annual school summits provide opportunities to share student work and learning experiences in progress, get critical feedback, and learn from similar work taking place at other schools.
3. *Develop school-to-school exchanges between our urban ecology high school, and the new rural ecology school being developed in Waldo County.* We are happy to host teams from the Ecology Learning Center on our campus in New Haven, and would be excited to bring members of our school community up to Maine. Our experience is that school visits like these are a valuable part of the school development process, and an important ongoing resource for student and teacher learning.
4. *Provide distance support and technical assistance -- via email, phone, and an online community that connects environmental high schools in the Northeast United States.*

Staff from Common Ground first learned about emerging plans for the Ecology Learning Center more than a year ago, and have been excited to see these ideas develop into a strong proposal and team. While New Haven, Connecticut, and Waldo County, Maine are very different places, we see much that is familiar in what's being proposed, and are excited about the opportunity to help nurture this seed. We are impressed by both the quality of the other partners that are supporting this effort, and the amount of planning that has already taken place.

Common Ground is ready to offer whatever experience and resources we have to your new school. Common Ground began as a community ecology education organization in 1991, and launched the nation's first environmental charter high school in 1997. Like the founders of the Ecology Learning Center, Common Ground's founders saw the promise of an approach to learning that integrates high academic expectations, relevant place-based environmental learning, and a focus on young people's development as leaders and whole people. While we are still a work in progress, we have developed and improved this model over more than two decades, and have seen its potential. Common Ground is a National Green Ribbon School. Our graduation rates consistently exceed the state average, and 100% of our graduates have been accepted to college in each of the last three years -- even though the majority of these graduates will be first generation college students.

Increasingly, we have seen the value of working with like-minded schools and organizations around the region -- and are excited to welcome the Ecology Learning Center into this network of schools. Four years ago, with support from the Environmental Protection Agency, we began bringing together a small network of urban, environmentally themed public schools -- mostly charter schools -- for several workshops per year (see www.teachcity.org). Evaluations of this community of practice indicate that working together has led to a rich exchange of resources and substantial improvements in school practices. Now, we are ready to expand this network to schools like the Ecology Learning Center, and have the core resources in place to sustain this network for the next three years.

Having met with you, and seen your emerging plans, we have confidence in this effort. We believe that you have what it takes to launch a successful charter school, and are happy for the opportunity to lend our support to you and your students.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Joel Tolman', written in a cursive style.

Joel Tolman
Director of Impact & Engagement