

A Letter in Support of HCLC

Richard Avery <yrevar@gmail.com>

Sun 5/15/2022 11:09 AM

To: input, public <publicinput@hamden.org>

 1 attachments (20 KB)

STEPS_REACH.docx;

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To the members of the Hamden Board of Education:

Attached please find a letter of support for the preservation of HCLC as a district-based service for Hamden Public School students. As the Board considers the needs of students, I remain hopeful that the history of HCLC will be duly considered and the impact it has had on the lives of students will be supported.

Respectfully,

Richard S. Avery

My heart is saddened to hear the news that Hamden Public Schools is considering closing the Hamden Collaborative Learning Center and outsourcing our student programming to ACES. Having spent the vast majority of my professional career in Hamden with the REACH and STEPS Programs, and with HCLC, I would be remiss not to write in support of continuing this vital program as a district-based resource for Hamden Public School students. I look back on my time with these programs as the highlight of my professional journey in alternative education programming and remain proud of the many accomplishments of the staff and students of these programs over the nearly thirty-seven years these programs have touched the lives of the children and families of our community. Closing this program, or outsourcing it to a regional education service center, can only mean that the town of Hamden has abandoned its commitment to all children and is poised to relegate them to the status of "second choice" students. Is the current administration of Hamden Public Schools, or the members of the Board of Education, aware of the history of these programs and the impact these programs have had on the lives of our students? As the former administrator of these programs, I feel compelled to share the journey of REACH, STEPS and HCLC.

In July of 1990, I received a phone call from Janice Morin, Director of Secondary Special Education. Jan informed me that the Board of Education had recently approved the creation of a new therapeutic alternative program for middle school students. The program, known as REACH, would be housed in the Newhall Community Center, next to the old Hamden Middle School. It would have two special education teachers, two paraprofessionals, and 10-12 students. Hamden Public Schools was now in need of a School Social Worker and I was invited to apply for the position. I was, at the time, happily employed by ACES as a Social Worker in what was then the ACES Secondary Program. I had worked there nearly ten years, first as a crisis interventionist, then school counselor, and, upon completion of my MSW, as a School Social Worker. It was a challenging, yet rewarding, experience and I have many fond memories of my years at ACES.

Professionally, the opportunity to be involved in the creation of a district-based alternative program was quite appealing. I interviewed for the position and was offered the opportunity to join the newly formed REACH team. REACH (Realizing Educational Aims, Choices, and Hopes) was a vision, based on the success of STEPS (Secondary Teens Education Program and Services). The STEPS, which opened its doors IN 1987 to special education students, grades 10-12, was designed to meet the needs of students who experienced challenges and failure at Hamden High School during their ninth grade year.

Two special education teachers from the middle school "volunteered" for this new venture, along with the paras who had worked with them in the middle school. We were provided two classrooms, access to a community kitchen to warm satellite lunches eaten in the classroom, access to the gym for PE and an office for the social worker that also housed the staff and student restroom. What we did not have was students. We were provided a list of students who may be good candidates for REACH, based upon their experiences in seventh grade at the middle school. Marie Rondini, Mary Kay Goldenberg, and I met over the next few weeks of summer to design a new program. We worked together with middle school administrators and reached out to families to solicit their involvement and support in creating a new program. We invited them to consider having their child attend our new program. REACH would provide specialized instruction, and intensive social work support. Our goal was to help students develop the social, emotional and behavioral capacities necessary to successfully transition back to the middle school, or high school, a process that was designed to be planned, gradual and built upon student growth and success.

After countless hours of outreach to families, we began our first day with 11 reluctant and resistant eighth graders who had experienced significant challenges negotiating the demands of the middle school setting. They came on separate buses and watched out their new classroom windows as their friends and former

classmates congregated outside the middle school. REACH was a work in progress. Understandably, these students were not happy about their new placement. Our first year was marked by challenges. We faced many hurdles, managed daily frustrations, and shed many tears. As we worked to define our mission, and engage students and families, we worked collaboratively with our families to develop a program that would meet the needs of our students. Despite the challenges, and limited resources, we persevered. The staff persevered, the students persevered, and our parents persevered. Driven by passion and our commitment to children, we reflected upon daily experiences, revised our approaches, and took risks to ensure that we remained focused upon our purpose: educating Hamden students in Hamden Schools. At the end of our first year, we were told our space in Newhall would no longer be available...it was needed for other town purposes. Needless to say, we were surprised and saddened. Our students were dismayed and our parents were outraged. They stepped in and advocated for the continuation of REACH. One parent even presented herself to Mayor Clayman, unannounced, to seek an explanation of what "need" was so great in the town that these students would no longer have a home? She waited patiently for hours to be seen by the Mayor. She returned to REACH that afternoon with a signed memorandum from the Mayor stating that REACH would continue to have a home at the Newhall Community Center.

For the next three years, we remained at Newhall and continued to grow. In 1994, we had outgrown Newhall and needed more space. We were relocated to Wintergreen, a closed elementary school that had recently housed Church Street School during the construction of the new Church Street School.

At the end of the school year in 1994, when I assumed the role of Department Chair of Social Work, I was transferred to the STEPS program. STEPS had been housed in the lower level of Central Office since its inception in 1987. As the programs continued to grow, STEPS outgrew Central Office and was then relocated to Wintergreen. REACH occupied one wing...STEPS the other. The building was old, dank and mildew laden. Lunches were delivered. A PE teacher from the high school came to teach PE. Our teachers taught everything else...art, electives, whatever the students needed. We couldn't go outside because the grass was not maintained, until neighbors complained that our students were at risk due the copperheads that hid in the high grasses. We were the last to receive updated curriculum materials or technology. Still, we made it work and our students thrived. It was the beginning of what would ultimately become the middle school/high school continuum for special education students affectionately referred to as REACH and STEPS! We teamed, collaborated, and worked together to meet the needs of all students. Over the next six years we continued to grow, and we continued to MOVE.

Hamden had organized a task force to look at developing a district wide alternative program for at-risk students. REACH and STEPS were part of that task force. We conducted needs assessments, analyzed student data, and began brainstorming programming initiatives to meet the needs of Hamden students, with the goal of housing that alternative program at Wintergreen. Central Office reached out to ACES for consultation on program development. ACES had a different vision. In the end, our efforts were discarded, the needs of Hamden students dismissed, and ACES took over Wintergreen to create the Wintergreen Magnet School. We were displaced once again and the needs of students in Hamden were sacrificed.

Homeless, we spend the summer months looking for a new home. Arrangements were made for us to rent space on Leeder Hill. At the 11th hour, the negotiations fell through. Highville Mustard Seed, a new charter school, had leased the other side of Leeder Hill, with the goal of expanding grade levels each year of operation. They were not using all the space they had rented and graciously offered space to REACH and STEPS. REACH was near the entrance of Highville, in classrooms configured by office dividers. STEPS was given half the cafeteria and dividers to create classroom spaces. Students took classes while elementary

students ate lunch on the other side of the dividers. The space did not matter. What made the program work was the dedication, determination, and conviction of the staff and students. We survived. We thrived. We touched lives and helped students grow and reach their goals.

In 1999, facing homelessness again, Dr. Begina made the decision to vacate the lease with Yale Child Study Center, Hamden Clinic, in order to renovate the first floor of Central Office. This would become the permanent home of the REACH and STEPS Programs. While renovations were being completed, REACH was housed in C107 at the high school. STEPS was housed in construction trailers in the parking lot of Central Office. No running water...no bathrooms. Just empty rooms. REACH made it work. STEPS made it work. It was not about the space, it was about the students. The educational experience for our students was not defined by the physical space, it was defined by excellence in practice, dedication, and a deep commitment to the well-being of the students we serve.

In February 2000, STEPS moved in. REACH followed. We were home. Valued, respected, and appreciated for the extraordinary efforts of our staff, students and families. During that time, ACES continued to grow as well, expanding its offerings to include magnet schools. CAMS was created to serve four surrounding communities. It met a need but did not sustain itself. When ACES announced its imminent closure, districts were hard pressed to find appropriate placements for the students they had referred to CAMS. In response, Hamden assembled a new task force charged with the responsibility of developing programs to meet the needs of these students. Building off the success of both REACH and STEPS, the foundation for HCLC was laid. For over a year our committee met, brainstormed, and engaged in robust discussions on the needs of Hamden for alternative programming. A proposal for expanding REACH and STEPS was put forth as a framework for developing a district-wide alternative school for at-risk students, grades 7-12. It received the blessing of Central Office and of the Board.

In 2000, STEPS and REACH were moved to Alice Peck. We developed new courses, aligned with state standards, piloted new initiatives, like distance and virtual learning for credit restoration, and expanded our curricular offerings. Mini-courses, Applied Science, Odysseyware, Art, Spanish, Practical Arts, Crafting, Children's Books, internships in the Integrated Pre-K, community service...always growing with determination and grit. We had sixty-five students, grades 7 through 12. It was an amazing accomplishment! It served Hamden well and kept our students in their own local community.

Sadly, Hamden abandoned its commitment to HCLC. HCLC was moved again to the old Daniel Barry Middle School. Once again, the program had to reestablish itself in a new setting. Over time, the components of HCLC that we worked so hard to develop were systematically dismantled. Elective courses were no longer funded. Essential staffing resources were cut. The program adjusted and endured. When renting space became cost prohibitive, HCLC was moved again. Back to Wintergreen, which the town had recently taken back from ACES. The middle school component was eliminated. Put it back! Elective courses were eliminated, requiring students to be transported to the high school daily for courses they once took at HCLC. Address that need on site! Efforts to regionalize and accept students from other communities were attempted but were not successful. As good as it is, ACES will not solve the problem Hamden faces. Hamden students deserve to be educated in Hamden by Hamden employees. There is sufficient need to warrant maintaining, re-growing and sustaining alternative programming in-district! All that is required is a belief that our students are worthy! One size does not fit all. All Hamden's students deserve our best... in their own town...in their own schools. Outsourcing this program is a disservice to our educational community and a financial shell game. It will not save the district money. It will cost more but those costs will be buried in tuition line items couched in the excuse that these are mandated services and we have no choice.

You do have a choice. Be transparent and display your earnest commitment to all children in Hamden. It's the right thing to do. Our neediest students should be our first choice, not a second choice!

Respectfully,

Richard S. Avery, LCSW
Former Coordinator of Special Education Support Services
Former Program Administrator, REACH and STEPS/HCLC

Comments regarding the proposed Bridge Program

DEBORAH HOLMAN <deborah.holman@sbcglobal.net>

Sun 5/15/2022 11:58 AM

To: input, public <publicinput@hamden.org>

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I am very grateful to the Board for the opportunity to share my opinion on this subject. I am also very pleased that the meeting will be held at Wintergreen. The staff, students, families, and the community-at-large need to be heard.

Unfortunately, I am out of town and therefore unable to attend the meeting in person. Please see the attached letter.

Deborah Holman

Visit my blogs:

<https://whoweareandhowwegotthisway.com/> Family History

<https://dorettecreations.wordpress.com/> Dollhouse Miniatures

To the members of the Hamden Board of Education:

As a former teacher at ACES (1976-2000) and STEPS/HCLC (2000-2014), I would like to offer my perspective on the plan to close HCLC and instead form a contract with ACES for an out-of-district program. I apologize for the length of this letter, but I am unable to attend the upcoming meeting and I have a lot to say.

The educational services provided by ACES for students most certainly have their place, and provide students with not only academic support, but more importantly, the skills needed to become independent adults. I left ACES after nearly 25 years because I felt the program was shifting to put more emphasis on academics rather than providing students the strategies so crucial to manage their emotional needs.

These students truly suffer. They feel “stupid,” “useless,” “broken,” “unlovable,” and most importantly, in my opinion, they feel disconnected. What makes a successful, independent adult? Yes, they need skills, but they also need to feel connected to the world around them; to feel like they matter. For some of my students at ACES, being placed out-of-district sent the message, “You are too damaged to be served in our town schools”, thus reinforcing what they already felt. It was very hard work to convince some of these students of their worth. Sometimes, we couldn’t. Especially after changing the curriculum focus to academics instead of emotional support.

I found that balance at STEPS. Yes, some of the students were angry they were no longer in the high school. But they were still part of the Hamden public school community. They could still participate in extra-curricular activities, or transition easily to take classes at HHS as they became ready. More often than not, they chose to remain at STEPS/HCLC where they felt welcomed and understood. Where they could succeed.

I believe Hamden students attending ACES programs have that same option. However, during my tenure at ACES, I knew not one who did.

What makes HCLC work is that it is in-district, not just physically, but psychologically as well. This makes not only transportation and transition easier, but also communication and collaboration. HCLC staff make use of the same content curriculum as HMS and HHS and are held to the same standards. The proposed program will be physically in Hamden, but that’s where the connection ends. Students attending the Bridge program will be Hamden students attending an ACES program. The staff will be ACES staff. It will feel like an ACES school, not a Hamden one.

As I listened to both BOE meetings held on this subject, my emotions ranged from disbelief to frustration. Several things struck me:

- There seems to be a rush to start this program in September. I find it very hard to believe that a quality program can be developed from the ground up in just a few months.
- There is not a good understanding of the history of Hamden’s alternative program and what has been offered over the past 35 years.
 - There is a concern that HCLC lacks career/vocational programming. One of the things I am most proud of during my tenure at HCLC was the Transition program we developed. By my last year at HCLC, we had in place a comprehensive Transition program for all students grades 7-12. The middle school students were exposed to career education in a

monthly class throughout the year. As students were promoted, additional class time was provided, focusing on career planning. The seniors participated in a two-semester course, Senior Seminar, which focused on the transition from high school to the adult world. By the end of their senior year, all HCLC students had completed in-depth vocational assessments as well as career planning, goal setting, decision-making, and problem-solving activities. Senior year culminated in the completion of their "Senior Project," where students chose a career based on their vocational assessments and created a presentation based on the research for their chosen career. As part of their presentation, students created a career portfolio which included a resume and cover letter. They then participated in mock interviews for their chosen career.

- Seniors also spent the year examining their life through writing an autobiography. This project was invaluable in helping them navigate the sometimes frightening prospect of graduation and in many cases provided them valuable insights they could carry forward into their adult lives.
 - Many students also elected to take the "Personal Financial Literacy" course which was offered for a math credit. During the first semester, students focused on building the required consumer math skills. For the second semester, they completed a "life simulation"—choosing a "job" and completing all the financial tasks required of independent adults (earning a paycheck, banking, taxes, housing, budgeting, insurance, etc.)
 - There was a time when our students went to ACES (Skiff Street) on a weekly basis to for hands-on vocational classes. I believe this was disbanded due to budget issues.
 - When we were moved to Alice Peck, we were told there would be a working kitchen where our students would be able to practice culinary skills. Instead, the kitchen never opened, and we spent more years eating food that was brought in.
 - Despite not having a full-time guidance counselor, HCLC staff worked with Guidance and Transition staff at HHS to assure students remain on-track for graduation and appropriate plans for school-to-work transition.
 - Internships were created within and outside of our building to offer HCLC students the opportunity to develop work skills. Settings included: childcare, teaching assistant (PE, Music), office work, automotive, and more.
- A comment was made during one of the meetings that it has been difficult for students to have the same teacher for "electives" (Art, PE, etc.) potentially for six years. The reason that occurs is due to the student-staff ratio as well as the fact "mainstream" teachers are often reluctant to spend their day in two places. I find it hard to believe ACES would not be faced with the same issue.
 - The vocational program services provided by ACES are excellent. I am not disputing that. However, I would strongly suggest the Board learn more about the proposed vocational opportunities before making any decisions.
 - Will students in the new program be working alongside the current clients on the "work-floor?" In my experience, many of the clients working on the "contract jobs" were of varying disabilities. This may not be politically correct to state, but our adult vision of students becoming more accepting of diversity does not often pan out. More often,

especially with emotionally fragile students, it results in avoidance behavior and lowered self-esteem.

- ACES' proposal includes the possibility of a longer school day. This may sound ideal, but it may make participation in home-school extra-curricular activities and part time jobs more difficult to manage.

I offer all this information as a caution. Please think long and carefully what parts of this proposal can actually be realized. What is presented on paper does not always translate to reality. Hamden already has the "bones" of a fabulous program. All that is needed is the opportunity to put the "meat" back on that has been stripped away over the last few years. Instead of Hamden handing students off to an agency for a comprehensive alternative program, HCLC can be that program. I hope you give them a chance to prove it.

Sincerely,
Deborah Holman

HCLC

Mary Kay Goldenberg <mkgoldenberg@gmail.com>

Sun 5/15/2022 2:16 PM

To: input, public <publicinput@hamden.org>

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May 15, 2022

Dear Members of the Hamden Board of Education:

HCLC, STEPS, and REACH have served the Hamden community for the past 35 years. These in-district programs have saved the town millions of dollars over this time, while providing support for numerous families. Many students who have attended HCLC have graduated and become contributing citizens. Without HCLC, many of these kids would have dropped out, been disruptive to the mainstream educational environment, and wouldn't have become successful members of society. While ACES can provide vocational opportunities for special education students, not all of the HCLC population are appropriate for this strict type of environment or career path. We've had an integrated population with many students who were strong academically and went on to attend college. HCLC fills a specific niche that ACES cannot duplicate.

The staff at HCLC have been quietly going above and beyond for Hamden families for over 35 years. This investment deserves to continue in the effort to educate all students, regardless of ability. In this time of greater mental health struggles, we really need to provide more of what HCLC offers students & their families, not less. HCLC was able to give kids an IN-DISTRICT chance to reset, recover, and redirect themselves while still graduating from HHS. This means more to these kids than you can possibly realize. It's unthinkable to take away an integral support system of such a fragile group of teenagers. Please reconsider your options while keeping students' needs as a priority. Be open minded and move forward, not back in time. Choose students and their families over profit. Support HCLC so the staff can continue helping Hamden students gain the confidence necessary to become successful adults.

Sincerely,

Mary Kay Goldenberg

Retired special education teacher HCLC 1992-2016

Sent from my iPhone

Public feedback

Sarro, Diana <dsarro@savechildren.org>

Mon 5/16/2022 8:30 AM

To: input, public <publicinput@hamden.org>; Board of Education <BoardofEducation@hamden.org>

Cc: gwillis501@comcast.net <gwillis501@comcast.net>

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I stand with the supporters of HCLC to keep the alternative program inside of Hamden Public Schools. This is a stellar program that put my life on the right trajectory as a teen and should not be sacrificed for even a modest cost savings. It's penny wise and pound foolish to dismantle a program that has excellent results when this small investment in Hamden's students pays bigger dividends to society. To intervene early and will result in savings from preventing the most at-risk teens from falling into coping mechanisms and needing serious remediation from possible incarceration of students or teen pregnancy or drug use and ultimately not successfully contributing to society.

I attended STEPS between 1989-1993. Like many, I came from a home with no parental supervision or involvement. My lack of structure and stability resulted in behavioral issues which started with nearly weekly suspensions for fighting in middle school. I had no role models other than siblings who had been in trouble with the law. I was put into the small nurturing environment at STEPS and the teachers there became the surrogate parents I lacked. I had to become accountable and discovered teachers who actually cared. The small nature of the program (around 12 students) allowed for one on one relationships to grow and not just for me to shrink into a corner. The counseling and conflict resolution at STEPS also helped to reframe any negative feelings I had as a teen. It allowed for conversations related to the vision of what I wanted for my future beyond my current home circumstances. They helped me not only in the classroom, but to gain confidence and skills. They found an opportunity for me to begin volunteering at the central office and find a job in the school system over the summer. I made new positive relationships through these first job opportunities. The teachers also encouraged my interest and auditions at the high school for theater as well. I was able to transition to the high school in 10th and 11th grade and spent my senior year not only at the high school but also accepted into the ECA theater program. I enrolled in college and finished my degree in communications and began working as a television producer for News 8 before working for an internationally known nonprofit, where I have now been for 17 years. I would have had a very different future without STEPS and I credit the program and it's amazing teachers for getting me back on the right track to succeed in life. I've come back to speak to kids in the program now to let them know their circumstances don't dictate their future. I hope you can take a look at the hard and soft data and see how the small investment of this program and its integrated nature within the Hamden Public Schools has proven the most successful means in preventing the larger cost of remediation once students are off track, failing, using negative coping mechanisms.

Diana S.

HHS Class of 1994

HCLC Letter

Gene Willis <gwillis501@comcast.net>

Tue 5/17/2022 9:36 PM

To: input, public <publicinput@hamden.org>

CAUTION: This email originated from outside your organization. Exercise caution when opening attachments or clicking links, especially from unknown senders.

I am writing this letter to the Hamden Board of Education as a former Special Education teacher of the STEPS/REACH/HCLC Programs.

I began my teaching career in Hamden in 1975 and taught for 36 years before retiring in June 2011. I spent seven years on the elementary level in two different Special Education programs and then taught for five years at Hamden Middle School. It was 1987 and Janice Morin, the Director of Secondary Special Ed. approached our staff asking for anyone interested in teaching a brand new, innovative, alternative secondary program that would be housed at Central Office. A committee had been formed 5 years prior to this and it had taken this long to properly set the stage so the best chance of success would be achieved. I was the teacher who volunteered to try my hand at this new program.

We received a generous budget. Everything from textbooks to furniture would be brand new. Nothing borrowed, nothing recycled, nothing used. The message was clear. These students needed to understand that the Town of Hamden felt they were worth it. They were worthy of the best resources, time, money, and staff to have a fresh start, begin anew, and achieve success.

The staff that worked with me directly or in consultation were some of Hamden's very finest. The Directors of Secondary Special Education, Psychology, Social Work, and Pupil Personnel Services were always there to provide support, ideas and leadership. The STEPS Program began with 5 male students from 8th and 9th grades. During the course of that first year we began to admit additional students in grades 9-12th. Each year we grew more and wonderful things were added along with more staff and more students. I had close contact with all Department Heads in content areas from Hamden High. They shared curriculums, texts, and support. It was extremely important to maintain, as closely as possible, the same class hours and subjects as the high school. Students would earn high school credits and were encouraged to mainstream some classes at Hamden High, possibly graduating from there if they had gone full time. If they graduated from STEPS, it was with a high school diploma, not with a certificate of achievement.

Five years from the inception of STEPS, REACH was established as an alternative program for middle school students.

These were strictly Special Education Programs. Every student had an IEP and teachers were certified in special education. We eventually combined REACH and STEPS and later became HCLC, Hamden Collaborative Learning Center with both special education as well as regular education students and staff. My intent of this letter is to illustrate the long road taken to create an alternative program that

has lasted 35 years. We began in the basement of Central Office with 5 students and grew to a program of 65.

It was a long, slow process that adapted to the needs of Hamden Public School students. Now with the possibility of Hamden giving up our own in district program and outsourcing it to ACES I feel the need to ask some questions and point out several issues of concern after looking over the ACES proposal.

It was mentioned at the Board of Ed meeting on May 10th that ACES provided a longer instructional day. This is simply not true. Comparative Differences in instructional time per week are as follows:

HCLC: Math 3:45
English 3:45
Science 3:45
Social Studies 3:45
Physical Ed. 3:45
Health 3:45

ACES: Math 2:45
English 2:45
Science 1:50
Social Studies 1:50
Physical Ed. 2:45
Health 1:50

If you look closely at their proposal, you will notice the courses required to graduate from high school are not following acceptable hours of instruction in order to receive full high school credit. Some ACES classes are taught only 2 or 3 days per week whereas HCLC offers them everyday.

Course Offerings:

HCLC: Algebra I, Algebra II, Geometry all *in person* with a certified math teacher.

ACES: Algebra I is the most advanced course and any higher level classes are offered *online only* through APEX with no indication of whether or not it is self guided.

HCLC: All classes are offered 5 days a week.

ACES: Math/English- 3 days per week
Science/Social Studies- 2 days per week
PE- 3 days per week
Health- 2 days per week

HCLC: Biology 5 days a week *in person* with a certified science teacher.

ACES: Biology, environmental science, physics, physical science, *online only*.

Please note the extent of math courses. Algebra I is the most advanced ACES course, whereas HCLC offers advanced courses taught by a certified math teacher. Also, ACES Science courses are taught ONLINE ONLY whereas HCLC has a certified Science teacher.

Another item discussed at the Board of Ed meeting was HCLC's dismissal time. HCLC's school dismissal time allows time for transportation to the high school to engage in sports, clubs, and extracurricular activities, while ACES school dismissal time potentially prevents participation.

This in fact is the goal of an alternative program. To allow students to join their district high school classes and possibly graduate full time from there.

Another important issue that should be of concern is The Bridge at ACES Vocational Shops. On paper this looks fantastic. Please notice the OSHA certification courses are all online. The IT computer lab courses and culinary courses ask for an additional fee.

In conclusion, I ask you to think long and hard about your decision to outsource HCLC to ACES.

HCLC is an established in-house Hamden Public School Program that was 35 years in the making. ACES has no experience with an Alternative Program. This will be a new undertaking for them. It would make more sense to continue to invest in an already established program, in our own school district, run by Hamden for Hamden students, that has been proven successful for 35 years.

Respectfully submitted,

Gene Willis

Former STEPS/REACH/HCLC Special Education Teacher

Hamden Collaborative Learning Center

Maureen Wulf <maureen2@snet.net>

Wed 5/18/2022 1:50 PM

To: input, public <publicinput@hamden.org>

CAUTION: This email originated from outside your organization. Exercise caution when opening attachments or clicking links, especially from unknown senders.

I am writing concerning the possible closure of this vital program.

I was a Paraprofessional there from 11/98 to 12/20 and I must say the most rewarding job I have ever had. Many of the staff have been there for many years which should show their love and commitment to this school and the students who go there. Even when some of us retire the new staff seems to understand the importance of what we do.

So many former students have kept in touch with staff long after they have graduated. We have bounced around Hamden many times over the years but always made it work for our students. Why some would want to hand this very successful program over to ACES is beyond me. It has been a lifeline for so many who have gone on leading successful lives because of what the staff saw in them. I think keeping this program is extremely important. I understand there is no solid plan from Aces as to how this would work from a financial perspective. Our children need to be in Hamden.

I also live in Hamden, and I do not my tax dollars to be used for this purpose.

Sincerely

Maureen Wulf