Bruce D. Anderson, Ph.D.

April 23, 2012

To Whom It May Concern:

It is with great pleasure, that I, on behalf of the Windham School Board, support the Grant Application to the State Farm Youth Advisory Board National Grant Application to construct a greenhouse at Windham High School.

From its very beginning, Windham High School was designed for students, specifically, to meet the needs of every learner. To that end, we have invested in technologies and programming that gives students of varying aptitudes and interests the opportunity to experience meaningful and relevant hands-on learning. Seniors will be required to do senior projects in which they pursue an interest or idea of their own and develop it into a meaningful academic project, which may have a significant community service component. The school was designed to support the one-to-one student computing model that provides each student with a laptop computer. This initiative has fostered the hands-on, real-time, individualized learning experience of the school. These are just two examples of how both technology and the curriculum has helped achieve extraordinary student ownership of, and engagement in, the school.

The student engagement in the school has manifested itself in several forms. Windham High School has extremely high student participation rates in athletics and extracurricular activities with over 60% of students participating in at least one interscholastic athletic team. Student involvement is perhaps nowhere more evident than in the ecological and environmental culture of the school. During construction, one student realized that the site of the school, up on a hill, would be an ideal location for capturing wind energy. This student idea resulted in a successful fund raising drive that culminated in the purchase and installation of a small wind turbine and solar panels. This equipment will be used to do a feasibility study to determine if the site is a candidate for installation of larger scale renewable energy infrastructure. The small wind turbine and solar panels will also provide the infrastructure for one of the first high school curriculums in renewable energy technologies. Thus, the idea of one student has led to a unique curriculum offering as well as the possibility of providing significant future savings in energy costs.

Windham High School also has the distinction of being a “Green” School. This honor was earned in part by the initiative of several students to begin an aggressive recycling program. The support of the student body and faculty is yet another example of not only the environmental commitment of the whole school, but of how student ideas have had a significant impact on the culture of the school.

`The “Green” culture of the school has led to an intense interest in sustainable agriculture. The students are very curious about how food gets to their table and understand the ecological impact of having foods transported large distances rather than being locally grown. They are very concerned about food production and what they eat. This curiosity has led to an intense interest in sustainable and organic agriculture. A greenhouse would provide the necessary facilities for students to understand the process and challenges of sustainable agriculture, and hopefully encourage some of them to pursue careers in food and agriculture.

As a biologist, I cannot over emphasize how a greenhouse would add to the hands-on, discovery learning that is and should be at the heart of our science curriculum. In my experience teaching Physiology and Ecology at the University of California, Berkeley, most college students lack the critical thinking skills that are developed when learning is truly hands-on and discovery centered. The faculty at Windham High is uniquely qualified to capitalize on the learning opportunities afforded by a greenhouse and renewable energy infrastructure. The faculty combined with these facilities will not only benefit our students, but will be a model for how science should be taught to promote the critical thinking skills throughout the country.

A greenhouse was included in the original design plan for Windham High School. However, due to rapidly increasing construction costs at the time of biding, it could not be built as part of the original project. This has long been a personal disappointment to myself. If any school is poised to take advantage of a greenhouse it is Windham High School. A greenhouse at Windham High School would not only further the science curriculum, but would be a direct response to the interests of our students in “Green” technologies and sustainable agriculture.

I encourage you to make an investment in Windham high school, as this will not be an investment in just one school. A greenhouse at Windham High will allow it to be a model for education in science, green technology, and sustainable agriculture. Your investment in Windham High School will be an investment in the education of young people across the United States.

Sincerely,

Bruce D. Anderson, Ph.D.
Chair, Windham School Board