

## **Testimony to the House Education Committee in Support of State Appropriation for Afterschool and Expanded Learning**

**Presented by Thara Fuller, Coordinator of 21C Funded Expanded Learning Programs in the Windham Central Supervisory Union**

**February 18, 2016**

Members of the Education Committee, thank you so much for the invitation to bring our student ambassadors from Leland and Gray to speak with you. I am Thara Fuller, the person charged with sustaining the Leland and Gray programs and expanded learning at six other schools in the WCSU. Although we have had federal 21c funding for almost 4 years, we are in a very vulnerable position right now. I came today with these students to urge the legislature to appropriate funds for state support for expanded learning. Yes, money is extremely tight and I appreciate your difficult role in prioritizing our state resources. When we recognize that something is essential for Vermonters, we find the money.

I believe in everyone doing their part. Parents pay fees on a sliding scale, school districts allocate funds in their budgets, and programs conduct fundraising. I am asking for the state of Vermont to do its part in a public-private partnership. I believe that state funding for expanded learning programs is essential and here are X reasons

1. Small, rural communities are disadvantaged in applying for federal 21c funding because they cannot meet the local share requirements. After 4 years we are supposed to have a 50% local match. I just submitted a renewal application where we stretched to our limit to come up with a 40% share. We find out in April if they award the grant. If they don't we close our doors after 4 years of excellence. Even if they do award us the grant, we have a steep fundraising challenge ahead and if we can't reach the target, we will close next year.
2. Investing in expanded learning is essential. It is dangerous to leave a gap between the end of the school day and the end of the work day. The legislature has just voted for sick days as a public health issue. Consider the public health issue of parents having to leave their children in all kinds of shaky situations in evenings and during the summer so that they can earn money to put food on the table.
3. In afterschool and summer programs we not only keep young people safe, warm and fed--we foster their growth in ways these students just described. We counteract the achievement gap. Please do not let Vermont allow expanded learning to be available only for the affluent in our state. The way toward a thriving society and thriving economy is high quality education for all.

Thank you for listening. Thank you for the job you do on behalf of Vermonters.