

Talking Points for Rep. Mrowicki

Why Expanded Learning Opportunities are important:

- We know that on average, children spend 1,000 hrs/year in school but 5,000 hrs/yr in their communities and with their families. How they spend this time can facilitate positive development and growth experiences, or place them at risk for negative outcomes.
- Research tells us that quality afterschool, summer, and expanded learning programs play a key role in Vermont communities:
 - They keep kids healthy and safe in the afternoon hours when parents and families are working as well as during school vacations and over the summer.
 - They provide innovative learning opportunities that reinforce and complement the school day and support positive youth development; and
 - They help working families; it is an economic reality that because these programs exist, parents and care givers can be at their jobs and provide for their families.
- Expanded Learning Opportunities also support Vermont's vision for education. Connections can be made in many of our key initiatives including flexible pathways, personalized learning plans, transferable skills, and proficiency-based graduation requirements.
- Vermont's academic achievement gap is one of the most pressing educational issues facing our state today. Students from poor and low-income households tend to score lower on both reading and math proficiency tests regardless of gender or grade level.
- Quality afterschool programs use project-based learning and hands-on experiences to engage young people. They bring students out in the community to explore new interests and opportunities and to build leadership skills. They help make important connections with parents and families strengthening those connections and supporting increased family involvement.
- We know in particular that what happens in the summer matters. Students tend to lose both math and reading skills over the summer. In fact, a recent study out of Johns Hopkins University attributed up to 2/3 of the academic achievement gap by 9th grade to unequal access to opportunities during the summer months.
- We need to focus on increasing equity and access. The afterschool and summer learning opportunities that a Vermont child has access to vary greatly depending on family income and on what community they live in. Some

communities have multiple options available both afterschool and in the summer. In other communities, there are few or no options.

Why H.391 is important:

- If we are going to address the academic achievement gap in Vermont, research and practice show us that we have to look at the opportunity gap. Where students are falling behind isn't in the classroom; it's in the opportunities and experiences that they have access to in the out-of-school time and over the summer.
- This bill is exciting. It raises the profile of Expanded Learning Opportunities and gives us a positive and proactive way to scale up opportunities across the state.
- It creates a statewide council that brings together perspectives and viewpoints from different agencies and partner organizations. Expanded Learning Opportunities, like Early Ed and preschool, are overseen by multiple state agencies- primarily Agency of Education and Agency of Human Services, Department for Children and Families. What we have in place now with split oversight and priorities isn't going to allow us to scale up opportunities statewide.
- H.391 and the statewide committee it creates would provide a format and structure for important cross-agency and sector conversations to take place. We need a prominent place for this initiative to work from.
- We realize this is a tough budget year. Getting at least the committee in place so as to create a structure and space for this initiative is important. It would also allow the committee and fund to accept funding from other sources, including private foundations.
- With the current challenges facing Vermont particularly around rising per pupil costs and declining student enrollment, Secretary Holcombe argues that investing in learning outside classroom hours and in summer is a way to address educational equality and close the achievement gap. She includes a slide in her presentation that asks: "Are we spending our money where it matters? Classes of 2-9 students or summer learning?"
- What Secretary Holcombe is pointing to is that we cannot address the academic achievement gap— something that leaders at all levels in Vermont have identified as a priority— without looking at gaps in opportunities during the out-of-school time:

I like to use the word "opportunity gap." There is nothing wrong with children who don't do as well in school except that, in my opinion, they haven't been given the same opportunities to learn. Certainly the

research shows that if we enable all children to have opportunities that are rich and diverse and that take place not just in the classroom but in hands-on, real-world problems, they can often do things we didn't think were possible. That's what [afterschool and summer learning programs] are all about. -Secretary Holcombe, February 2015