

Hello. My name is Sara Robertson-Ryan and I live in Fletcher, VT. Thank you so much to the Vermont House and Senate Appropriations Committees for holding this hearing and taking public testimony.

I would like to ask that the legislature fund the Expanded Learning Opportunities (ELO) Special Fund with an appropriation of \$2.5 million for Fiscal Year 2017. An annual appropriation of \$2.5 million would ensure all communities like mine in Vermont could get the financial support they need to make sure that children, youth, and families have access to quality afterschool and summer learning programs.

Many Vermont families like mine want access to expanded learning opportunities—including school-based afterschool programs, summer learning programs, YMCAs, vacation camps, and Boys & Girls Clubs—but access to these programs are limited, non-existent, or costs are prohibitive.

Currently, there are 21,000 K-12 kids enrolled in afterschool and more than 22,000 would like to participate in an afterschool program if one were available in their community. These are our communities. I choose to live in Franklin county because I want the space for my children to connect with nature and enjoy a small town community connection. What I also want is for my children to have a chance at expanded learning opportunities which are key to my children's success and for my working family.

I want a safe space where my soon to be kindergartner can continue his learning while both my husband and I are working. Since the school day doesn't span the length of a typical work day, after school care is essential.

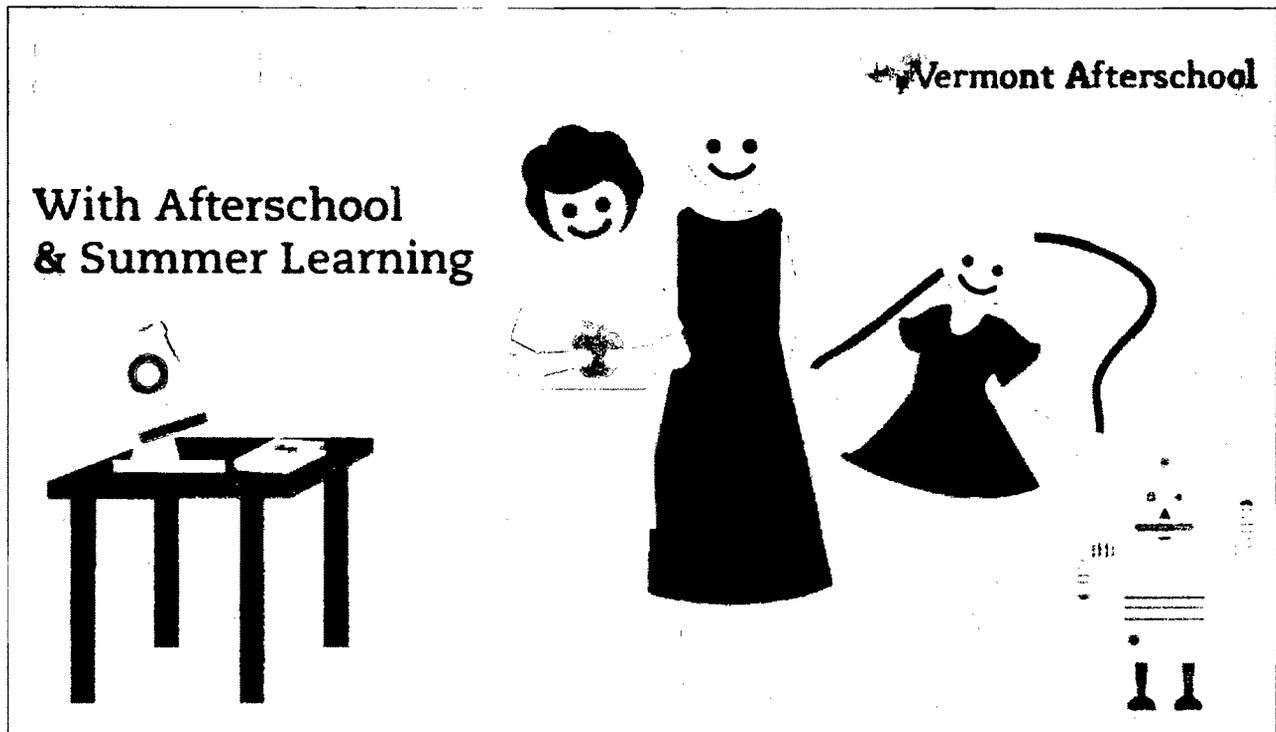
We know other Vermont parents are on board—according to a national study in 2014, 88% of Vermont parents support public funding of afterschool and summer learning opportunities.

For every \$1 spent on quality expanded learning opportunities, Vermont gets back \$2.18 in long-term savings from reduced criminal activity and substance abuse treatment, as well as accruing benefits from increased high school graduation rates and work productivity.

Additionally, you'll have families like my own *stay* in Vermont and in our current location because we have safe, essential, and beneficial opportunities for our children to excel and not to fall into the achievement gap.

I very much appreciate the legislature's support of education initiatives that happen in and out of school. I hope the Appropriations committees will make the financial commitment to support expanded learning opportunities for all kids in VT by allocating funds for the ELO Special Fund in FY17.

Thanks again, I am grateful for this opportunity.



SUPPORT STATE FUNDING OF \$2.5 MILLION IN THE EXPANDED LEARNING OPPORTUNITIES (ELO) SPECIAL FUND

Quality afterschool and summer learning programs keep kids safe & healthy, inspire learners, help working families, and support Vermont’s vision for education. Vermont has the lowest level of low-income children enrolled in afterschool in the entire nation. Help to **zap all the gaps**—the achievement gap, opportunity gap, geographic gap, and homework gap—by supporting a \$2.5 million appropriation to the ELO Special Fund.

Vermont currently has **no dedicated state funding** to ensure that **afterschool and summer learning programs are available and accessible to all.**

The **ELO Special Fund** was passed in 2015 as part of Act 48, which included language establishing a state fund for ELOs. The purpose of the ELO Special Fund is to expand access to programs that serve preK-12 children and youth outside the school day on a regular basis, including before and after school, school vacation weeks, and summer.

More than 21,000 Vermont K-12 youth are enrolled in afterschool, but 22,000+ are waiting for an available program.

An annual appropriation of \$2.5 million would help to ensure that **all high-need communities** in Vermont get the support they need to make sure that children, youth, and families have access to quality afterschool and summer learning programs.

Vermont Child Poverty Council Report December 2015

"The Council believes that improving access to high quality afterschool programming is essential to mitigate the achievement gap between students from low- and high-income families. It urges the committees of jurisdiction to investigate the link between high quality afterschool opportunities and academic achievement for students. The Council further requests that the General Assembly as a whole provide funding to the Expanded Learning Opportunity Special Fund to expand afterschool programs in all communities, and particularly those with a high percentage of students from low-income families."

Governor's Pathways From Poverty Council November 2015

"Provide all students with extended day or after school program opportunities. These programs allow for creativity and diversity in learning, incorporating the Common Core State Standards and addressing Personal Learning Plans, above and beyond current sports programs. They also provide homework assistance and after school snacks, necessary supports for some of our struggling students. It is recommended that school districts receive financial support to either create or continue with programs of this nature."

Vermont Early Childhood Alliance Agenda January 2016

"Quality afterschool and summer learning programs keep kids safe, inspire learners, and help working families. The Alliance supports Vermont Afterschool's "Zap the Gap" campaign to create a state appropriation for the Expanded Learning Opportunities Special Fund, which if funded can provide grants to increase access to these programs, particularly for low-income children and families."

PreK-16 Council Working Group on Expanded Learning Opportunities December 2015

"If eliminating the academic achievement gap, ensuring equity in educational opportunities, and fulfilling the vision of Vermont's Education Quality Standards are indeed priorities for the state, then it is critical that the Legislature and Administration take leadership with investment and action on this issue by following the recommendations [detailed in the report] and allocating state funding to work toward providing access to Expanded Learning Opportunities for the children and youth in every Vermont community."



Holly Morehouse, Executive Director
hollymorehouse@vermontafterschool.org
(802) 598-4005

Vermont Afterschool is a statewide nonprofit dedicated to supporting and sustaining innovative learning opportunities that extend beyond the school day for all Vermont's children and youth.