

## **Testimony for State of Vermont Budget Hearing (Williston, VT) Monday, February 15, 2016**

Hello, my name is Barbara Russ. I am an educator and live in South Burlington. I would like to thank the House and Senate Appropriations Committee for holding this hearing and taking public testimony.

I am testifying this evening to ask the legislature to fund the Expanded Learning Opportunities Special Fund with an appropriation of 2.5 million dollars for Fiscal Year 2017. An annual appropriation of \$2.5 million would ensure all high need communities 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.

We know that Expanded Learning Opportunities "zap the gap"--the achievement gap. Research shows that more consistent time spent in afterschool activities during the elementary years can close the achievement gap caused by income inequalities. Many Vermont families want access to expanded learning opportunities, but are not currently able to access them. Right now we have 21,000 grade K-12 students participating in afterschool programs throughout the state. There are more than 22,000 additional youth who could participate in afterschool programs if programs were available in their communities. According to a national study in 2014, 88% of Vermont parents support public funding of afterschool programs.

Expanded Learning Opportunities help working families by providing safe space where students can continue their learning while their parents are working. The hours of 3-6pm are the peak hours for unsupervised youth to commit crimes, be in car accidents, be victims of crime, or engage in risky behaviors.

As a retired 21<sup>st</sup> Century Community Learning Centers Afterschool and Summer Learning Program Director for the Winooski School District, I have seen first hand how expanded academic learning opportunities make a difference in the lives of students in grades K-12. Providing ongoing enrichment and academic support during the school year and summer resulted in academic progress continuing year round. In particular, students in grades K-5 being tutored by their school day classroom teachers, showed significant improvement in literacy and math skills. Offering afterschool and summer programs, this ensured that our children and youth were provided healthy snacks, lunches, and suppers. For many of these students the healthy snacks and meals they had at their summer programs were the only food they had access to each day.

I appreciate the administration's focus on learning initiatives both in and out of school, and I hope that the legislature will make the financial commitment to "zap the gap" by appropriating 2.5 million dollars for the ELO Special Fund.

Thank you again for this opportunity to share my experience and perspective. I appreciate the concern the legislature is showing for the needs of all of Vermont's children and families.

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