

Hello! My name is Jolanta Labejsza. I live in Rochester, Vermont and I am the Site ^{Director} ~~Coordinator~~ for Rochester Ex.C.E.L. Afterschool Program. 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 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.

Many families in my area want access to expanded learning opportunities—including school-based afterschool programs, summer learning programs and others but these same families and kids aren't able to do so mostly because of the cost. ~~Yes, they can apply for subsidy but often find themselves just over the minimum required and they need help. I have worked with families in my afterschool program who were denied subsidy and felt they needed to pull their children from the program.~~ ^{Some times enrolled their children but they} That decision hurts the children who love attending our enrichment programs, get help with their homework, make friends and are in a safe place instead of often having to go on a bus to an empty house.

Our town
only
appropriate:
1,000 toward
the afterschool

Expanded learning opportunities are key for working families by providing a safe space where students can continue their learning while their parents are working. In addition, afterschool and summer programs are places to get healthy snacks and meals, participate in fun physical activities, and engage more deeply in STEM topics. We know that Vermont parents are on board—according to a national study in 2014, 88% of Vermont parents support public funding of afterschool.

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.