

Hello, my name is Nicole Miller, from Roxbury, VT. I have been the director of the REACH! Afterschool & Summer Programs in Craftsbury, Hardwick and Wolcott for seven years.

I'd like to thank the Appropriations Committees for holding this hearing and listening to our thoughts about the budget.

I am asking the legislature to fund the Expanded Learning Opportunities Special Fund with an appropriation of \$2.5 million for Fiscal Year 2017. This amount could ensure that all communities that have been trying to get federal 21<sup>st</sup> Century Community Learning Center grants to provide expanded learning opportunities could get the supports they need to make sure the families and students in those communities have access to ELOs.

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. We routinely have a wait list for the programs in our district, and many of our programs fill within two days after being announced.

Students who are consistently involved in extracurricular activities are about 70% more likely to go to college than kids who only participate sometimes – and 400% more likely than kids who don't participate at all.

I know these programs make a difference. One of our youth has been in our program since she was in Kindergarten. Now in middle school, she and her mom talk about how much the program has affected her. Our program allows her mom to work, and her opportunity to think and create differently than she does in the classroom. She gets the academic support that she needs to complete her homework, and a healthy snack. Moreover, she has gained skills such as confidence, cooperation, critical thinking and problem solving. I can attest to the power of ELOs for myself, as the opportunities that I had as a youth significantly shaped who I am today.

I appreciate the legislature's focus on learning both in and out of school, and I hope that the Appropriations Committee will make a commitment to "zap the gap" by appropriating funds for the ELO Special Fund.

Thank you again.

Nicole Miller  
nmiller@ossu.org  
802-472-2523