

I am Thara Fuller from Putney. Thank you to the Shumlin administration team for setting up this forum for public comment. My request is to please make an appropriation to the Expanded Learning Opportunities Special Fund. A 2.5 million dollar appropriation to this fund for FY17 would be a powerful investment in closing the achievement gap for Vermont children—especially in our small rural communities.

I am the director Learning After School (L'AFTER), a network of afterschool and summer programs at schools within the Windham Central Supervisory Union, which runs along the Rte 30 corridor to small towns north of Brattleboro. For the six elementary schools and the high school we serve, L'AFTER is the only source for afterschool help with homework and for enrichment programs in math and science and career exploration. But our programs are in jeopardy for FY17. We are applying for renewal of 21c funds and there is not enough money to go around. Even if we succeed in earning the 21c funding, it will be at the expense of another group of children whose program will likely close. **There should not be winners and losers when it comes to educating Vermont's children.**

State funding for expanded learning opportunities could have a huge impact in two ways. One, it could save an existing high quality program from closing due to inability to raise the local match for federal funds. This is the case for our programs. We are at least \$50,000 short of the target for eligibility to apply for renewal of a 21c investment. **For lack of \$50,000 we could lose programs that serve 700 children and programs that have paid one million dollars in payroll over the last four years.**

The second impact of a state appropriation to expanded learning would be to support new programs in underserved areas. Supplementing the 21c revenues would mean that new and returning programs would not have to compete against each other for funds. There could be enough for all programs meeting the standards of high quality.

Afterschool and summer programs are not just important—they are critically important for building the economy of Vermont. If we want more people to be working, we must provide safe places for the children of working families between 3:00 and 6:00 pm. If we want all children to move on to college and careers—not just those in wealthy communities---then we must close the summer learning gap and make sure afterschool enrichment is affordable for all children. **Students participating in quality afterschool programs are 400% more likely to go to college than their peers who do not participate.** Vermont Afterschool has solid research that every dollar invested in expanded learning doubles in the value of its impact.

I appreciate the Governor's commitment to quality and equity in education. Thank you so much for considering this request to fund the Expanded Learning Opportunities Special Fund.