

Vermont Child Poverty Council Meeting

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Testimony- Holly Morehouse, Executive Director, Vermont Afterschool

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REQUEST

I'd like to ask the Council to include a recommendation in your report to fund the Expanded Learning Opportunities (ELO) Special Fund with an appropriation of \$2.5 million for Fiscal Year 2018. The ELO Special Fund was created in 2015, but no money has yet been allocated. An appropriation of \$2.5 million would help ensure that all high-needs communities in Vermont are able to provide access to quality Expanded Learning Opportunities for their children and youth.

BACKGROUND

On this council, you are asked to look at many difficult issues related to poverty: addiction, hunger, homelessness, the academic achievement gap, unemployment, mental health. While access to quality afterschool and summer learning programs won't solve all our problems, research tells us that without adequately addressing what is happening with our children and youth outside the school day and over the summer, we won't be able to make meaningful progress on some of our most critical issues affecting Vermont kids and families, most especially those living in poverty. Consider the following:

- (1) **Working Families.** Over 79% of Vermont children (ages 5-17) have all available parents in the work force. For working families there is often a gap of 15-25 hours per week when parents are working and children are out of school. This gap is even bigger during the summer months and school vacation weeks. The challenge of finding quality care is further increased when family resources are strapped.
- (2) **Income-based Academic Achievement Gap.** Studies have shown that where our students fall behind is not in the classroom but outside the school day and over the summer. In fact, up to 2/3 of the income-based academic achievement gap can be attributed to differences in summer learning opportunities.
- (3) **Access to Food.** In many schools, lunch is served at 11:30am or even earlier. The snacks and suppers provided during an afterschool program may be the only healthy food a child has access to until the next day. In summer, access to food is even more important.
- (4) **Addiction and Risky Behaviors.** The afterschool hours of 3-6pm are the peak hours for children and youth to engage in risky behaviors, experiment with alcohol and drugs, and commit crimes or be victims of crime. Right at the age where families try to save on childcare costs by having their 8, 10, or 12-year old stay home alone or perhaps even care for younger siblings, these risk factors are increasing.

The benefits of regular participation in afterschool and summer learning programs are many. Currently 22,000 children and youth in Vermont need access to programs. One of the biggest barriers in Vermont is program cost. While Vermont ranked 4th in the nation in 2014 for afterschool programming, in that same report we were 51st in the nation for the percentage of low-income children and youth participating in these programs (14% in VT compared to 45% nationally).

PROGRESS ON THE ELO SPECIAL FUND IN 2016

Thank you for your leadership on this issue and for making funding for the ELO Special Fund a priority in your annual report last year. With your report leading the way, we were able to see the following progress on the ELO Special Fund in 2016:

- The Governor's Pathways from Poverty Committee also included a recommendation for funding to all schools and districts in the state for afterschool programming (Nov/Dec 2015). <http://bit.ly/1OI8jvL>
- The Working Vermonters Caucus voted to send a letter to the House Appropriations committee asking that the committee include an appropriation of \$2.5 million for the ELO Special Fund. A second sign-on letter was circulated by Rep. Mrowicki collecting additional signatures from representatives not on the Working Vermonters Caucus.
- The House Education Committee wrote a letter to the House Appropriations Committee listing the ELO Special Fund as one of their top priorities and requesting \$1,000,000 in funding.
- The Senate Education Committee sent a letter to the Senate Appropriations Committee also supporting an appropriation to the ELO Special Fund.
- A number of strong statewide partners supported the efforts for funding in the ELO Special Fund, in particular Hunger Free Vermont, Voices for Vermont's Children, and Vermont's Early Childhood Alliance.

IN ADDITION: The McClure Foundation added a new funding priority in their competitive grant competition in 2016 to fund programs that "address the significant gap faced by secondary school students in many parts of the state in out-of-school and community-based learning opportunities that provide academic and career education" and the Vermont Community Foundation highlighted afterschool and summer learning programs as a place where philanthropists should focus funding. (<http://bit.ly/1OjC4gh>)

TRENDS ACROSS THE STATE

Quality Improvements. Over the last year, afterschool programs using the Youth Program Quality Assessment (YPQA) and improvement process showed measurable gains in program quality across all areas measured by the assessment tool. The largest areas of improvement coincided with those areas identified the previous year as needing the most attention.

Increased Summer Hours. Eighty-five percent of sites receiving 21st Century Community Learning Center (CCLC) grants in 2014-15 provided summer programming during the summer of 2014. Two-thirds of these sites (66%) operated for at least five weeks. This rate had been steadily increasing since 2009-10 when only 40% of summer sites operated for at least five weeks. (NOTE: The National Summer Learning Association recommends at least 6 weeks of summer programming to address the achievement gap.)

Unmet Demand. While over \$5.5 million per year in federal dollars helps to support afterschool and summer programs across Vermont, requests for funding under Vermont's 21st Century Community Learning Centers (CCLC) grant competition this past year once again exceeded available funding. Over the past few years, a number of communities lost funding in the competitive process (e.g., Grand Isle, Alburgh, Fairlee, Windsor, Putney, Danby, Bradford). Other high-need communities applied in recent competitions, but were not successful in winning grant awards (e.g., Milton, Barre).