

My name is Ginny Burley. I am on the Board of Vermont Afterschool, and I am here to advocate for funding for the ELO Special Fund. ELO, Expanded Learning Opportunities, includes before-school, afterschool, and summer programs for youth pre-K through high school. The fund was created in 2015 after two summer study groups established the need for financial support for expanded learning opportunities. It has yet to be funded. Currently, the block grant of federal 21<sup>st</sup> Century Community Learning Center funding, administered through the Vt. Agency of Education, is **the only public funding for ELO**. Vermont has no dedicated state funding to ensure that afterschool and summer learning programs are available and accessible to all.

These programs need to be accessible to all. Research shows that regular attendance at a quality afterschool program can eliminate the income-based achievement gap by fifth grade. Kids don't fall behind during school. They fall behind during afterschool and summer, when their opportunities are limited compared to their more affluent peers. Vermont has the worst record in the country in reaching low income children. Cost and geography are big reasons for this.

In Vermont, more than 21,000 K-12 youth are enrolled in afterschool, but 22,000 are waiting for an available program. Programs are not available for many reasons:

- There is no program nearby. This especially harms rural communities.
- The schedule does not work for some families (e.g. starts too late, ends too early) This is the origin of using the school bus as a morning program!
- **The cost is too high, even with childcare subsidies.** This is the biggest hindrance.
- A town/school is too small to qualify for the limited, competitive 21C grant funding.

When the program I started in 9 schools, K-12, in central Vermont in 2001 finished its 3-year federal grant, we faced the funding hurdle. Without the grant to subsidize the program, we raised prices – from 1-2 dollars a day to \$8-12. We licensed the elementary programs. Licensing and child care subsidies are not available for middle and high school programs. The subsidies expire at a child's 13<sup>th</sup> birthday. My decades of work in substance abuse prevention tell me that this is the worst time to send teenaged kids home alone for a couple of hours every day.

When we transitioned to a fee-for-service model, I had agonizing conversations with parents about their options. Many families could no longer afford to attend. Many families dropped the number of days they came – instead of every day, they came once or twice a week. The research shows that the benefits of ELO depend on dosage, so these cutbacks do harm. When the kids could not attend, families often went back to the pattern of having older kids care for younger kids. Alone. I have listened to a mom in tears describing how her older child called her at work to tell her that the younger one, using the couch as a trampoline, had crashed into the coffee table and knocked out a tooth. Even if all goes well at home, the anxiety is huge. And the kids are not getting the social support, exposure, opportunities, and learning that they deserve.

Yesterday, the President's budget was released. It eliminated all funding for the federal 21<sup>st</sup> Century Community Learning Centers grants. It's time for Vermont to put money in the fund to ensure that our youth continue to have these opportunities. ELO programs keep kids safe; support working families; and inspire learning. We cannot afford to lose them.