

OUT OF SCHOOL PROGRAMS

Children spend, on average, 1,000 hours a year in school but 5,000 in their communities and with their families.³⁰ How they spend this time can facilitate positive development and growth experiences or can place them at risk for negative outcomes. Growing income inequality impacts dramatically what out-of-school options are available to children. Higher income families have always spent more on enrichment activities like private tutors, music lessons, camps, and educational materials, but now spend nearly \$9,000 per child per year, or almost seven times more than their lower-income counterparts.³¹

Children born in 2001 are facing an achievement gap 30-40 percent larger than their parent's generation,³² and this growing inequity impacts not just success in school, but the likelihood that a student will graduate at all. Many experts point to the impact of after-school and summer programs specifically as a major factor in determining this gap.

Studies show that participation in summer and after-school programs can dramatically reduce achievement gaps: consistent participation in afterschool activities in elementary school can help close the gap in math achievement between low-income and high-income children by grade 5, reduce absences, and improve overall academic performance.³³ Unfortunately, many Vermonters do not have access to quality, affordable programs in their communities.

Vermont currently has 458 out-of-school time programs, including school-run programs, boys and girls clubs, and teen centers. While these programs serve over 21,000 children and youth across the state, an estimated 22,000 more would likely participate if a program were

available in their community.³⁴ Instead, 24 percent of Vermont's K-12 children are responsible for taking care of themselves after school.³⁵

Nearly 80 percent of Vermont children ages 6-17 have all available parents in the workforce. For most families, that means there is a gap of 15-25 hours per week when parents are still at work and children are out of school and need supervision, a need that increases during school vacations.³⁶ While out-of-school programs can help provide safe, healthy settings for kids during this time, many families report cost as a significant barrier. Vermont families who pay for their child's afterschool program spend on average nearly \$350 per month, but only 9 percent of families report receiving government assistance with the cost of their child's program.³⁷

The lack of access to quality out-of-school programming for low-income students is particularly disturbing because of the important role these programs play in providing healthy snacks and meals in the afternoons and during the critical summer months. While over 40 percent of Vermont students rely on free or reduced-price (FRL) meals during the school day, only 14 percent of afterschool participants in the state are FRL eligible. National participation rates for low-income students are much higher: 45 percent in 2014.³⁸ More than 1 in 6 children in the state live in households that are struggling to keep food on the table,³⁹ and research shows that children consume up to 50 percent of their daily calories in school.⁴⁰ After-school and summer programs are important interventions in fighting childhood hunger and can help reduce burdens on families that already struggle to make ends meet.⁴¹

We know that what children and youth are doing in the hours outside the classroom and over the summer plays a significant role in their future success. Afterschool and summer learning programs keep kids healthy and safe, inspire learners, and help working families. However, Vermont is faced with an opportunity gap where the types of experiences and programs that a student is able to participate in after school and over the summer depends largely on the level of their family's income and varies greatly from one community to the next.

If eliminating the achievement gap and providing equity in educational opportunities are indeed priorities for our state, then it is critical that we ensure that the children and youth in every Vermont community have access to the quality afterschool and summer learning opportunities.

-Holly Morehouse,
Executive Director
Vermont Afterschool

THE SUMMER SLIDE

Students across income brackets tend to return from summer vacation having lost math, spelling, and other foundational skills, but it is low-income students that experience the greatest loss. Low-income students lose more than two months of grade-level proficiency in reading achievement, while their middle-income peers make slight gains in reading level over the summer.⁴² Two-thirds of the ninth grade achievement gap in reading can be attributed to summer learning-loss,⁴³ widening the achievement gap before the school year even begins.

