

My name is Holly Morehouse, and I am the Executive Director of Vermont Afterschool, a statewide nonprofit. Thank you for your time and efforts to hear from so many different voices.

I'd like to ask the Appropriations Committees to fund the Expanded Learning Opportunities (ELO) Special Fund with an appropriation of \$2.5 million for Fiscal Year 2019. The legislature created the ELO Special Fund 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.

While access to afterschool and summer learning programs won't solve all our problems, research from across the nation, and experiences here in Vermont, tell 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 the most critical issues that we face today. Consider the following:

- Afterschool and summer learning programs allow parents and family members to hold jobs and be at work. They keep children safe, provide positive adult role models, and time to build strong, healthy relationships with peers.
- They help address childhood hunger by providing important access to healthy snacks and meals in the evenings and throughout the long weeks of summer.
- They engage students, offer help and remediation where needed, prevent summer learning loss, and are recognized as an essential strategy in addressing the academic achievement gap.
- Afterschool and summer learning programs are also an effective prevention strategy. Studies have shown that children and youth who participate on a regular basis are less likely to experiment with alcohol and drugs, get into trouble, or engage in other risky behaviors.
- Afterschool programs also create jobs, currently more than 5000 full and part time jobs across the state, including some of the only work experience available to high school students in VT's rural communities.
- Finally, many of Vermont's quality afterschool and summer programs place a strong emphasis on building skills in Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math (STEM)—all skills that are important to the future of VT's workforce.

Research shows that students who are consistently involved in extracurricular activities like afterschool programs are about 70 percent more likely to go to college than those who are not. At the same time, trends over the last 15 years show a widening gap between families of means and low-income families when it comes to spending on and participation in afterschool and summer enrichment activities. With the lowest percentage of low income children participating in afterschool programs in the nation, this opportunity gap exists here in Vermont and is in danger of getting even wider.

The request for \$2.5 million for the ELO Special Fund was arrived at with great care and intention and is based on two years of research by the ELO Working Group under Vermont's PreK-16 Council. An investment in the ELO Special Fund in FY19 is an investment in Vermont's children, youth, and families that is research-based, leverages other dollars, addresses key state concerns, targets those most in need, and supports a working Vermont- both now and in the future. Thank you for your consideration.