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TO: Chairman Sharpe and House Education Committee members
FROM: Jess DeCarolis, Division Director – Agency of Education
SUBJECT: 21st Century Community Learning Centers/H.270
DATE: April 17, 2018

Thank you for the opportunity to speak with you today. We appreciate this Committee’s shared belief in the power of after-school programs, and are hopeful that we will come to a resolution on the issue of H.270 and its latest iteration in S.257. The fact that this Committee has engaged so deeply on this issue speaks volumes to all stakeholders who care about out-of-school-time learning.

In January, we shared that as part of the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), 21CCLC dollars play a critical role in providing access and opportunity to high-quality educational programs for all students – but particularly for those most vulnerable to the consequence of economic hardship and poverty. By legislative design, 21CCLC-funded programs target under-served students and focus on activities that promote:

- college and career readiness,
- arts and **STEM exploration** and problem-solving,
- academic achievement and remediation,
- civic engagement and community involvement,
- foreign language development,
- interdisciplinary applications, and the list goes on.

I would like to take the opportunity to note here that the AOE, several years ago, made STEM a priority and engaged out contractor to incorporate STEM learning into its professional learning series. Additionally, I am delighted to share that the Agency has a STEM Coordinator on staff who collaborates frequently with our 21C State Director.

This 21CCLC focus on “access to a well-rounded education,” within the context of our public school system, can provide students— especially vulnerable students— with rich, creative and engaging opportunities to learn, while staving off summer learning losses and other challenges associated with limited opportunities. More importantly, by growing these programs through school-based community partnerships, out-of-school time learning can be integrated within the broader learning continuum and supported by additional community and district resources.

To put a number to these resources, on average we grant out \$5.7 million to SUs/SDs while they invest an additional \$6.6 million from other cash sources to achieve the outcomes that advocacy groups such as Vermont Afterschool cite – data collected from the AOE-run 21CCLC Program.

The AOE has consistently maintained that if the intent is to get more funds directly to the individuals who run, or compete to run, high-quality comprehensive programs that are academically and socially enriching then we have an existing mechanism to do that – the 21CCLC Program.

There is no need for the creation of an additional, parallel system that is, at best, duplicative of current work and would run the risk of the following:

- Spending money to maintain a committee that has no dollars to grant to the field
- Granting dollars, if generated, to untested programs that have not been vetted and may be unsustainable
- Pulling dollars that are already going to existing high-quality programs to populate a fund that will then re-distribute those dollars to new applicants
- Creating conflicts of interest, failures to meet quorum, and other bureaucratic entanglements that would derive from a committee that realistically will have vested interests in specific applicants, programs and or the direction of AOE work (e.g., we contract with Vermont Afterschool to provide professional learning, among other things, to 21C programs – can we be placed in the position where they then are directing where and how the AOE invests state dollars?)

Recently, James Brown, at the urging of Vermont Afterschool, offered to place a fellow at the Agency of Education, at \$100,000/year, to help administer a grant program. Unfortunately, Mr. Brown did not bring this generous offer to the Agency. In fact, this letter was never shared with the AOE, despite the fact that it was proposed to the Department of Labor, Agency of Human Services, and several legislative committees. If it had been, we could have shared with Mr. Brown directly the following:

- We have in Vermont an existing, highly effective program that supports Expanded Learning Opportunities statewide (e.g., 21st Century Community Learning Centers and the Flexible Pathways grants). If we had additional state dollars, we could immediately turn them around to fund proposals across the state, because demand for these dollars far outstrips supply.
- These programs have excellent outcomes and support diverse student needs due to the structure and purpose of the program. We can replicate and expand these student outcomes without creating any new duplicative administrative processes or bureaucracies by leveraging our existing grant and data-collection processes.
- If STEM Education Coalition and Vermont Afterschool are truly committed to expanding afterschool opportunities for Vermont students then we recommend that that money be invested directly in services to kids.

We so appreciate Mr. Brown's concern for Vermont students, and commend him for offering this generous gift. As the AOE is not equipped to receive gifts, we would recommend that these funds be used to populate the existing Vermont Expanded Learning Opportunities Special Fund created several years ago and, as we have detailed in our proposal, the Agency could invest in a high-quality, comprehensive 21 CCLC project right now – one vetted and approved through a rigorous peer review process -- that would serve Vermont students.