

**Testimony for State of Vermont Budget Hearing (Rutland, VT)
Monday, February 12, 2018**

Hello, my name is Barbara Russ. I am an educator and live in South Burlington. Thank you so much to the Appropriations Committee for holding this hearing and taking public testimony.

I am testifying this evening to ask the Appropriations Committee to fund the Expanded Learning Opportunities (ELO) Special Fund with an appropriation of 2.5 million dollars for fiscal year 2019. An annual appropriation of \$2.5 million would ensure all high needs communities in Vermont could get the financial support they need to make sure that children, youth, and families have access to quality afterschool and summer learning programs.

Expanded Learning Opportunities help families by providing safe spaces where their children can continue their learning while their parents are at work. They keep children safe, provide positive adult role models, and offer time to build strong, healthy relationships with peers.

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 risky behaviors.

As a retired 21st Century Community Learning Centers Afterschool and Summer Learning Program Director for the Winooski School District, I have seen first hand how expanded learning opportunities make a difference in the lives of students in grades K-12. Some examples: students in grades K-5 being tutored by their school day classroom teachers, showed significant improvement in literacy and math skills. Middle schoolers used math skills and learned how to use woodworking tools while completing a project of their choosing, and high school students

expressed themselves through their writing in Poetry Club. And for many of the K-8 students, the healthy snacks and meals they had at their summer programs were the only food they had access to each day.

Afterschool programs create jobs. Currently, there are 5000 full and part time jobs across the state, including some of the only work experience available to high school students in Vermont's rural communities.

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 Vermont's workforce.

An investment of \$2.5 million 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.

We know from research and from practice, that afterschool and summer learning programs are essential to the health, well-being, and future success of Vermont's children and youth. Thank you for your consideration.

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