

Hi—

My name is Cassie Willner. I am the communications manager for Vermont Afterschool. Which is a statewide nonprofit dedicated to supporting programs that work with youth during the out-of-school time hours. These programs include afterschool, before school, vacation camps, summer learning programs, YMCAs, and recreation departments that work with youth in grades K-12.

I think many of you here are familiar with afterschool and why it matters, so I'll just quickly remind you that afterschool programs:

Are essential for our working families in Vermont;

Inspire learners and can help reduce the achievement gap;

Keep kids safe and active;

And provide access to healthy meals and snacks.

There's something else I'd like to point out today in this testimony, and I want to try to help answer the question of WHY it's critical to fund afterschool programs in Vermont right now.

1) Whether in Barre or Shrewsbury, parents from across the state in urban and rural areas alike are struggling to find quality afterschool and summer care for their kids. According to a [national report in 2014](#), an estimated 22,000 youth across Vermont not in enrolled currently in an afterschool program would be likely to participate if a program were available in their community. Vermont also has the lowest percentage of low-income kids enrolled in afterschool and summer programs *in the entire nation*. This is not only a problem of access; it's an issue of equity.

2) The opportunity gap is widening. Every day. 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. One study found that high-income families in the US spend on average \$9000 per year per child on out-of-school time enrichment activities. And they do so because it makes sense; they recognize the value of this time and how important it is to their children's future success.

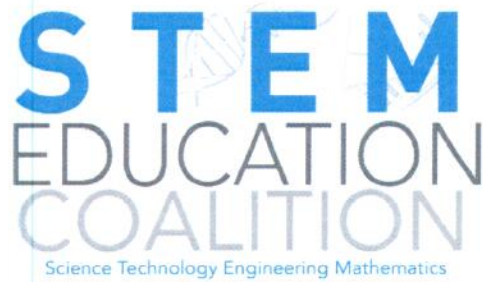
3) We have recently learned that national groups are committed to providing a fellow to help with the start-up for the Expanded Learning Opportunities Special Fund grant program, *if* Vermont allocates a significant state appropriation into the Fund for FY19. An appropriation of 2.5 million is the real need that would ensure all high-needs communities in Vermont have access to high quality afterschool programs, but we are hoping to get at least \$300,000 in the Expanded Learning Opportunities Special Fund for FY19 so that we can take advantage of this opportunity on the table RIGHT NOW to secure funding for a qualified fellow.

I hope you can see that this is a chance to shape a positive agenda for Vermont's children and youth. By investing in afterschool and summer learning programs we can help close the opportunity gap and put all students on a path to success. I appreciate the legislature's focus on some of our toughest issues and hope that you will make the financial commitment to "zap the gap" by appropriating funds for the ELO Special Fund in FY19. Thank you.

Cassie Willner

Vermont Afterschool, Inc.

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February 23, 2018

TO: Holly Morehouse
Executive Director, Vermont Afterschool, Inc.
123 Ethan Allen Ave, Dupont Hall #308-309
Colchester, VT 05446

FROM: James Brown
Executive Director, STEM Education Coalition
777 6th St NW, Suite 510
Washington, D.C. 20003

Dear Ms. Morehouse:

It has come to our attention that the Vermont legislature is considering H. 270, a bill concerning expanded learning opportunities. This bill would increase access to afterschool and summer learning programs for low-income students and youth in underserved areas of Vermont. It would also have a priority for science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) programming. It is our understanding that while there appears to be strong legislative support for H. 270, the Vermont Agency of Education has indicated that they are facing capacity issues to administer the proposed grant program.

With this in mind, and weighing the great positive impact that this bill could have on youth in Vermont, I am making a commitment to support your search to find and fund a qualified grant administrator should the law be enacted and sufficient funds become available.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "J. Brown III", is written over a light blue vertical line.

James Brown
Executive Director
STEM Education Coalition