

**Testimony for State of Vermont Budget Hearing (Winooski, VT)
Monday, February 13, 2017**

Hello, my name is Barbara Russ. I am an educator and live in South Burlington. I would like to thank the House and Senate Appropriations Committees for holding this hearing and taking public testimony.

I am testifying this evening to ask the legislature to fund the Expanded Learning Opportunities Special Fund with an appropriation of 2.5 million dollars for fiscal year 2018. An annual appropriation of \$2.5 million would ensure all high need 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 working families by providing safe spaces where students can continue their learning while their parents are working. The hours of 3-6pm are the peak hours for unsupervised youth to commit crimes, be in car accidents, be victims of crime, or engage in risky behaviors. Research shows that more consistent time spent in afterschool activities during the elementary years can close the achievement gap caused by income inequalities.

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 academic learning opportunities make a difference in the lives of students in grades K-12. In particular, students in grades K-5 being tutored by their school day classroom teachers, showed significant improvement in literacy and math skills. For many students the healthy snacks and meals they had at their summer programs were the only food they had access to each day.

The proposal in the Governor's Budget to level fund school board budgets could be very harmful for school-based afterschool and summer learning programs. Instead of cutting programs and services for kids, let's focus on supporting education initiatives that benefit all Vermont kids.

Governor Scott's proposal to promote more interest in science, technology, engineering and math (STEM) via grants is in direct alignment with afterschool and summer learning programs and could be included in the ELO Special Fund.

Thank you again for this opportunity to share my experience and perspective. I appreciate the concern the legislature is showing for the needs of all of Vermont's children and families.

Barbara Russ
4 Brownell Way
South Burlington, VT 05403
y.barbdean@gmail.com
802-864-8345 (Home) 802-734-7251 (Cell)