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Hello, my name is Christy Gallese, I am the Director of Expanded Learning Opportunities for the Burlington School District. In this role, I manage the afterschool and summer programs, grades K-12, serving over 1, 250 students annually. Our mission is to foster the social and academic success of Burlington youth through quality programming in an environment that creates lasting connections with peers, adults and the community. Our committed team works everyday to support students in achieving vital outcomes such as, increased academic performance, increased leadership and social skills, increased cultural and global awareness and the cultivation of a belief that they can make a difference in their community and world.

Our programs serve a very diverse and high need community. We are not only supporting working families, who value having a safe and supportive environment for their students to learn and thrive in but are also exposing students to new skills, career fields and allowing them to experience their community in new and meaningful ways. In addition, we work in close partnership with school day to accelerate learning, avoid the summer slide, support students personalized learning plans and strengthen students work in the classroom. Specifically regarding PLPs and Flexible Pathways our afterschool and summer programs are being utilized as a critical partner, resource, and connection for students in the middle schools and high school. We have aligned our programs to the Graduate Expectations, developed referral forms in order to support students in gathering evidence for the PLPs and GXs, and actively participate in the planning committees and professional development at each school regarding Act 77. We are excited that our programs are being viewed as a key component in a student's pathway to graduation and that the experiences and learning that occurs during out of school time now is valued and recognized as a part of student success.

In an ongoing effort to meet the needs of the Burlington community and families, our program works closely with the School District Homeless Liaison to support homeless children and families. Our Burlington Kids afterschool programs, operating at all of district elementary schools, reserve spaces for homeless students if the need for afterschool care arises. Regardless of program space, fees and wait lists, we work immediately with the Homeless Liaison and the family to provide same day afterschool care for children. In order to provide immediate care, we have worked closely with the Liaison, the schools and our Site Directors to provide scholarships for all homeless students to attend programming free of charge, minimize the amount of registration paperwork needed and have made accommodations in order to serve students coming to afterschool programs that may differ from their primary school day site in order to be closer to a shelter. We also work closely with our EL families, offering additional time afterschool for students to increase their language acquisition skills, collaborating with local community partners for the New Arrivals program in the summer, and through our Parent University program. The Parent University program provides parents (primarily New American families) with the opportunity to take classes that enrich, engage and empower them to become equal partners in their child's education.

As the NEA studies have shown, when parents are more engaged in their child's education, that student experiences more success.

A critical effort for our programs is increased capacity to meet the growing needs of our community and students. Each year we see wait lists of up to 25 families, per elementary school who need a place for their child in either summer or school year programs. This is consistent with other programs in the Burlington community. There is an urgent and critical need for every family to have access to quality after-school and summer learning programs, and funding the ELO Special Fund is a critical step in alleviating wait lists and providing more program opportunities for any student who needs it.

On a personal note, as a working parent, I can also attest to the need for more programs across communities in Vermont. With a daughter headed to Kindergarten next year, I am very concerned about the lack of options and high quality programs for her.

In closing, I have witnessed firsthand the benefits afterschool and summer programs have on students both personally and professionally. The ELO Special Fund will help us to continue to meet critical needs in the community, and support every student in accessing high quality afterschool and summer programs.