

Voices
for Vermont's Children



Voices for Vermont's Children Testimony to House Committee on Education
Regarding funding for the *Expanded Learning Opportunities Special Fund*
Carlen Finn, Executive Director
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Voices for Vermont's Children is an independent, children's policy research and advocacy non-profit. For 34 years, we have worked on behalf of kids of all ages by advocating during the Vermont legislative session; organizing and working in state and regional coalitions; and providing up-to-date information, policy briefs and fact sheets on issues important to children and families.

Our mission is to promote public policies that enhance the lives of children and youth in Vermont. We believe every child is entitled to a nurturing and responsive environment including enough nutritional food; safe and stable housing, personal safety; and access to high quality health care, public education and childcare. To that end, we prioritize the needs and concerns of Vermont's most vulnerable and disadvantaged children and youth. We seek to ensure that public policies address inequities so that all children thrive.

I. Child Poverty and School Meals Data:

See children in poverty fact sheet and school meals fact sheet

II. Income Inequality and our Schools

We know that income matters. The negative impacts of poverty and low-income are numerous and kids remain our poorest age group. Children's health and cognitive and emotional development can be compromised. Students from low-income families are more likely to score worse on standardized tests, are less likely to graduate on time and are less likely to reach college or career readiness.

But we also know that strong relationships between students and teachers matter are essential to student engagement and academic achievement and that parent and community involvement in schools increases equity. And we know that out-of-school time strongly impacts inequality and child wellbeing.

III. Afterschool and Summer Learning: See Out-of-school time section of Education report

The good news is that an investment in afterschool and summer learning programs goes a long way in mitigating the impacts of income inequality on students and their families.

Consider the following:

- **Academic achievement gap.** Studies have shown that where our students fall behind is not in the classroom but outside the school day and over the summer. In fact, up to 2/3 of the academic achievement gap can be attributed to differences in summer learning opportunities.
- **Working families.** Over 79% of Vermont children have all available parents in the work force. For working families there is often a gap of 15-25 hours per week when parents are working and children are out of school. This gap is even bigger during the summer months and school vacation weeks.
- **Prevention.** Data from law enforcement shows that the afterschool hours of 3-6pm are the peak hours for children and youth to engage in risky behaviors, experiment with alcohol and drugs, and commit crimes or be victims of crime. An analysis by the ELO Working Group under the PreK-16 Council found that every dollar invested in afterschool and summer learning programs can save Vermont tax payers \$2.18 in the future by reducing crime, drug abuse, and juvenile delinquency.
- **Hunger.** In many schools, lunch is served at 11:30am or even earlier. The snacks and suppers provided during an afterschool program may be the only healthy food a child has access to until the next day. In summer, access to food is even more important, and summer food sites reach many more kids when they are an integral part of a summer learning program than when they are a stand-alone meal site.
- **Currently 22,000 children and youth in Vermont need access to programs.** One of the biggest barriers in Vermont is program cost. While Vermont ranked 4th in the nation in 2014 for afterschool programming, in that same report we were 51st in the nation for the percentage of low-income children and youth participating in these programs (14% in VT compared to 45% nationally).

IV. Vermont Child Poverty Council

After considering the above cross-cutting and positive outcomes of afterschool and summer learning programs, you can see why the Vermont Child Poverty Council placed such a strong emphasis on funding the Expanded Learning Opportunities (ELO) Special Fund in its 2016 annual report to the legislature - the Council "requests that the General Assembly provide funding to the Expanded Learning Opportunities (ELO) Special Fund to expand access to afterschool and summer learning programs particularly in underserved areas of the State and in communities with a high percentage of students in families with low income." As a member of the VT Child Poverty Council I have enthusiastically supported the ELO Special Fund and understand that a substantial investment is required to significantly increase access to these programs.

V. \$2.5 million appropriation for the ELO Special Fund.

I appreciate that in 2015, the legislature recognized the value of expanded access to afterschool and summer learning programs and created the ELO Special Fund. However, no funds have yet been allocated. I want to recognize that last year this Committee recommended \$1 million in funding to House Appropriations – thank you. I hope that this committee will make an investment in afterschool and summer learning programs a priority again this year.

The \$2.5 million appropriation for the ELO Special Fund will support the following:

See HM ELO Special Fund graphic

- The creation and/or support of afterschool and summer learning programs in 218 Vermont communities, with an emphasis on communities with at least 50% poverty rate
- 8,711 students in these high-need communities participating in afterschool and summer learning programs on a regular basis
- 2,287 full and part-time jobs created to run the afterschool and summer learning programs
- 60 summer meals and 185 afterschool suppers served per student per year, plus healthy snacks
- 555 hours of programming per student over the school year and 240 hours of programming per student over the summer

The structure of the ELO Special Fund is expected to be such that the state investment of \$2.5 million would leverage other funding sources (including federal dollars, local contributions, participant fees, other grants, private donations, etc.) to reach communities throughout the state at the levels described above.