

Policy Agenda 2014:

Ensuring Access and Equity in Expanded Learning- Vermont's Afterschool and Summer Learning Programs

- **Vermont's Academic Achievement Gap.** One of the most critical education issues facing Vermont is the significant proficiency gap between students who live in poor and low-income households and those who do not. Students from poor and low-income households tend to score lower on both reading and math proficiency tests regardless of gender or grade level.
- **Importance of Summer Learning.** Studies show that students tend to lose about two months of grade level equivalency in mathematical skills over the summer. Low income students also lose ground in reading achievement. Research has shown that nationally up to two-thirds of the academic achievement gap between lower and higher income youth can be explained by unequal access to summer learning opportunities.
- **Importance of Afterschool Programs.** New studies demonstrate that more consistent time spent in afterschool activities during the elementary years is linked to narrowing the gap in math achievement at Grade 5. Income differences in math achievement were eliminated for students who had consistent afterschool activities across their Kindergarten to Grade 5 years.
- **Unequal Access.** The afterschool and summer learning opportunities that a Vermont child has access to vary greatly depending on family income and on what community they live in. For instance, 80% of public schools in Vermont offer summer programming, but less than half of these schools (45%) operate at the recommended level of five weeks or more. One-third of the schools that offer summer programming (32%) are open for only 1-3 hours per day for just a few weeks.
- **Inadequate Funding Models.** For schools providing additional hours of programming outside the school day and over the summer, current state funding models do not account for the additional programming in calculations of Average Daily Membership (ADM). Likewise, funding for afterschool and summer learning programs is not exempt from calculations of budget thresholds limits, in essence penalizing schools that try to offer student more time for learning.

Action Needed:

- 1) **Ensuring that conversations about state education funding include approaches to addressing the funding of afterschool and summer learning programs.** State funding models must account for schools and communities adding more time for learning in a way that ensures equitable access to educational opportunities for all of Vermont's children and youth.
- 2) **Including fields in statewide data systems for noting participation in expanded learning opportunities such as afterschool or summer learning programs.** Following examples in other states, these fields should be formatted so that level of participation (e.g., days or hours of participation) over time can be analyzed against indicators of student achievement (e.g., grades, standardized test scores, graduation rates, behavior referrals, absentee rates, etc.).
- 3) **Requesting that a legislative summer work group be formed to look at issues of equity and access with regards to afterschool and summer learning programs in Vermont.**

Additional Policy Items

Flexible Pathways

- **Ensuring that current efforts to expand flexible pathways and implement personalized learning plans promote and encourage the use of time outside the school day and partner with afterschool and summer learning programs to make this happen.** Working through afterschool and summer learning programs allows these initiatives to expand to all grades and provides even more flexibility in how and when opportunities are created.

Early Education (birth to Grade 3) and Child Care (ages 5-12)

- **Continuing and sustaining Vermont's investments in ensuring access to quality early care and education for all children through the early elementary grades and beyond.** The need for quality child care for working families does not stop when a child enters kindergarten, and quality afterschool and summer programs must be available in all communities. Afterschool programs provide essential supports in these early years, especially for children at risk of falling into the academic achievement gap. Opportunities this year include fully funding Vermont's Financial Assistance Program (CCFAP); providing annual quality differential payment to each provider Vermont's Step Ahead Recognition System; permanently dedicating \$100,000 of Vermont's Workforce Education and Training Fund to the early childhood and afterschool workforce; and increasing training for afterschool and summer program providers on the Common Core State Standards.

STEM

- **Forming a Statewide Task Force on STEM education that looks at programming and opportunities both during the school day and in the out-of-school time.** Vermont's afterschool and summer learning programs are uniquely positioned to help schools implement innovative approaches to teaching Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math (STEM). A State Level Task Force on STEM education would bring this issue to the forefront, challenge Vermont's educational community and partners, and spark innovation in the way students engage in STEM education.

Older Youth

- **Providing funding for schools and community organizations to offer more afterschool and summer opportunities for middle school and early high school youth.** Child care subsidy dollars stop when a child reaches his/her thirteenth birthday leaving a large gap in funding for programs serving Vermont's young adolescents. At no other time in their development, other than early childhood, do children and youth undergo such an intense period of physical, emotional, and mental growth as in adolescence. We know that it is important to provide engaging and relevant out-of-school time programming, healthy relationships with adult role models, and a focus on positive youth development for children and youth during these critical years.

Teen Centers

- **Reinstating and competitively awarding, through a grant or contract, state funding to provide professional development, evaluation and sustainability support, and other resources for Vermont's community-based teen centers.** Teen Centers in Vermont are often understaffed, underfunded, and under-regulated. Program standards vary widely and centers come in and out of existence seemingly overnight. Yet a viable, quality teen center can provide important supports and resources, as well as a safe place for youth to gather, grow, and develop important relationships with peers and caring adult leaders. State funding that used to go towards supporting Vermont's community-based teen centers was eliminated in recent years and should be reinstated and competitively awarded.