Testimony to the Elementary & Secondary Education Sub-Committee
of the Appropriations Committee
Governor's Budget Proposal – SDE
In Support of Funding for After School Programs
Submitted by Tracey Lay, Director, School Age Programs & Development Services
EDUCATION CONNECTION

March 1, 2011

Senator Harp, Representative Walker, Senator Andrew Maynard, Representative Andrew Fleishman, and Members of the Elementary & Secondary Education Sub-Committee of the Appropriations Committee:

My name is Tracey Lay. On behalf of EDUCATION CONNECTION, one of the 6 RESC's (Regional Educational Service Centers), I would like to testify on the Governor's proposed budget for the State Department of Education. I urge your support for continued funding for the state funded After School Grants.

I am the Director of School Age Programs and Development Services for EDUCATION CONNECTION. I am responsible for before & after school programs that operate at 10 school-based sites, serving 20 elementary and middle schools in 6 school districts throughout western Connecticut. Our program staff also provides enrichment services, professional development opportunities and consulting services to other agencies and school districts.

We have been fortunate to be one of the State Department of Education After School Grant recipients for the past three and a half years. More than 421 students and their families have benefited from this grant each year. Not only have the students received quality after school programming, but they have had access to a highly successful hands-on science and literacy curriculum. Families in need have received scholarships to attend the program for the first time and it has helped many students gain access to the after school programs that normally wouldn't have.

I am also currently the Vice-Chair of the Connecticut After School Network Board of Governors. The network is a statewide alliance representing parents and providers across the state. The Network's goal is to have high quality, affordable after school programs available to every Connecticut child and youth so that they grow up safe, healthy, educated, connected and employable. The Connecticut After School Network provides educational opportunities and support to over 1200 members, who are after school providers throughout Connecticut.

Most importantly I am the parent of 2 school age children and know how important quality after school programs can be to working families. Knowing our children are safe and well cared for in the hours after school is imperative for families, including mine. Studies show that work productivity is affected by this very issue. Productivity goes down after 3 p.m. when students are arriving home from school and parents are wondering where their children are and if they are safe. Investing in after school programs can help build productivity in the work place.

Representing EDUCATION CONNECTION and the Connecticut After School Network for the past 16 years, I have been actively working with other partners in the field of Out of School Time. I have been a member of the After School Advisory Council which is a group formed through the State Department of Education in partnership with the State Department of Social Services and the Commission on Children and other state agencies and stakeholders, to work as an advocacy advisory group to the Connecticut After School Network.

Connecticut continues to move forward as a visionary to other states in the field of After School, but we need your support to keep going. A lot has been accomplished, but there is much to do, and we don't want to lose the progress that has been made. Many communities in Connecticut, both urban and rural, are in dire need for quality after school programs. In these dismal economic times, families need quality after school programs more than ever. If we lose programs, the consequences to families and our communities could be detrimental.

In my various professional roles and as a parent I have personally experienced the positive outcomes after school programs can have on children and youth. I have seen firsthand, what the research shows; how after school programs can enhance the overall well-being of our children (emotionally, socially, physically, and academically). In addition to student success; there are numerous other benefits to investing in after school programs. Quality after school programs support working families, keep kids safe, and provide extra time for learning. They provide support to schools, communities and especially to our families in Connecticut. Also, due to these roles I have seen the down side to children and families that have not had access to quality after school care and it is not where we should be in a state that has shown such leadership in this field.

On behalf of EDUCATION CONNECTION and the Connecticut After School Network, I wholeheartedly support these efforts and appreciate your continued support of quality after school programs for the children and youth in Connecticut.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of this much needed program.

Respectfully submitted by,
Tracey Lay
Tracey Lay
Director, School Age Programs & Development Services
EDUCATION CONNECTION
&
Vice-Chair, Board of Governors
Connecticut After School Network

www.educationconnection.org
lay@educationconnection.org
EDUCATION CONNECTION, 355 Goshen Road, Litchfield, CT 06759
Phone: (860) 567-0863, Fax: (860) 567-3381

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