

Connecticut After School Network

Testimony to the Appropriations Committee In Support of Funding for After School Grants, After School Quality Enhancement, and Summer Learning Grants

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Submitted by Michelle Doucette Cunningham
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Good evening, Senator Bye, Representative Walker, and members of the Appropriations Committee. My name is Michelle Doucette Cunningham, and I am the Executive Director of the Connecticut After School Network, a statewide alliance representing the thousands of children, parents and staff who participate in after school and summer programs all across the state.

I am here this evening to urge you to expand funding for after school and summer programs for children and youth, in particular:

- ❖ Restore full **After School Grant** funding by adding \$3.9 million to the After School Grant line in the Department of Education budget.
- ❖ Reinstate **After School Quality Enhancement** by adding \$150,000 to the After School Quality Enhancement line in the Department of Education budget which was zeroed out in 2009.
- ❖ Create new **Summer Learning Grant** program by adding \$6.2 million to a new Summer Learning Grant line item in the Department of Education budget.

After School Grants

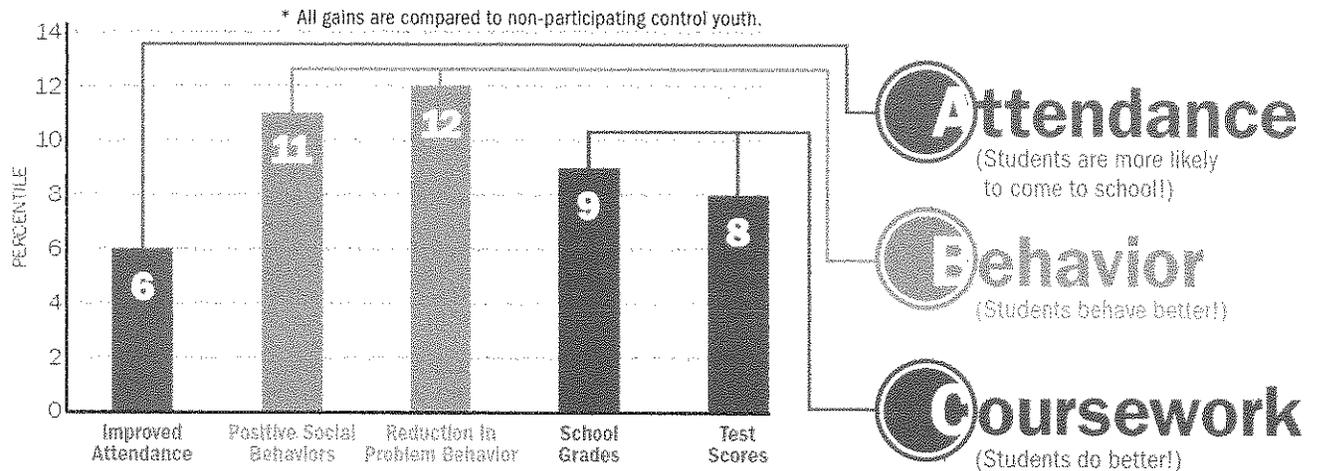
In 2013 CSDE began requiring programs to run for the full school year to better meet families' needs, which increased the maximum grant size from \$150,000 to \$200,000, but had the negative effect of reducing the number of grants from 40 in 2011-13 to 26 grants in 2013-15. The demand for these grants is tremendous, and there are three proposals for every one that is funded.

After school programs supported by this grant help working families, keep children safe, and improve student learning. Research shows that the program works -- the Results-Based Accountability (RBA) scorecard prepared by the Department each year shows that they are reaching their targeted participants and making a difference in the lives of young people.

Evaluation results of these grant-funded programs by the University of Connecticut demonstrate that program participants show significant CMT test score improvements in math and reading. The state-funded After School Grant Program is an excellent investment of our tax dollars and deserves substantially more funding so that more students and families can benefit.

Please note that the Governor's proposed budget moves \$563,286 from the Department of Social Services Before and After School funding into this line item. This is not new funding meant to expand programming, but rather a transfer of existing earmarks and contracts, and might be better moved to its own line within the SDE budget rather than combined with this one.

High quality afterschool programs are proven to accelerate student achievement:¹



¹ Durlak, J. A., & Weissberg, R. P., Pachan, Molly (2010). *A Meta-Analysis of After-School Programs That Seek to Promote Personal and Social Skills in Children and Adolescents*. <http://casel.org/wp-content/uploads/A-meta-analysis-of-after-school-programs-that-seek-to-promote-personal-and-social-skills-in-children-and-adolescents.pdf>.

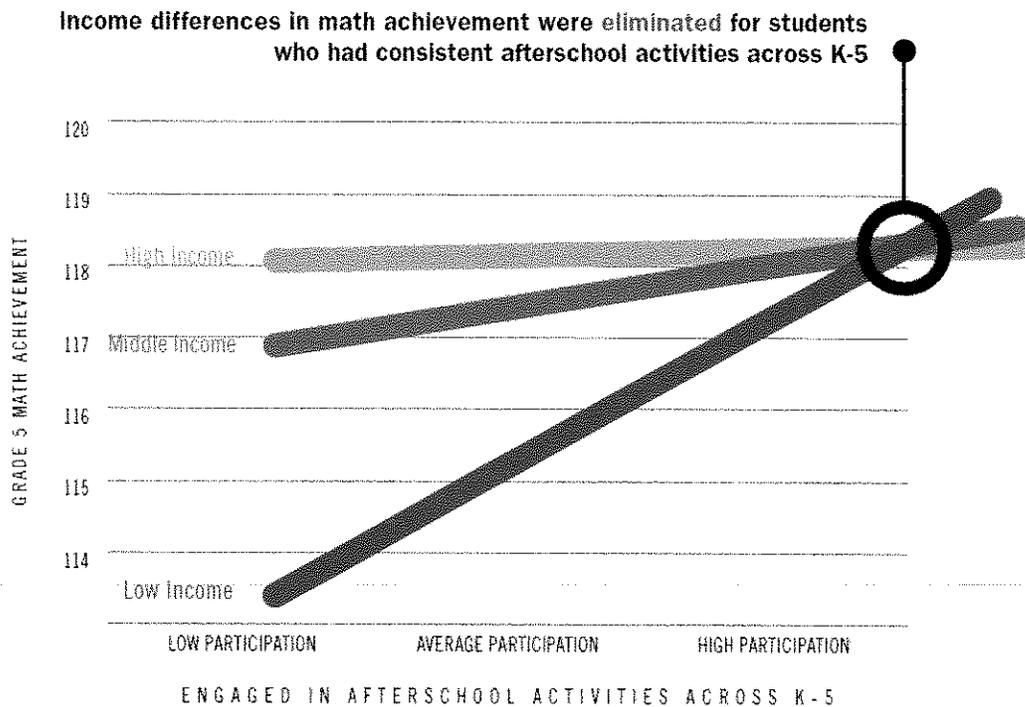
After School Quality Enhancement

Like child care provided for young children, after school programs, or school-age child care as it is sometimes known, need a broader infrastructure to support quality improvements system-wide. The \$150,000 in the After School Quality Enhancement line item was the only dedicated public funding source for these quality initiatives, yet the funding was zeroed out in 2009. If reinstated it would be used for improving the statewide infrastructure that support quality enhancements for after school and summer youth programs. In particular I would recommend that this funding be used to begin work on the creation of a state-level accreditation system for programs serving school-age children, since the National After School Association no longer does this work.

Summer Learning Grants

Summer learning loss is a major contributor to the state's achievement gap, and I urge you to expand funding for summer programs by creating a new competitive grant program to begin to address this need. \$6.2 million would provide thirty grants and support programming for more than six thousand children. The program we envision would allow Connecticut programs to replicate the successful BELL program, which started outside of Boston and has shown significant improvements in students reading and math levels. Specifically the types of programs we are hoping to fund with these grants would blend rigorous small-group academic instruction in reading and math with hands-on enrichment courses in science, technology, creative arts, and fitness and health. Based upon the successful After School Grant program, the programs would require collaborative community partnerships and would provide a minimum of 240 hours of programming.

After school and summer programs are one of the best tools in the state's arsenal for combatting the persistent achievement gap between high-income and low-income students. The latest national research by Deborah Vandell and her colleagues at University of California clearly shows that income differences in math achievement were eliminated for students who had consistent after-school activities across grades K-5 (see graph next page).



Pierce, K. M., Auger, A. and Vandell, D. L. (April, 2013). Narrowing the Achievement Gap: Consistency and Intensity of Structured Activities During Elementary School. Unpublished paper presented at the Society for Research in Child Development Biennial Meeting, Seattle, WA

In closing, I would like to quote Mindi Englart, a teacher in an After School Grant program at Co-Op High School:

*“As you well know, there is much gun violence in New Haven. Two years ago, my creative writing class decided to write and collect stories for a book commemorating people they had lost. We spoke frankly about the reasons people join gangs, commit crimes, and engage in violence. When I asked how grownups could help, the overwhelming answer was: Provide safe places for teenagers to be after school and in the evenings so they have a safe alternative to the pressures of the street. A former student who was shot by a gang member initiate came to talk to our class as we began to write our book. He said that as a theater major, rehearsals and shows gave him a legitimate excuse to use when gangs tried to engage him. He said he felt that **having a school-related place to go in the afternoons and evenings had literally saved his life.**”*

After school and summer learning programs supported by these grants keep young people safe, help working families, and help students succeed in school and in life. The benefits are clear and well-documented — please expand the state’s investment in these programs so that they can continue to deliver for Connecticut’s children and families. In so many ways these programs are truly life-savers. Thank you for allowing me to speak with you this evening.