



**Testimony to the Appropriations Committee
In Support of Funding for After School Programs
Submitted by Tracey Lay, Director, School Age Programs & Development Services
EDUCATION CONNECTION**

February 24, 2014

Senator Bye, Representative Walker and members of the Appropriations Committee:

My name is Tracey Lay. I am the Director of School Age Programs and Development Services for EDUCATION CONNECTION, one of the six RESC's (Regional Educational Service Centers). I would like to testify on behalf of after school programs. I urge your support for reinstatement of full funding of the state funded After School Grants and the After School Quality Enhancement line, as well as the creation of a new Summer Learning Grant Program.

I am responsible for before and after school programs that operate at 11 public school-based sites, serving 21 elementary, intermediate and middle schools in 6 districts throughout western Connecticut, including **Barkhamsted, Brookfield, New Hartford, Newtown, Torrington** and **Region 14 (Bethlehem & Woodbury)**. We also operate full day summer programs in 3 districts, including **Barkhamsted, Newtown** and **Torrington**. Our program staff also provides enrichment services, professional development opportunities and consulting services to other agencies and school districts in the out of school time field.

We have been fortunate to be one of the State Department of Education After School Grant recipients for the past six and a half years. More than 580 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 STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering & Math) and Literacy curriculum as well as a Physical Education and Nutrition component. 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 the opportunity.

I am also a long-time former member of the Board of Governors and current Task Force member of the Connecticut After School Network. The Network is a statewide alliance representing providers across the state. The Network's goal is to have high quality, affordable after school programs available to every state child and youth so that they grow up safe, healthy, educated, connected and employable. The CT After School Network provides educational opportunities and support to over 1200 members, who are after school providers throughout Connecticut. I strongly support the reinstatement of the After School Quality Enhancement funding of \$150,000 that in 2008 allowed the Network to provide statewide systems support for quality.

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 20 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 since its inception. The council 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. I also am the Facilitator of the Northwest CT Regional After School Network, which links after school programs throughout western CT for networking opportunities and shared trainings and resources.

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 and summer learning programs. In these difficult economic times, families need quality after school programs and summer learning programs more than ever. If we don't provide these programs, the consequences to families, schools 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 and summer learning programs for the children and youth in Connecticut.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of these much needed programs.

Respectfully submitted by,

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