

## Testimony to the Appropriations Committee In Support of Funding for After School Programs

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Good evening, Senator Bye, Representative Walker, and members of the Appropriations Committee.

My name is Tracey Madden-Hennessey I am the Associate Director of the YWCA New Britain and a representative of the Steering Committee for New Britain's Youth Network. I am here this evening in support of expanded funding for After School Programs. This includes reinstatement of full funding to the state after school grant; reinstatement of after school quality enhancement funds and the addition of funds for a new summer learning grant.

The need for after school and summer programs is particularly acute in cities like New Britain. New Britain is the now the fourth poorest city in the State according to the Connecticut Public Investment Community Index. Information from the Department of Education, Strategic School Profile indicates that the percentage of adults living in New Britain without a high school diploma is 33%. The drop-out rate for New Britain students is 25%, twice the state average. Dr. Beth Miller, a leading researcher in the after school field indicates (Critical Hours: After School Programs and Educational Success (2003)) after school programs can increase the likelihood of academic success, decrease engagement in "at risk" behaviors, increase self esteem, improve social skills, promote leadership skills, and act as a bridge between parents and schools. Yet, despite its benefits, in New Britain after school programs are only available to a fraction of students (about 1 in 4 students).

Local research substantiates what we have learned from national research, youth, particularly those "at risk," benefit from high quality after school programs. Longitudinal research conducted by American Savings Foundation found that students who participated regularly in New Britain after school programming were more likely than non-participating peers to graduate from high school on time.

The New Britain Youth Network, a coalition of more than 40 partners who support or provide after school and summer programs to New Britain children, are working like many other partners across the state to align our efforts to support children's academic development without replicating what is happening in the classroom but by providing complementary hands on programming that children find exciting and challenging. The Wallace Foundation, a leader in the field of out of school time programming indicates that "coordinated system-building work to improve access and quality in the after school field"<sup>1</sup> is necessary. Support of the legislature for this work supports success.

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<sup>1</sup> Bodilly, Susan J., et al; Hours of Opportunity: Lessons from Five Cities on Building Systems to Improve After School, Summer and Other Out of School Time Programs, v.1; Rand Education; 2010;  
<http://www.wallacefoundation.org/knowledge-center/after-school/key-research/Documents/Hours-of-Opportunity-1-Lessons-After-School-Summer-OST.pdf>

Over the past three years, the New Britain Youth Network and The Consolidated School District of New Britain collaborated on a summer pilot program which addresses a phenomenon common in poorer communities called Summer Learning Loss. Summer Learning Loss is the skill level loss experienced most acutely by low income students when they are unable to participate in enriching educational experiences during the summer. In New Britain, an analysis of children's skills in the spring and following fall documented that a high percentage of our children experienced this drop in skill level. A summer project was born from research indicating collaborative approaches outside of Connecticut were helping children avoid learning loss. In 2013, more than 200 students attended the Summer Enrichment Experience at Smalley Academy and another 69 attended a corresponding Roosevelt middle school program. On average, 195 students at the elementary level attended per day, of which 55 students had perfect attendance. Of those who completed the pre and post-test, 75-85% demonstrated gains in literacy skills. Of the students who attended the middle school program, 8 had previously attended the elementary program for at least one year. While students in the Roosevelt program averaged a 25% gain on the post-test scores, students who had prior experience at the elementary level showed a full 50% gain.

Feedback from students and parents shared their enthusiasm for the program:

*"She was looking forward to going every day. That's something very new in summer."*

*"What I enjoyed most about summer Academy is math because I need to learn more estimation."*

*"What I would like next year is to change nothing."*

The program has been recognized nationally and was recently presented as a model of effective programming at a National Summer Learning Association conference. Despite its stellar outcomes, it serves less than 10% of the city's students. In a district where less than a third of children read at grade level expanded opportunities like this are critical to children's academic success and could be replicated in other communities across the state. Legislative attention and expanded funding for summer programs has a positive implication for students in New Britain and those like them.

There are other documented benefits to out of school time programs, including:

- Its role in preventing student involvement in high risk behaviors. Children involved in after school programs are not home unsupervised and are less likely to become involved in crime, substance abuse, or sexual activity.
- Its contribution toward worker productivity. Polling data indicates that 87% of working moms say after school hours are when they are most concerned about their children's safety. This distraction leads to lower workplace productivity, higher employee turnover, and absenteeism. 80% of employees with children miss work because of childcare problems.<sup>2</sup>
- It's cost effectiveness. For every dollar invested in after school programs, tax payers are saved \$3, not including the savings from reduced crime.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Afterschool Alliance (2003); "After School Programs Help Working Families"

<sup>3</sup> Brown, et al; (2002) "The Costs and Benefits of After School Programs: The Estimated Effects of the After School Education and Safety Program of 2002;" The Rose Institute of Claremont-McKenna College.

Support for After School Programming is far reaching. The Institute for a Competitive Workforce and The U.S. Chamber of Commerce stated:

*As America continues to face critical talent shortages and continual budget deficits, afterschool programs are vital in ensuring our competitiveness globally. Offering a significant return on investment, these programs not only make communities a better, safer place to live and work, but they have the potential for making our nation stronger.<sup>4</sup>*

U. S. council for Mayors advocates for more after school opportunities for youth.

*The United States Conference of Mayors continues to support increased funding for after school programming, because of its vital importance to the education, recreation, and development of youth in cities across the country.<sup>5</sup>*

Investing in youth by supporting efforts that have demonstrated positive impact on their development is not only good for youth, but its good policy for Connecticut.

Thank you for your attention.

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<sup>4</sup> "The Need for After School Programs," Institute for A Competitive Workforce; United States Chamber of Commerce, 2010, <http://education.uschamber.com/sites/default/files/ICW%20Afterschool%20Talking%20Points.pdf>

<sup>5</sup> "Mayors Stand Behind Afterschool for All," Shannon Holmes, U.S. Mayor Newspaper, 11/22/04, [http://www.usmayors.org/usmayornewspaper/documents/11\\_22\\_04/afterschool.asp](http://www.usmayors.org/usmayornewspaper/documents/11_22_04/afterschool.asp)