



**Testimony to the Education Committee
In Support of Summer Learning Grants to Close the Achievement Gap (S.B. 476)
Submitted by Tracey Lay, Director, School Age Programs & Development Services
EDUCATION CONNECTION**

March 17, 2014

Senator Stillman, Representative Fleischmann and Members of the Education 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 out of school time and summer learning programs. I urge your support for the creation of a Summer Learning Grant Program.

I am responsible for full day summer programs in 3 districts, including **Barkhamsted, Newtown and Torrington**. In addition we operate before and after school programs located in 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)**. There is a significant need for summer learning programs in our region.

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. This grant has been an asset to our communities in western Connecticut, but has not allowed for the programming to continue throughout the summer months. This funding would enhance the students' hands-on learning in a fun, safe, enriching environment over the summer, helping prevent summer learning loss, which is known to add to the achievement gap.

I am also a long-time former member of the Board of Governors and current Task Force member of the Connecticut After School Network. 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. Throughout these various roles we have discussed and realized how important summer learning can be to our students, families and communities in Connecticut.

Most importantly I am the parent of 2 school age children and know how important quality summer programs can be to working families. Knowing our children are safe and well cared for in the summer hours is imperative for families, including mine. Studies show that work productivity is affected by this very issue. Investing in summer learning programs can help build productivity in the work place, as well as keeping children safe and help them continue their learning so they can start the new school year ready to continue learning.

Connecticut continues to move forward as a visionary to other states in the field of out of school time, but we need your support to keep going beyond the school year. 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 summer learning programs. In these difficult economic times, families need quality 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 summer programs can have on children and youth. I have seen firsthand, what the research shows; how quality summer learning 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 these programs. Quality summer learning 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.

On behalf of EDUCATION CONNECTION, I wholeheartedly support these efforts and appreciate your continued support of quality 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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