

CONNECTICUT AFTER SCHOOL NETWORK

Testimony to the Education Committee In Support of MINOR REVISIONS TO THE EDUCATION STATUTES (R. H.B. 7023)

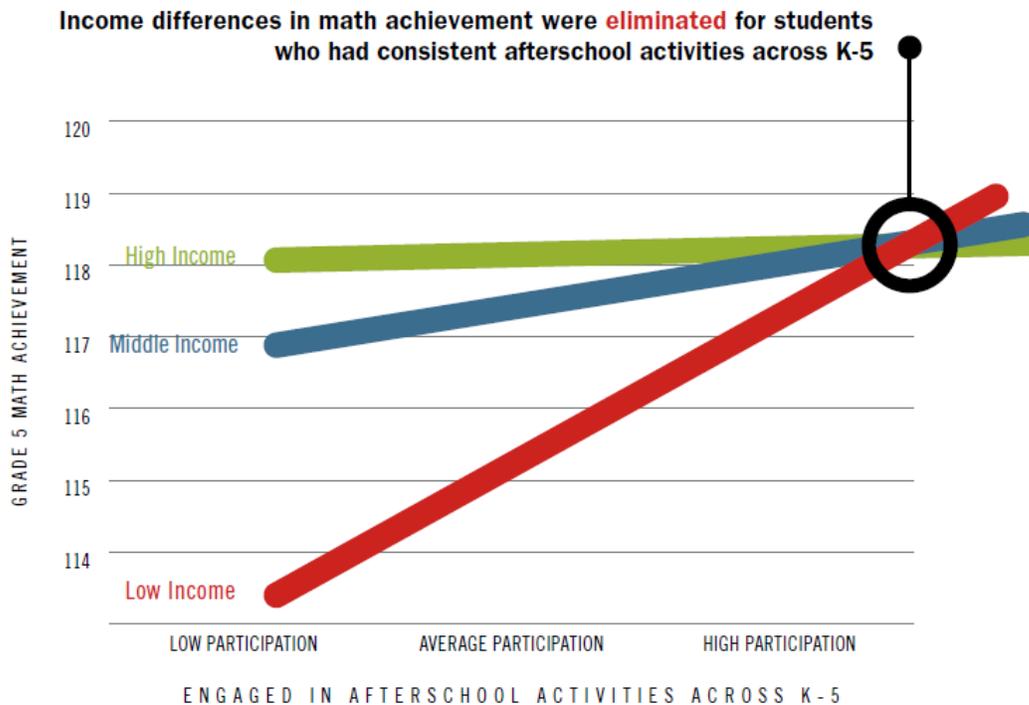
March 19, 2015

Submitted by Michelle Doucette Cunningham
Executive Director, Connecticut After School Network

Good afternoon, Senator Slossberg, Representative Fleischmann, and members of the Education 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 today to urge you to add language to Raised House Bill 7023, An Act Concerning Minor Revisions to the Education Statutes, in particular Section 12 concerning the Summer Learning Grant program in the Department of Education budget.

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 others 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.

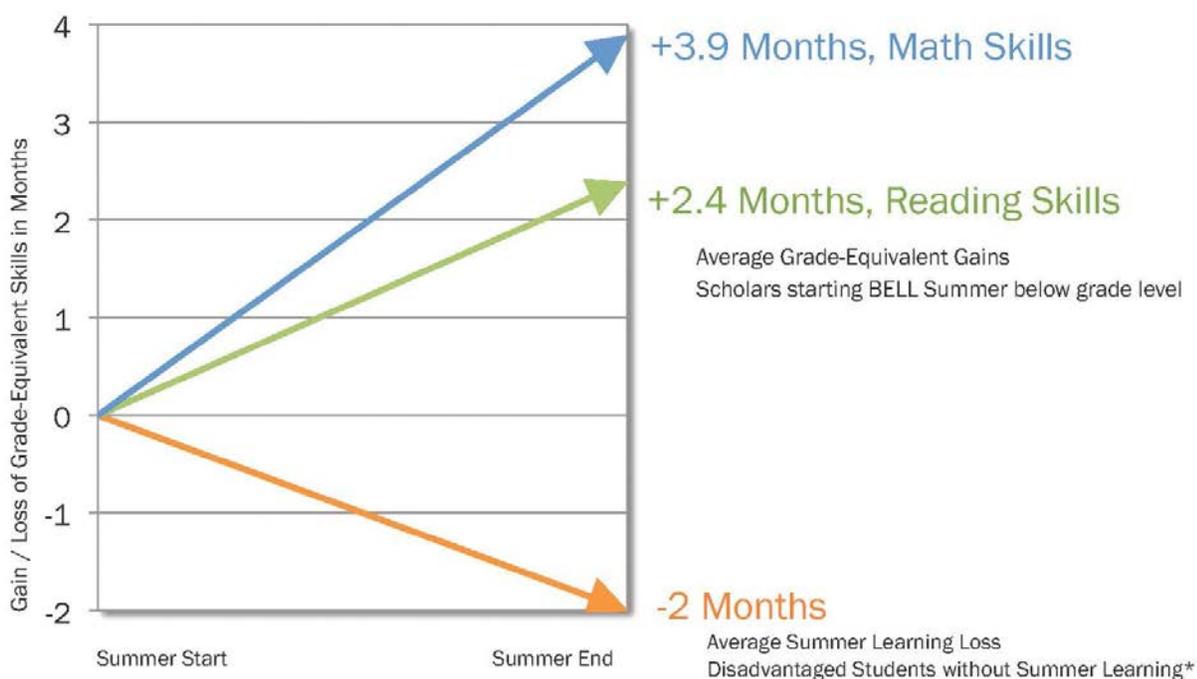


Pierce, K. M., Auger, A. and Vandell, D. L. (April, 2013). Narrowing the Achievement Gap: Consistency and Intensity of Structured Activities During Elementary School. Unpublished paper presented at the Society for Research in Child Development Biennial Meeting, Seattle, WA



Summer learning loss is a major contributor to the state’s achievement gap, and I urge you to expand summer programs by creating a new competitive grant program that would allow Connecticut programs to replicate the successful BELL (Building Educated Leaders for Life) model, which started outside of Boston and has shown significant improvements in students reading and math levels. Specifically the types of programs we are hoping SDE will 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.

AVERAGE SUMMER LEARNING GAINS OF UNDERPERFORMING SCHOLARS VS SUMMER LEARNING LOSS



* Sources: McCombs, et al. (2011). Making Summer Count: How Summer Programs Can Boost Children’s Learning. Rand Education & The Wallace Foundation; and Cooper, Harris (2003). Summer Learning Loss: The Problem & Some Solutions. ERIC Clearinghouse on Elementary and Early Childhood Education.

The BELL Summer program helps scholars gain academic skills. Most students - and disadvantaged students, in particular - lack access to structured summer learning opportunities and as a result experience "summer learning loss."

Because these Summer Learning Programs are community-based, they are significantly more cost effective than other possible solutions to address the achievement gap. The average cost for this type of summer program is between \$800 and \$1500 per student, \$3.33 - \$6.25 per hour, depending upon the level of in-kind services that are provided.

A typical day at a Summer Learning Program starts with a healthy breakfast and community-building events. Scholars then transition into classrooms, where certified teachers and trained teaching assistants lead small-group instruction in literacy and math. Staff use research-based curricula and apply data from computer adaptive assessments to differentiate instruction according to scholars' unique learning needs. After lunch, scholars rotate through a series of enrichment courses and activities focused on topics such as STEM (science, technology, engineering, and math), creative arts, and health & exercise. Examples of courses include robotics, digital music production, creative writing, drama, tennis, character development, and financial literacy.

While we are very much in favor of this bill, there is one addition to the language that would be essential if the program were to be implemented. Because after school programs cross fiscal years, with planning and marketing for programs starting in one fiscal year with implementation happening between June 20 and August 25 of the next fiscal year, it is essential that the Department of Education be explicitly allowed to award grants that can be assured funding for the entire implementation. I would suggest language similar to that included in H. B. 5016, for example **“permit a recipient of a grant under the summer learning competitive grant program to carry over any unspent grant funds into the next fiscal year, provided such recipient use such unspent funds in accordance with its original summer learning grant application.”**

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 we can address the achievement gap in a way that is truly cost effective.