

CONNECTICUT AFTER SCHOOL NETWORK

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

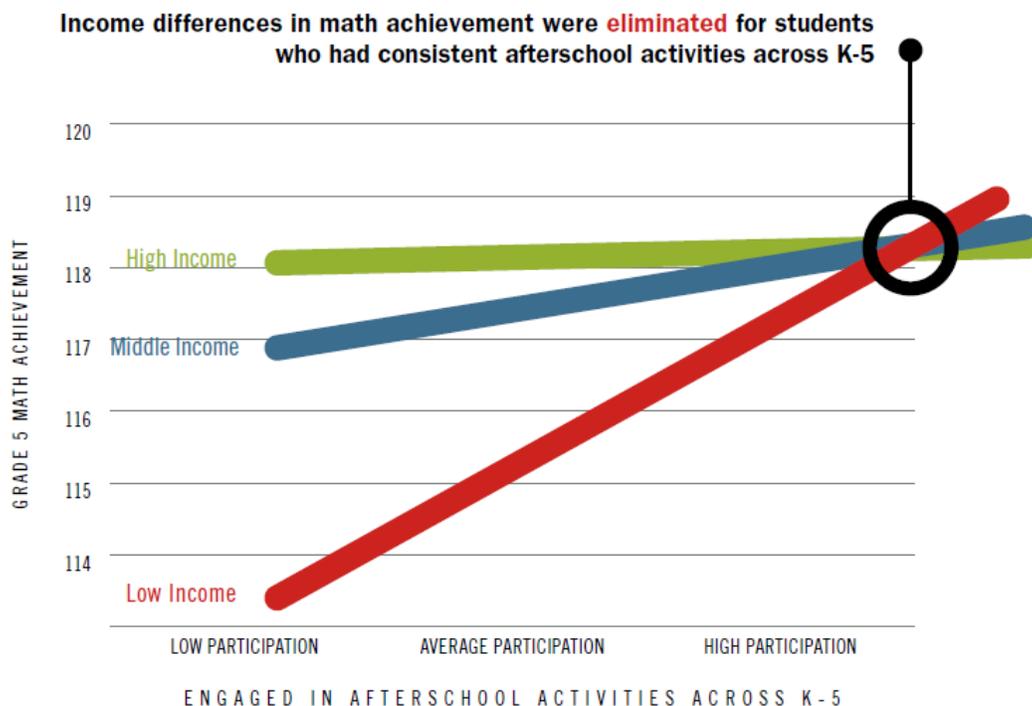
February 13, 2020

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

Good evening, Senator Osten, 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 maintain full funding for after school programs 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 her colleagues at University of California clearly shows that income differences in math achievement were eliminated for students who had consistent after-school



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 Unpublished paper presented at the Society for Research in Child Development Biennial Meeting, Seattle, WA



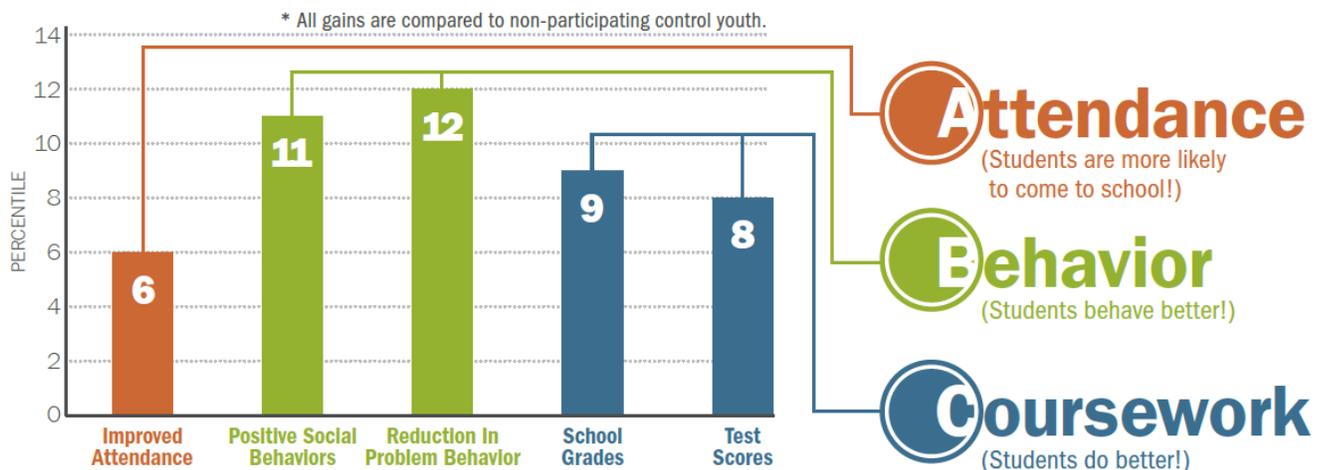
After School Grants

More than 5,000 children and their families depend on these programs every day after school. The \$5,720,695 in the SDE budget supports two-year grants which were awarded this fall and are now operating at 75 nonprofit, municipal and school sites in 28 towns and cities all around the state, including small towns like Scotland, Sprague and Barkhamsted, as well as multiple sites in the larger cities with an average grant amount of \$146,000. 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.

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>.

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.