

READY  
SET  
ADVOCATE



## A Communications & Advocacy Toolkit

# CONTENTS

---

<b>OVERVIEW</b>	<b>2</b>
Advocacy vs. Lobbying	
<b>KNOW THE FACTS</b>	<b>3-4</b>
Vermont and National Data	
<i>America After 3PM</i>	
Return on Investment	
<b>TALKING POINTS</b>	<b>5-6</b>
Why Afterschool Matters	
Opportunities for All	
Making the Case for Afterschool	
<b>BE PREPARED</b>	<b>7-8</b>
Practice Your Elevator Speech	
Create a One-Pager	
<b>TAKE ACTION</b>	<b>9-10</b>
Talk to Policy Makers	
Be a Champion	
<b>PUBLISH</b>	<b>11-12</b>
Write a Letter to the Editor	
Write an Opinion Article	
<b>RESOURCES</b>	<b>13</b>
Endnotes	



Vermont Afterschool is a public-private statewide partnership dedicated to supporting and sustaining innovative learning opportunities that extend beyond the school day for all Vermont's children and youth. Our activities are directed toward increasing the quality and availability of education programs during non-school hours, and our mission is to:

Support organizations in providing quality afterschool, summer, and expanded learning experiences so that Vermont's children and youth have the opportunities, skills, and resources they need to become healthy, productive members of society.

**Published February 2015**

**[www.vermontafterschool.org](http://www.vermontafterschool.org)**

Afterschool providers are the frontline advocates for the many services their programs provides for children, families and communities. This toolkit will serve a guide and resource for afterschool leaders and staff who are looking to take action, communicate about their programs, and connect with policy makers.

## Are Nonprofits and School-Based Programs Allowed to Advocate?

The answer is yes! Advocacy is defined as any action that speaks in favor of, recommends, argues for a cause, supports or defends, or pleads on behalf of others. Examples include:

- Speaking out on issues of concern to the public or special audiences;
- Testifying at a hearing, writing a letter to the editor, communicating with government officials;
- Telling your member of Congress how a federal grant (i.e. 21C funding) your organization received has helped your community;
- Inviting a legislator to visit your program so s/he can see how federal policy (i.e. 21C funding) or local community partnerships help the youth served and the difference it makes.

## What's the Difference Between Advocacy and Lobbying?

Lobbying is an attempt to influence specific legislative action (i.e. bills, acts, ballot measures). Examples include:

- Communicating with any legislator or administrative official for the purpose of influencing legislative or administrative action;
- Inviting elected officials to an event in support of a specific piece of legislation;
- Asking your community members to call their legislators in support or opposition of a specific piece of legislation.

## Who can lobby?

Many people believe that nonprofits organizations are not allowed to lobby or advocate. This is not true! What is true is that there are limits on how much a nonprofit can spend on lobbying. It is important to note that **organizations cannot use federal funds to lobby** at the state or local level and **cannot support or endorse candidates**. See this IRS site for guidance:

<http://www.irs.gov/Charities-&-Non-Profits/Lobbying>

Any person or organization has the right to advocate on behalf of policies they believe in.

Additionally, any person has the right to talk to legislators or other policy makers and to try to influence policy on his/her own time.

# KNOW THE FACTS

Do your research and learn the facts to inform your messaging. This program data<sup>1</sup> is for you to use in any of your communications materials and is important in establishing context within the larger picture of what's happening in Vermont. Afterschool programs in Vermont consist of:

- 458 out-of-school time programs exist in Vermont, serving over 21,000 (24%) children and youth
- 264 Licensed School Age Care Programs
- 149 21st Century Community Learning Center Sites
- 21 Boys and Girls Club Sites
- 43 YMCA Program Sites
- 35 Teen Centers

\*These numbers are not mutually exclusive

## **America After 3PM Report**

The 2014 nationwide report *America After 3PM* ranked Vermont as 4th in the nation for afterschool programming. The *America After 3PM* report highlighted the progress Vermont has made in providing quality afterschool programs while also documenting a growing need in our state. Key findings include:

24% (21,690) of Vermont's K-12 children are responsible for taking care of themselves after school. These children spend an average of 8 hours per week unsupervised after school.

33% (22,000) of Vermont's K-12 children not enrolled currently in an afterschool program would be likely to participate if a program were available in their community.

24% (21,690) of Vermont's K-12 children participate in afterschool programs. On average, afterschool participants spend 8 hours per week in afterschool programs.

95% of Vermont parents are satisfied with the afterschool program their child attends.

79% of adults surveyed agree that afterschool programs help working parents keep their jobs.

88% of Vermont parents surveyed support public funding for afterschool programs.

Additional information is available at <http://afterschoolalliance.org/AA3PM>.

## **Return on Investment**

Providing quality expanded learning opportunities for children and youth pays off in the long run:

For every \$1 invested in quality expanded learning programs, Vermont gets back \$2.18 through long-term savings and benefits.<sup>2</sup>

Research shows that quality afterschool programs can reduce chronic absenteeism in school, which has been associated with reducing student dropout rates. In doing so, afterschool programs contribute to increased societal gains from graduates' taxable earnings AND increased societal savings by preventing juvenile and adult incarceration.

To learn more about the methodology and calculations behind our ROI analysis, see this link: <http://bit.ly/1zqTHp0>.



## Afterschool in America

Participation in afterschool programs across the country has consistently increased over the past 10 years, rising by nearly 2 million children in the last five years alone. In 2014, nearly one-quarter of families and 18 percent of children rely on afterschool programs to provide a safe and supportive environment, inspire learning, and fill the gap between when the school day ends and when the workday ends. Here's some key findings on national data from the *America After 3PM* report:

10.2 million children (18 percent) participated in an afterschool program in 2014, an increase from 2009 (8.4 million; 15 percent) and 2004 (6.5 million; 11 percent).

Nearly 1 in 4 families (23 percent) currently has a child enrolled in an afterschool program.

While participation in afterschool programs has increased, the unmet demand for afterschool continues to rise. More than 2 in 5 children (41 percent)—19.4 million—would participate if programs were available.

11.3 million (20%) children and youth are unsupervised after school for an average of 7.34 hours per week.

On school days, the hours between 3 p.m. and 6 p.m. are the peak hours for youth to commit crimes, be in or cause an automobile accident, be victims of crime, smoke, drink alcohol, or use drugs.<sup>3</sup>

Teens who do not participate in structured activities after school are nearly three times more likely to skip classes at school, experiment with drugs, and engage in sexual activity than teens who do participate.<sup>4</sup>

45% of children and youth in afterschool programs qualify for the Federal Free or Reduced Lunch Program.

The average amount parents spend per week on afterschool programs across the nation is \$114.



# TALKING POINTS

## General Talking Points

Research shows that afterschool and summer learning programs offer a range of valuable benefits:

### INSPIRE LEARNERS

Afterschool and summer programs are real solutions linked to closing the academic achievement gap and accelerating learning gains.<sup>5</sup>

### HELP FOR WORKING FAMILIES

For most families there is a gap of 15-25 hours per week when parents are still at work and children are out of school and need supervision.<sup>6</sup>

### KEEP KIDS SAFE & HEALTHY

Participants are less likely to become involved in criminal activities, more likely to stay in school, see increased physical activity, and very likely to receive nutritious snacks and meals.<sup>7</sup>

### SUPPORT VERMONT'S VISION FOR EDUCATION

Project-based, service learning, and STEM programs cultivate career awareness, build 21st century skills, and support personalized learning plans.<sup>8</sup>

## Why Afterschool Matters in Vermont

Every child in Vermont deserves a great education, regardless of background, income, or ZIP code. Schools can't do it alone. Youth spend only 20% of their waking hours in school. How they invest the other 80% is worth our attention, especially for youth living in under-resourced communities.

"Afterschool," also known as expanded learning opportunities (ELOs) or out-of-school time (OST) programs, refer to programs and activities that happen before school, after school, over school breaks, and during the summer months for K-12 children and youth. These programs reimagine how, where, and when our young people learn.

## Opportunities for All

Afterschool and summer learning programs can add 1,080 hours of academic enrichment to a child's year, equivalent to the number of hours in 144 school days. Yet, access is not equal. Low-income youth experience 6,000 fewer hours of enrichment and learning opportunities than their more affluent peers by the eighth grade.<sup>9</sup> Afterschool and summer learning programs are a way to address and overcome this opportunity gap.

For many kids these programs are also their best chance to get a healthy meal, complete homework, and be in a safe place. Afterschool programs also help the students who need the most support: those who are underrepresented and underserved, particularly in 21st Century Community Learning Centers where 73% of regular attendees receive free/reduced lunch.<sup>10</sup>

## Making the Case for Afterschool

When crafting your message around afterschool, you need to be prepared with talking points to defend your message against criticism, naysayers, and confusion. These responses, created and published by the Afterschool Alliance, outline responses to common statements made by those who either doubt or are unaware of the overwhelming benefits of afterschool programs. The responses listed below can be infused with your own local stories and data to resonate even further.

***“We can’t afford to pay for afterschool.”***

**Reply:** We can’t afford not to. If a youth falls into a life of crime, society will pay a tab of roughly \$1.5 million over his or her lifetime. Quality afterschool has been proven to deter youth from risky behaviors and offer an safe, positive alternatives. Data shows that for every \$1 invested in quality afterschool and summer learning programs, Vermont sees a return on investment (ROI) of \$2.18. This investment pay off over the long-run by keeping kids safe, helping them succeed and graduate, and reducing incarceration and crime rates over the years.

***“There’s no way taxpayers are willing to spend public money on afterschool programs.”***

**Reply:** Recent data tells us the exact opposite. Here in Vermont, 88% of parents surveyed in the 2014 *American After 3PM* report support public funding for afterschool programs. Nationwide, we see that nine in 10 Americans think that afterschool programs are important. When programs fold, take budget cuts, or can’t accommodate the growing needs of children seeking afterschool care, working families in our community suffer.

***“It’s the parents’ responsibility to see that their kids have adequate care.”***

**Reply:** What happens outside of the regular school day matters – it matters a lot. And unfortunately, adequate care during out-of-school time hours is not something always available in every community. Kids need to be somewhere doing something during the hours, days, and weeks when school isn’t in session – and the difference between what higher income kids and lower income kids experience during those times is drastic. Many parents are stretched to the limit and not able to find reasonable, affordable solutions. Expanded learning opportunities--and all the accompanied learning benefits--need to be accessible and available to every student regardless of income.

***“Afterschool programs are basically babysitting programs.”***

**Reply:** Afterschool is so much more than putting kids in a gym from 3 to 5 p.m. and giving them a bunch of balls to bounce around. Numerous formal studies demonstrate the value of expanded learning programs. These studies prove that afterschool, summer, and out-of-school time programs keep kids safe, help working families, and improve academic achievement. For example, new studies demonstrate that more consistent time spent in afterschool activities during the elementary years is linked to narrowing the academic achievement gap. In a recent longitudinal study, income differences in math achievement were eliminated for students who had consistent afterschool activities across their Kindergarten to fifth grade years.<sup>11</sup> Afterschool and summer learning programs have become a place for flexible and fun learning to happen.

# BE PREPARED

## Know Your Legislators

Identifying who your legislators are and developing relationships with them is a critical step in advocating for your program. Use annual events--Vermont Afterschool & Summer Learning Day and Lights On Afterschool--to talk with your legislators and invite them to visit your program. For a listing of Vermont legislators:

<http://legislature.vermont.gov/people/>

## Practice Your Elevator Speech

An “elevator speech” is a short statement of your mission, goals, and needs that could be delivered for the duration of an elevator ride. In other words, it’s a short and sweet pitch that gets right to the point if you only have a minute or two to talk! Your general script should address:

1. Why are afterschool programs important for kids and communities?
2. How does your program address these needs?
3. What does your program do to affect change?
4. What does your program need to be successful?

Focus on the strengths of your program in the community and have a personal anecdote ready to share but also be willing to say what your needs are in order to achieve further success. Sample elevator scripts can be found here:

<http://www.vermontafterschool.org/advocacy/toolkit/#speech>

## Create a One-Pager

A program profile is a one-page handout that can be used with your elected officials, policy makers, potential funders, supporters, parents, and educators. Above all, the one-pager should be current and easy to read. Bullet points are best! High quality images of youth are also extremely powerful. Tips, templates (downloadable Word and Microsoft Publisher documents), and examples for creating one-page profiles can be found here:

<http://www.vermontafterschool.org/advocacy/toolkit/#templates>





## One-Pager Profile Sample Template

Template to download:  
<http://www.vermontafterschool.org/advocacy/toolkit/#templates>

### Program Name

#### Our vision and goals . . .

*Include vision statement, specific program goals and/or sites at which the program operates.*

*Insert photo of youth*

Caption for photo

#### Program highlights . . .

- Number of children and youth served
- Age/ grade level served
- Number of low income children served
- Types of programs offered
- Program examples of *engaged learning, school/ community partnerships, and family engagement*
- Positive outcomes seen within program
- Community partnerships supporting program

#### Our funding . . .

Statement around funding sources currently supporting program. Include information pertaining to unmet need within the community (i.e. children on a waiting list) if applicable.

*Insert pie chart of funding sources*

*Insert program logo here, if applicable*

Program Name  
Street Address • Town, Vermont Zip  
802-\_\_\_\_-\_\_\_\_  
website address and/or general email address



# TAKE ACTION

## Talk to Policy Makers

Once you have learned who your representatives and local leaders are, the most effective way to influence them is to get to know them and their staff members personally. You can schedule a meeting to discuss a particular piece of legislation (note that it's not lobbying until you try to influence him/her to vote a certain way) or educate him/her about why afterschool is important in your local community.

### **Schedule in advance**

Write, email, or call the legislator to request a meeting. When the Legislature is in session, you can also call the State House Sargeant-at-Arms office to leave a message (802-828-2228).

### **Come prepared**

Prepare an agenda with two or three important items to share and bring talking points with you. Explain why you requested the meeting and attempt to answer the "So what?" question. The most important thing you can do is share your own experience with the legislator or staff person, so be ready with a personal story.

### **Introductions**

Identify yourself, who/what you represent, where you live, and what your organization does. You can reference your one-pager if you have brought one. Be friendly and try to find common ground.

### **Know their background**

You will be able to tailor your message depending on his/her interests. If your senator serves on the appropriations committee, target your talking points to fiscal responsibility and return on investment. If your city councilor works in mental health, target your talking points to how afterschool programs support healthy behaviors. Your goal is to make the case as to why they should care about afterschool.

### **Stay on message**

This is where that elevator speech comes into play! It's your job to stay on message and keep the meeting focused on your issue and agenda items.

### **Don't be intimidated - you are the expert of your own community**

Especially when it comes to powerful stories about kids and families.

### **Leave something behind**

This is where that one-page profile will prove to be beneficial. Other items include fact sheets, photos, newspaper articles, and stories/messages from kids.

### **Be respectful**

Write or email a very simple "thank you for your time" immediately. This is important, don't forget. Follow-up with any information you promised to send or additional materials to support your position.

### **Extend the invitation**

Do invite him/her to visit your program!

## Be a Champion

Here are ten things you can do as an individual to be a champion for afterschool in Vermont. Always refer to the key talking points: **afterschool programs help working families, keep kids safe, and inspire learners.**

- 1. LETTER** - Write a letter to an elected official or decision maker.
- 2. E-MAIL** - Send an e-mail to an elected official or decision maker.
- 3. CALL** - Make a phone call to an elected official or decision maker.
- 4. MEET** - Ask for an appointment for an in-person meeting.
- 5. LETTER TO THE EDITOR** - Submit a letter to the editor (in response to a story, an editorial, town meeting day, budget cuts, or just about afterschool as an issue that should be in the news).
- 6. OPINION EDITORIAL** - Write an opinion editorial or guest column.
- 7. AFTERSCHOOL FOR ALL PETITION** - Start a petition from the Afterschool Alliance.  
<http://afterschoolalliance.org/a4aPartnerPetition.cfm>
- 8. AFTERSCHOOL & SUMMER LEARNING DAY** - Join Vermont Afterschool to have lunch with your legislators and discuss the importance of afterschool in Vermont every February at the Capitol Plaza in Montpelier.  
[http://www.vermontafterschool.org/advocacy/afterschool\\_day/](http://www.vermontafterschool.org/advocacy/afterschool_day/)
- 9. SOCIAL MEDIA** - Use these tags #AfterschoolWorks #Afterschool #SummerLearning @VTAfterschool
- 10. LIGHTS ON AFTERSCHOOL** – Host or attend an event that participates in the Afterschool Alliance’s annual nationwide advocacy day in October. Invite your legislators, community leaders, partners, and funders to join as well. <http://www.afterschoolalliance.org/loa.cfm>



# PUBLISH

## Write a Letter to the Editor

Submitting a Letter to the Editor is a great way to get your message out to your community and one of the easiest ways to get published. Here are some things to keep in mind:

**Stick with the key talking points: afterschool programs help working families, keep kids safe, and inspire learners.**

Take a look the publication you wish to submit to for a feel of what they do and do not publish, as well as submission guidelines. Most will have a word limit; aim for 350 words max.

If the paper publishes anything related to afterschool or education, use that article as a starting point for your own thoughts. If there is misleading, inaccurate, or false information reported, use a Letter to the Editor to communicate corrections but keep your message focused on your talking points.

Though most Letters to the Editor are opinionated, you can also write a general one to raise attention to the issue of afterschool, especially as it relates to your community (i.e. a need that you see) or budget concerns (i.e. around town meeting day).

Focus on your own opinion and the facts that support it. Do not personally attack anyone or make broad, sweeping generalizations.

Writing a Letter to the Editor is also a way to publicly thank someone who did something for your program and spotlight a positive message about the work happening in afterschool.

## How to Format Your Letter to the Editor

[Headline I Want Published]

[Date]

To the Editor:

[Bold statement about why you are writing, followed by your main point.]

[One or two sentences with details or data that support your main points.]

[Restate your main point and tell people where they can get more information.]

Sincerely,

[Your name, town, phone number, and email]

More tips and examples can be found here: <http://afterschoolalliance.org/mediaNewspaperLetter2Ed.cfm>



## Write an Opinion Article

Op-Eds are opinion articles 500-750 words in length. Most newspapers accept guest op-eds but have specific requirements. Call and ask for the opinion page or general editor, and explain what you want to write about (i.e. funding challenges facing afterschool programs in your community and what this means to working families). Then ask about submission guidelines.

**Stick with the key talking points: afterschool programs help working families, keep kids safe, and inspire learners.**

Op-eds can also take the form of blog posts, so be clever with how you publish!

Write with a thoughtful point of view but without being harsh or judgmental.

Back up what you say with real facts, and tell real stories.

Start with a lead that captures your reader's attention and give a sense of direction. For example,

"Every weekday afternoon in Montpelier, more than \_\_\_ number of students stay after the final bell -- not as punishment, but as part of the Community Connections afterschool program. The program helps them learn, keeps them safe, and relieves their working parents of childcare worries. However, with funding lagging so far behind our community needs, we've had to turn away kids due to a lack of staffing and space..."

More tips and examples can be found here: <http://afterschoolalliance.org/mediaNewpapersOped.cfm>



# RESOURCES & ENDNOTES

## **Afterschool Alliance**

The Afterschool Alliance is a nonprofit public awareness and advocacy organization working to ensure that all children and youth have access to quality afterschool programs.

[www.afterschoolalliance.org](http://www.afterschoolalliance.org)

## **Alliance for Justice**

Alliance for Justice is a national association of environmental, civil rights, mental health, women's, children's, and consumer advocacy organizations. The Alliance works to advance the cause of justice for all Americans, strengthen the public interest community's ability to influence public policy, and foster the next generation of advocates.

[www.afj.org](http://www.afj.org)

## **List of Newspapers in Vermont**

[www.abyznewslinks.com/unitevt.htm](http://www.abyznewslinks.com/unitevt.htm)

## **Vermont Legislature**

[legislature.vermont.gov](http://legislature.vermont.gov)

## **Endnotes**

<sup>1</sup> Survey Data Collected by Vermont Afterschool. (2014).

<sup>2</sup> Vermont Afterschool. (2014). *Return on Investment Study*. Available at <http://bit.ly/1zqTHp0>.

<sup>3</sup> Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention. (2006). *OJJDP Statistical Briefing Book*.

<sup>4</sup> YMCA of the USA. (2001). *After School for America's Teens*.

<sup>5</sup> Vandell, D., Reisner, E., and Pierce, K. (2007). *Outcomes Linked to High-Quality Afterschool Programs: Longitudinal Findings From the Study of Promising After School Programs*.

<sup>6</sup> Catalyst & Brandeis University. (2006). *After-school Worries: Tough on Parents, Bad for Business*.

<sup>7</sup> Durlak, J. A., Weissberg, R. P., & Pachan, M. (2010). *A Meta-Analysis of After-School Programs that Seek to Promote Personal and Social Skills in Children and Adolescents*.

<sup>8</sup> Brand, A. and Valent, B. (2013). *The Potential of Career and College Readiness and Exploration in Afterschool Programs*.

<sup>9</sup> Learning Point Associates. (2011). *21st Century Community Learning Centers (21st CCLC) Analytic Support for Evaluation and Program Monitoring: An Overview of the 21st CCLC Performance Data: 2009-10*. U.S. Department of Education.

<sup>10</sup> The After-School Corporation. (2013). *The 6000-Hour Learning Gap*.

<sup>11</sup> Vandell, D. (2013). *Afterschool Program Quality and Student Outcomes: Reflections on Positive Key Findings on Learning and Development from Recent Research*.