October 17th, 2018

The Honorable Al Gobeille
Secretary
Agency of Human Services
280 State Drive - Center Building
Waterbury, VT

Dear Secretary Gobeille:

We write you as national organizations with a shared interest in supporting policies to aid young people and their career development. We were very encouraged to learn about Vermont’s recent decision to devote $600,000 from the state’s tobacco settlement to support afterschool programs statewide and the potential to utilize these funds to support science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) learning opportunities in afterschool and out-of-school settings. We think Vermont has a unique opportunity to craft a statewide initiative that can improve outcomes for youth development for generations to come and we would like to pledge our assistance in this effort.

Our complex and changing world demands an adaptable workforce that is prepared to collaboratively reason through tough problems and come up with creative solutions to the challenges of tomorrow. STEM educational opportunities cultivate students’ curiosity and creativity while teaching them to work as a team, base their reasoning on evidence, and solve problems through experimentation. Our students must gain the critical thinking abilities and other transferrable skills offered by STEM to be prepared for the unknown challenges and opportunities of our future.

The National Research Council’s Board on Science Education concluded in a recent study that out-of-school programs have been shown to contribute to young people’s interest in and understanding of STEM, connect young people to caring adults who serve as role models, and reduce the achievement gap between young people from low-income and high-income families.
Exposure to formal and informal learning in STEM subjects, beginning at an early age and continuing through high school, prepares our nation’s students for the future ahead. Supporting quality science, technology, engineering, and mathematics education for all children and youth is therefore vital to our country’s social and economic prosperity.

Our two organizations, together in close partnership with Vermont Afterschool, have proudly supported Vermont legislation to implement the Expanded Learning Opportunities (ELO) fund as an organized statewide effort to harness the benefits of high-quality afterschool and informal STEM learning experiences. Going forward we collectively see this most recent allocation of one-time funding to the Agency of Human Services as a concrete opportunity to implement the vision of the ELO over the next few years to lay the groundwork for a sustained statewide effort to expand afterschool STEM learning at a broader scale.

We want to aid you in such efforts. Please let us know how we can be of assistance to you as supportive national partners.

Respectfully,

James Brown
Executive Director
STEM Education Coalition

Chris Neitzey
Director of STEM Initiatives
Afterschool Alliance