In our last meeting, the Task Force discussed a wide range of priorities relating to the design and implementation of Universal Afterschool. The lists below breaks these priorities out into two key areas: (1) Funding Priorities that speak to how funding should be directed to meet specific needs and gaps in the state; and (2) Implementation Priorities that speak to the system itself and the key principles that it should embody as Vermont moves towards Universal Afterschool.

This is a DRAFT put together to give Task Force members a chance to reflect on what was discussed and to start to put our ideas into a framework that will eventually develop in our report to the legislature.

Funding Priorities
- Low-income children and youth
- Underserved areas of the state
- Underserved populations
- Access for students with disabilities and/or special needs
- Quality Programs (SEL, STEM, positive youth development, transferable skills, youth voice, etc.)

Implementation Priorities
- Allows for flexibility in the use of the funds and in the entities that can apply in order to best meet the needs of the specific community
- Utilizes a mixed delivery system and a wide range of providers are eligible to apply for funding
- Foster multi-agency collaboration
- Addresses the needs of childcare and learning
- Incorporates Youth Voice
- Increases Protective Factors (such as belonging; VT Prevention Model)
- Encourages partnerships across schools and communities
- Ensures the sustainability of programs
- Provides multi-year funding for projects
- Lowers the cost to families of afterschool programs across the board (not just helping a subset of children/youth pay for them)
- Supporting staff

FUNDING PRIORITIES

The 2020 America After 3PM report found that 39%, or over 26,000 Vermont children and youth, who are not currently participating in afterschool programs would be today if more were available and accessible *(CITE NEEDED)*. While all communities in Vermont should be allowed to apply for funding, the Universal Afterschool Task Force recommends the following five funding priorities:

- **Expanding access to programs for children and youth of all ages who qualify as low-income**. According to the 2020 America After 3PM study, Vermont has the lowest level of low-income children enrolled in afterschool in the nation, and Vermont parents listed program cost as one of the key barriers to participation.

- **Expanding programming in parts of the state where few or no options are currently available.** Parents in Vermont also report lack of available programs in their area as a barrier to participation. These disparities in program availability are further substantiated by data collected at the state level. Grant funds should be targeted to support programs in these communities. *(CITE NEEDED)*

- **Making sure that underserved populations are well-represented in the mix of children/youth participating in programs.** Analysis of afterschool participation rates across different sub-populations of youth should be an ongoing and integral part of the funding process. YRBS data from recent years, show that special consideration should be taken to ensure participation among racial/ethnic groups, New Americans, and LGBTQI youth *(CITE NEEDED)*. In addition, programs that serve older youth are important as well as options that that encourage participation in non-traditional offerings (e.g., engineering clubs for girls and non-binary gendered youth).

- **Providing additional resources so that students with disabilities and/or special needs are able to fully participate in programs.** All after school opportunities created through public funds or using public facilities should develop capacity with the financial support of the state to be equitably accessible to students with disabilities. Children and students should not be denied access to after school opportunities due to the need for services and supports in order to access the opportunities. The design of afterschool programs should consider universal design concepts to ensure inclusion of all children.

- **Strengthening key elements of program quality within all afterschool programs, including in the areas of Social-Emotional Learning, STEM, transferable skills, positive youth development, and youth voice/engagement.** Afterschool programs should offer a wide range of offerings and opportunities for youth. Youth voice must be incorporated into how a program is designed and what programming is offered. Particular attention should be paid to offering programming and supports around Social-Emotional Learning, STEM, transferable skills, positive youth development, and youth voice/engagement as these areas have been shown to contribute to positive and long-lasting impacts for youth. *(CITE NEEDED)*

IMPLEMENTATION PRIORITIES

Flexibility. Every community in Vermont has a unique mix of resources, partners, strengths, and opportunities. Flexibility in the system will allow funds to be geared towards specific needs in the local community, including staffing, transportation, supplies, etc. While program quality is important, allowing for a wide variety of program types and programming options is essential given Vermont's varied landscape. The application process should be accessible to all communities (e.g., small, rural, etc.).

Eligibility. A mixed delivery model would allow a broad array of entities to apply for funding to expand afterschool access. Eligible programs could be run by a school, district, or supervisory union <u>or</u> by a community organization, nonprofit, business, or licensed childcare center. Eligible programs should serve students on a regular basis outside the regular school day/year (e.g., before school, after school, summer, weekends, school vacation weeks, evenings, or teacher in-service days).

Multi-agency Collaboration. As seen throughout COVID, multi-agency collaboration is essential to the success of any major initiative serving children, youth, and families. Because afterschool is a cross-cutting issue, close collaboration should include, but not be limited to, the Agency of Education, Agency of Commerce and Community Development, Agency of Administration/Department of Libraries, and Agency of Human Services, in particular the Department of Health, Department of Mental Health, Department for Children and Families- Child Development Division, Family Services Division, and Licensing Unit.

Multi-year Funding. Multi-year funding is essential to give programs time to get up-and-running and to build staff and programming options. Multi-year grants also place the emphasis on designing and running quality programs instead of on writing one grant after another. It also takes time for parents, families, and children/youth to get to know program staff. Knowing that a program will be around for a number of years also increases the likelihood that children and youth will participate.

 Program Sustainability. The grant application process should include questions about program sustainability. With limited resources, the state should invest in programs that are most likely to be able to sustain for multiple years and even beyond the scope of the current grant.

Childcare and Learning. Universal Afterschool must meet the childcare needs of working families while also providing amazing opportunities to enhance learning, foster positive youth development, and build protective factors for children and youth.

Youth Voice. Authentic youth engagement requires intentional programming, skilled staff, and a deep understanding of how to build youth voice into every aspect of programming. Research shows that afterschool programs that support true youth engagement have stronger positive youth outcomes *(CITE WEIKART).*

Protective Factors. Research shows that afterschool programs play an essential role in primary prevention measures. As recommended by Vermont's Opioid Coordination Council and the Vermont Marijuana Commission, expanded access to afterschool programming can build protective factors for youth, such as a sense of belonging, support of caring adults and mentors, positive peer relationships, and youth agency. *(NEED CEED and reference to VT Prevention Model)*

Partnerships across schools and communities. Research has shown that children and youth thrive when there is alignment and close partnership across schools, community, afterschool programs, and family. *(NEED CITE)*. Quality afterschool programs do not replicate the school day but rather complement and reinforce it. Close collaboration between school staff and afterschool staff is essential. Likewise, vibrant afterschool programs help connect children and youth to their community through service project, field trips, outdoor adventure programs, career exploration programs, as well as, bringing in guest speakers, local artisans, and community members to share skills, information, and interests.

Cost to Families. The Universal Afterschool system in Vermont should lower the cost to families across the board rather than only helping a subset of children/youth pay for access to programs.

Supports Staff. The quality and success of the afterschool system in Vermont relies heavily on the people who staff and run the programs. The system must build up, strengthen, and support individuals working in afterschool through livable wages, opportunities for learning and advancement, meaningful work, and support from supervisors as well as the organizations and communities in which they work.