

**From:** Erica Zimmerman

**Sent:** Monday, November 20, 2023 2:03 PM

**To:** Seth Gardner; Carl Etnier ; Rosie Laquerre; Scott Hess; Zoe Christiansen; Jon Jewett

**Cc:** Janice Walrafen; Elanor Chapin; Kevin McCollister

**Subject:** Testimony for today's consideration of All Together Now

Dear Select Board,

I write to support All Together Now's request for financial support. ATN has been an important asset in our family and our community since it began. The extended learning, arts experiences, creative outlets and community connectivity are pivotal to the health of our community - in terms of youth and community mental health, belonging and connectivity and economic vitality.

Here are some highlights of how it has enriched our lives in East Montpelier:

1) Third Space - equitably -- ATNow provides arts and music lessons that are easily accessible to working families. When I could not leave work to drive them to extra activities, my kids took the bus to ATN for instrument lessons, ceramics classes, and more. Its summer programs are essential -especially since so many programs have not returned since Covid, even those offered by schools. With a dramatic decline in the arts and activities available at and after school and in summer, this is an essential asset. ATNow's scholarship programs make these services available to many families who cannot afford camps and lessons.

2) The "[third space](#)" - which means time after school and outside of the home - is critical to substance use prevention and mental health for our youth, critical and growing issues, as well as to our [community health in general](#), as documented by the NIH and many others.. ATNow fills an important need for these services.

3) Community connectivity via the arts -- the opportunity for intergenerational creative community creations is critical to the connectivity of our community and the full development of our children. ATNow has provided my kids and myself with theater and dance opportunities, important community traditions in which to participate. This is key to connectivity -- also central to mental health and substance use prevention. Among local communities, East Montpelier is decidedly lacking

in these opportunities ---- except via ATNow! (You might remember the Pete Seeger pageant which East Montpelier resident Amy Torchia and I produced with ATNow when EMES offered no theater opportunities for our children. With the partnership of Janice Walrafen and Ellen Leonard, we secured a Vermont Arts Council grant that funded a summer camp for about 20 children to write the script and then a community production in which the children were joined by upwards of 50 community members. More than 400 people attended the productions. Its offshoot of community singalongs continued for a long time -- until halted by Covid.

4) Nonprofit, independent organizations are an essential part of our community fabric - alongsi our public institutions and our businesses. The presence of community arts and creative ventures attracts new residents and keeps our real estate market -- ie our tax base -- competitive with surrounding towns that perhaps have more traditions and activities. People who do not have kids in the public schools are excited to see an arts organization based in East Montpelier. People who need daycare are thrilled (although I realize that asset may now be lost). I urge you to recognize the importance of this vital community asset and to support All Together Now to the greatest extent you can.

Thank you

Erica Zimmerman (and Kevin McCollister)

Center Farm, Washington Central Friends of Education

East Montpelier residents since 1995