



Loss of state money cuts after-school programs

By [Elizabeth G. Howard](#) on December 6, 2013 in [Lead News](#), [School News](#) · 0 Comments

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The future of programs funded with grant money is always questionable. And this year, with state budget cuts, Stratford's middle schools felt the blow.

Since 2006, Wooster and Flood middle schools each have won \$150,000 annual state grants that were used to fund after-school programs: FLASH — Flood Learns After School Hours, and at Wooster, CLASP — Creative Learning After School Program.

The programs were passed over by the state Department of Education's After-School Grant Program for the fall 2013 through spring 2015 cycle.

In their place, the Stratford Board of Education, school administrators and teachers, with PTA support, are doing their best to provide after-school support for students (and parents) who want and need it.

In CLASP and FLASH, students had access to up to 300 hours of structured, after-school activities that included academics, wellness time and a snack. Parents were charged nominal fees for each of the eight- to 10-week sessions. Without the programs, the schools' administrators estimate they can currently offer less than 50% of those hours.

Wooster Middle School Principal Jack Lynch estimates that the CLASP program at Wooster supported about 90 of his 550 students. Lynch said his after-school activities have been cut to two days a week, usually ending by 3:45, sometimes as late as 5:30. Current organized activities are intramural sports and arts-related, with homework help being offered by teachers on an as-needed basis. Students previously making use of after-school support are still getting time after school, Lynch said, but less than half the time, and without the structured academic component.

"After school is a critical time for a child," said Lynch. "In these programs, the parents know their children are involved, that they are safe and secure. We really do miss the program. It was systemic to what we do here."

Flood's principal, Jack Dellapiano, said he was "taken aback" when he learned the program had not been funded through 2015. However, the schools and the board have some funding set aside from small fees collected in previous years and from a Board of Education intramural budget, he said. This money is available because of a required "sustainability plan" written into the grants.

"Right now, we have clubs and activities after school that mirror some of the same activities we had with FLASH," Dellapiano said. "We are by no means

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8	9	10	11	12	13	14
15	16	17	18	19	20	21
22	23	24	25	26	27	28
29	30	1	2	3	4	5

TUE 02 **Senior calendar: May 29-June 4**
 June 1 @ 8:30 am - June 4 @ 4:00 pm

TUE 02 **Catholic Daughters meeting**
 June 2 @ 6:30 pm

offering the same, but we are coming close with some of the activities that were well-attended and successful. It does speak to the dedication of everyone involved."

The loss of the program is a blow not just to the families who relied on the program for support but to the cross section of community members, teachers, administrators, and parents who invested time and energy into creating the programs' success.

"The kids are disappointed. The parents are disappointed," Dellapiano said. "As soon as we learned about this, we started to talk. [The programs now are] going to be abbreviated, but they are going to be better than having nothing."

Valuable programs lost

After-school programs in Stratford's middle schools provided services for up to 300 students each year, over the course of three eight- or 10-week sessions. Programs started at 2:45 and ran to 5:30 Tuesdays through Fridays. Cost of transportation, program facilitation, coaching, teaching supplies, food, and program support was covered by the grant funds.

The programs like CLASP and FLASH support students academically and emotionally, and help ease the burden of working-parent households. The two Stratford programs were so well run and received, said Pat Naylor, grants coordinator for the Stratford Board of Education, that they were recognized as two of the top in the state.

Research compiled by the Connecticut After School Network shows that well-designed after-school programs have been shown to reduce juvenile crime, help increase future graduation rates, support working families, and boost the economies that rely on those families.

The CLASP and FLASH grants were partnership grants, in which Stratford Community Services provided program facilitators and developed leadership activities and service opportunities for students. The schools also partnered with the town health department, police department and Sterling House.

Less state money given to fewer programs

Naylor wrote all of the grant applications with Tammy Trojanowski, administrator of the town of Stratford's Community Services office. Since 2006, the pair has coordinated their efforts to ensure the applications were competitive.

"We worked really hard to position for this funding," Naylor said. "You have to look at the grant application and what they are asking. They give you points and there is a rubric. You have to make sure you answer succinctly all the questions."

The state Department of Education's 56-page grant application offers three options — elementary, middle/high school, and a STEM (or science, technology, engineering and mathematics) option. This means that after-school programs at any grade level, and including specialized programs, are competing for funding from the same pool of money.

Naylor said she believes part of the reason for grant loss this year was twofold. First, a \$1-million line item was cut as part of the state's extensive budget cuts last June. Second, Naylor said, the limit for funding per program was raised from \$150,000 to \$200,000. That meant that grant awardees could receive more money but fewer awards would be available. The After-School Grant Program awards approximately 20 to 25 grants per two-year cycle, and only about 10% of those are middle school and high school grants.

Naylor, who said it was "a little frustrating for us, because they used [our program] as the model," is already planning for the next grant cycle.

"It takes so long to build a high-quality program, so it is, of course, frustrating," she said. "I think we did an amazing job and it was a big disappointment."

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02 June 2 @ 7:00 pm

THU **Major League Baseball Umpire**
04 **Mark Hirschbeck**
June 4 @ 10:00 am

THU **Thursday Night Ballroom Dance**
04 **Party**
June 4 @ 7:30 pm - 11:00 pm

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