

Carol Lizotte- Program Director of FNWSU After School & Summer Programs ~ Crossroads, Crossroads Explorers and MVU AfterHours after school programs

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Good morning and thank you for the opportunity to speak with you today. My name is Carol Lizotte and I've been director of the CROSSROADS afterschool and summer learning programs for 11 years. This is Joyce Ashton our Highgate Crossroads Coordinator who has also been with the Crossroads program since its beginning 11 years ago.

Franklin Northwest Supervisory Union runs after school programs for students in grades 2 to 12 in the towns of Swanton, Franklin, Sheldon and Highgate.

I'd like to quickly mention the types of programs that we run... Everything

- From our Outdoor Adventure Series (where we read award winning books on wilderness survival then go outdoors and explore the woods near the school trying things mentioned in the reading...this is a highly successful program with our reluctant readers)
- to occupational skills like archery-welding-photography-school newspaper club-cosmetology-hunter safety (that we offer at Missisquoi Valley Union Middle and High School)
- to nutrition in our cooking & garden programs and we challenging students in the state-wide Junior Iron Chef competition
- to ocean science where we have as one of partners, the New England Aquarium, who provide curriculum and materials, as we expose our students to the oceans that many have never seen
- to our highly successful Highgate Actors Theater where our multi talented 1st grade teacher, Ernie Hemingway inspires, guides and engages children in 30 weeks of drama work and everything related to production of a play or musical, with 3 or more plays per school year.
- to interconnected technology programming like our Claymation class where students create a story line, make their characters with clay and other materials, use iPads or digital cameras to record the stop motion images, using Windows Moviemaker to bring the images together into a video, finding free music online and finally presenting their finished product (you can see our Franklin Crossroads website for our award winning video documenting our Claymation class is.....)

We are offering over 30 after school classes 120 days each school year....

- this is keeping students engaged in learning in a fun hands-on way....
- this is keeping students safe,
- this is developing strong connections with supportive adults and
- this is helping to equalize opportunities for all our youth, not just those whose family can afford it....
- This is helping our schools to provide flexible pathways to learning and as we move towards personalized learning plans for each child, our after school programs are a key way to make this happen

I'd also like to share a bit about how our programs are funded. Our communities are high-poverty communities and we rely on funding from the federal 21st Century Community Learning Centers Program Grant as well as our local school Title 1 funds for our tutoring, USDA Child Nutrition Programs for our after school snacks and meals, STEM and other grants we annually apply for, fundraising, donations AND school budget allocations. Currently we serve more than 680 students in 8 after school programs across the 5 school sites. Our biggest challenge is staffing and funding and if we had additional funds we could expand our summer programming to include programs for more students and for a full day instead of our half day 4 week summer program.

We are particularly vulnerable to changes in federal legislation and funding. For instance, a couple years ago when 21st CCLC funding in Vermont was cut by 4% due to sequestration at the federal level, our schools were faced with difficult dilemma of trying to decide whether to fund afterschool programs or summer programs because we could no longer afford to do both. We ended up cancelling our summer program that year. This is not a choice we can afford to make in our communities as our students need access to programs, supports, healthy meals, and positive adult role models both afterschool during the school year and throughout the summer months. Research shows that summer learning loss is a real issue for children from low income families. Unequal access to summer learning opportunities accounts for 2/3 of the achievement gap between low and middle income students.

I am extremely concerned about the proposed caps for school budgets in Gov Scott's proposed budget in that I fear that when budgets get tight, schools WILL BE forced to cut afterschool and summer learning programs in order to keep up with rising health care and salary costs for classroom teachers.

Annually the after school and summer programs are challenged with sustaining the 21C grant if we can't rely on school budget contributions and in our communities a participant fee structure would cause us to lose the very students that most need to be in the program. Having an alternate funding source, such as through the ELO Special Fund, would be an important way to help expand access to programs, leverage federal dollars, and address the opportunity gap in our communities.

Thank you for your support of afterschool and summer learning programs and thank you for the opportunity to speak with you today.