Supporting Afterschool in Light of Proposed Budget Cuts
March 2017
Every weekday, 700 children from some of the poorest parts of the Atlanta area stay after school for three hours with Wings for Kids, a program that aims to bolster not only academic performance, but also social skills, relationships with caring adults and a sense of belonging at school.

The kids get a safe and enriching place to spend the afternoon and early evening, and their working parents get child care. But now, Wings for Kids and thousands of programs like it are on the chopping block, threatened by President Trump's proposal to eliminate $1.2 billion in grants for after-school and summer programs.

“It's heart-wrenching,” said Bridget Laird, chief executive of Wings for Kids, which serves 1,600 children in Atlanta; Charlotte; Charleston, S.C.; and rural Lake City, S.C. She said Thursday that without federal aid, those programs would be eliminated or gutted. “I can't imagine if that were turned off—all of those kids running around the streets.”
President Trump’s first proposed budget would cut after-school programs for about two million children—including WINGS for kids.

CNN correspondent Gary Tuchman visited a WINGS program in Atlanta and spoke with Bridget Laird about how the proposed cuts to the 21st Century Community Learning Centers Program would impact WINGS.

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John Oliver highlighted WINGS for kids as an afterschool program that benefits working parents but is at risk of losing funding due to the proposed cuts to the 21st Century Community Learning Centers Program.
As Oliver points out, however, Mulvaney was silent on what single mothers might think of the fact that Trump’s budget would cut funding to after-school programs like Wings for Kids, which serves 1,600 children in three states. “I really don’t know,” said a mother asked by CNN what she would do if the program didn’t exist. “I would be lost.”
Do After-School Programs Positively Impact Children?

THE ATLANTIC | MARCH 23, 2017

Bridget Laird, the CEO of an organization funded through 21st Century Learning Centers, commissioned an evaluation for her own program. WINGS for Kids provides after-school enrichment that fosters social and emotional health in 11 different centers located in Atlanta; Charleston, South Carolina; Charlotte, North Carolina; and rural South Carolina. “We have always focused on evaluations within WINGS, and most recently we finished up a four-year randomized control trial, which is kind of the gold standard of evaluations, and we have found that WINGS kids attend school more often, do better academically, and do better in schools than non-WINGS kids,” Laird says.

The goal of 21st Century Learning Centers is primarily academic. Their purpose, according to the newest version of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, is to “provide opportunities for academic enrichment, including providing tutorial services to help students, particularly students who attend low-performing schools.”

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CHARLESTON POST & COURIER | MARCH 25, 2017

At a time of widening income inequality, we’re cutting after-school programs for poor kids? Come with me to the cafeteria of North Charleston Elementary after school to see for yourself.

About 140 kids, almost all of them black and all of them low income, are sitting on the floor, arranged in circles of a dozen kids and a counselor. They are in their “nests,” holding hands, smiling and singing (loudly) the WINGS Creed:

I soar with WINGS, let me tell you why. I learn lots of skills that help me reach the sky.

And on it goes. How they remember it all I have no idea. It is just the beginning of a three-hour, five-days-a-week after-school session that will focus on social and emotional skills—this week’s topic is teamwork—and includes homework tutoring, playtime, a snack, supper and a bus ride home. It is a safe place to be when your parents are at work.

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Getting through the “clutter” of emotional baggage, Blake says, clears the way for better school performance. She says WINGS’s own research shows kids in the program have improved in three areas: school attendance, behavior and academic performance.

And single mom Jalita Law says she noticed a difference in her daughter, Riyanna Hairston, right away.

“The first year when she was in WINGS, she came home and I noticed she was more willing to discuss her feelings and her emotions,” Law says. “She says, ‘This is what we do in WINGS. When something goes wrong, we talk about it. We talk through it.’ So, I think it’s given her a lot of courage. It’s given her a lot of motivation just to kind of be herself.”

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A number of studies also shows students who attend 21st Century Community Learning Centers do better on standardized tests, improve their classroom behavior and are more likely to be promoted to the next grade.

“It’s absurd because I don’t think people are necessarily taking the time to learn and research 21st Century and after-school (programs) in general” said Bridget Laird, the CEO of Charleston-based WINGS for Kids, about the push back against after-school programs.

WINGS is a nonprofit that helps students cultivate social and emotional intelligence in three states, including 420 students in South Carolina. About 35 to 40 percent of WINGS’ budget is funded by 21st Century grants, Laird said.