

## MY TURN

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Julie Cadwallader-Staub

If you were to take a new position working in city government, and you worked for a city in which two after-school programs provided services to the *same* students, at the *same* time, in the *same* schools, each led by a different city department, and each partially supported by taxpayer dollars, would you question it? Or would you turn away and say, no, good people are employed by both programs, with vocal constituencies behind each program, so I won't rock the boat.

How about if your city had committed itself to providing equitable opportunities for all children, and you found that in these two programs, one had historically served kids from families who could pay a daily fee, and the other served families who couldn't pay a fee but who needed care and additional enrichment activities—so that your city was running two afterschool programs divided by economics? Would you still turn away?

If there were an economic downturn of unprecedented proportion, and good programs were eliminated across your state and city— would you still say no, it's a political hot potato, so even though the two afterschool programs serve the *same* kids, at the *same* schools, at the *same* time, and funded by the *same* taxpayers, I won't touch it?

These are the issues that Mari Steinbach inherited when she accepted her new position, leading the Parks and Recreation Department. These are the issues that I inherited when I become Grants Director for the Burlington Schools three years ago.

Leaders from Parks and Rec and the Burlington Schools, as well as the afterschool coordinators from both programs, have worked tirelessly to find a more cost efficient way to deliver high quality after school services to students. We have made steady progress. We began a pilot program last year at Flynn which combined the best of both programs. This year we expanded that pilot to serve Flynn, Edmunds, Champlain, and Smith, and re-named it Burlington Kids.

During this time, we have learned many things: together, we can serve more children and families; we can offer more programming opportunities, from Math Mania to basketball; and thanks to grant funding, we can provide more scholarships. We also learned that having two site co-leaders at each site (one from the old Burlington After School program and one from the old City Kids program) is too much for the budget to sustain, and having two sets of policies and procedures creates many problems and complications in the day-to-day administration of the program.

So Burlington Parks and Rec and the Schools are now recommending another step in this ongoing process to improve Burlington Kids. As Parks Director Mari Steinbach detailed in the announcement partially reported on by the Burlington Free Press, the recommendation is to re-structure the program so that we have *four* site leader positions to run *four* school programs, rather than eight co-leaders. The new model opens up these

four new positions to all applicants, including those whose positions are part of the restructuring, with parents, Parks and Rec, and the Schools included in the hiring process. In addition, the model recommends that two positions be created within Parks and Rec that will serve the city as a whole, not only the after school program.

After all is said and done, these changes will mean that our city is doing what we continuously ask of all our public officials: to review staffing, budgets, services and priorities across departments and put the needs of our children first. These recommendations mean that the city will be supporting one high quality afterschool program, rather than two, with scarce taxpayer dollars.

I hope you will get the facts behind this proposal, support the recommendation to restructure the program, and work with Parks and Rec and the Schools in the interest of all of Burlington's children.