



GO

Port Chester's after-school program thriving under Carver and PCCFA

By Casey Watts, Reporter

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In 2013, Port Chester lost \$1.3 million in state grants for after-school programs, causing the district to scramble to find new ways to offer after-school activities. The first year of tuition-based programs left a lot to be desired – only 150 students signed up in the beginning of the 2013 academic year compared to the 800 the district saw the year before.

Four years later, the after-school programs are thriving once again. The change began in 2014, when the Carver Center was enlisted to help. The organization reached out to current donors for support, including Bridgewater Associates' Ray Dalio, who is ranked 54 on the Forbes World Billionaires list.

In the past three years, his family's Connecticut-based Dalio Foundation has contributed nearly \$4 million in support of the Carver Center, according to a written statement from the center. These monies have assisted their efforts to bring after-school programs to Thomas A. Edison Elementary School, John F. Kennedy Magnet School, the Early Learning Center and Port Chester Middle School.

"The after-school programs provide extra learning time, additional enrichment activities, additional physical and mental health activities, and additional pro-social involvement opportunities for our students," said Port Chester's Deputy Superintendent of Schools Joe Durney. "We are grateful to Carver Center CEO Joe Kwasniewski and Denise Colangelo of the Council for the Arts for their leadership in supporting our students and families."

Carver's initiative

With four schools and over 500 students to serve, the Carver Center has a lot on its plate. The organization provides all the staffing, programming, transportation, food and more. Unless the elementary students are swimming or dancing that day, they remain in their school building until the activity ends. All middle school programs are hosted at the community center.

Many components are similar regardless of the school – academic support allows opportunities for supervised homework help; socio-emotional development activities such as yoga promote strong minds and ways to reduce stress; enrichment opportunities introduce students to community



Port Chester Middle School students Gloria Pena, Katherine Vizhco and Alexandra Trejo build with spaghetti noodles and marshmallows during an after-school program while Carver Center staff member Sol Riello supervises. Over 500 students are enrolled in the after-school activities sponsored by the Carver Center. Courtesy of Joanna Kunicki



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partnerships and organizations such as the Clay Art Center and the Rye Nature Center; and health and wellness is all about eating right and maintaining an active lifestyle.

In addition to all of this, Carver provides "snupper," a mix of snack time and supper.

"The program has grown in terms of its depth and content over time," explained Leanne Tormey, Carver's chief learning officer. "We've not only made sure we've capitalized on the components, but also made sure to do purposeful staffing – every site is staffed by professionals to bring a variety of passions to share with the students."

Every child receives a guaranteed experience – meaning they are required to participate in certain activities. Middle School children have a larger element of choice when it comes to what they can do that day. The electives are built on student interest.

When it comes to popularity, the Carver Center is pleased with the attendance, which is quite high every single day. Port Chester Middle School's program is fully enrolled with 82 students. Edison, JFK and the ELC all have room left, with 165, 175 and 90 students enrolled, respectively.

Carver's programs start at \$250 a year for a family's first child and \$125 for an additional child.

"We're really fortunate to have the partnership and support of the Dalio Foundation," Tormey said.

King Street and Park Avenue

The Port Chester Council for the Arts (PCCFA), on behalf of the Carver Center, runs the after-school programs at King Street and Park Avenue schools.

"Our program offers a meal, courtesy of Carver, an academic hour and then two sessions of 'enrichment' activities including art, music, theatre, crafts, physical education, etc.," PCCFA Executive Director Denise Colangelo said in an email. "The council has been involved in the operation of after-school programs in the Port Chester Public Schools in a variety of capacities since the late 1980s."

Every child gets every enrichment option at least once a week. Older students can participate in the One World Club and can have access to computers. The One World Club, under the umbrella organization One World United and Virtuous, teaches about global awareness, good character development and service learning through age-appropriate concepts.

PCCFA offers programs at \$125 per month per child.

Tammy Dominguez, a teacher's aide who runs the after-school programs at King Street School, said the kids work on their homework for the first part of the program. After that, they can enjoy various activities such as gym, computer, dance, art, cartooning and music.

"A lot of kids don't do what they do here in the after-school programs," Flynn said. "It broadens their horizons."

King Street has 108 students enrolled in the program.

Park Avenue School students love their gym and art time – on Wednesday, Oct. 11, some of the students were outside dipping leaves into paint before pressing them onto a piece of paper. Eager hands were quickly colored red and purple.

"Kids don't have much time during the day to do art," said program coordinator Marcela Montano. "This is a chance for them to be creative."

Park Avenue enrollment is around 120 students.

What happened in 2013

The Port Chester School District used to be singled-out as one of the best in the state for its ability to educate and support all its students. It was the district's success that was its downfall. In the past, Port Chester Schools received millions of dollars through the 21st Century Community Learning Center grants.

It was a mix of the district's wellbeing and a cut in state and federal budgets (from \$82 million to \$78 million) that caused the lack of funding. Of that \$78M, 55 percent was set aside for New York City schools, 15 percent was saved for Syracuse, Rochester, Buffalo and Yonkers, and three-fifths of the remaining funds went to community-based organizations. This left about 12 percent to be divided among the rest of the schools in the state.

Port Chester did not have any low-performing schools at the time and therefore was put towards the bottom of the list to receive money. In the end, the district was left empty-handed.



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For the first time, LawnChair Theatre is using their Shakespearean summer production to embrace a deeper message and advocate for environmentalism in the community. "The Tempest" will premiere this Thursday and travel to several parks over the next two weeks.



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