



NEWS RELEASE
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Santa Ana Afterschool Program Wins National Award for Innovation from MetLife Foundation

Program Recognized for Innovation in Dance Education and Mentoring

The Afterschool Alliance and MetLife Foundation today honored The Wooden Floor in Santa Ana with a 2012 Afterschool Innovator Award for high-quality dance education and a comprehensive focus on youth development through intensive academic services, pre-collegiate mentoring and family service programs. The Wooden Floor was one of only five programs in the country recognized for using innovative approaches to help middle school students succeed in the programs, school and life. D.J. DuBois, Financial Advisor for MetLife of Southern California (Irvine) presented the award, which included \$10,000 for The Wooden Floor to expand its work, during a special event that was part of *Lights On Afterschool*, the only nationwide rally for afterschool programs.

“Children learn in a variety of ways and middle school is the perfect time to take advantage of a student’s natural curiosity and interest in learning new things,” said Dennis White, president and CEO of Met Life Foundation. “We are honored to join the Afterschool Alliance in recognizing The Wooden Floor which represents some of the most exciting innovations in expanding horizons and helping middle school students achieve their full potential.”

The Wooden Floor combines high-quality dance education, collaboration with renowned artists, mentoring and individualized academic and social services. The program’s student body is 96 percent low-income and 95 percent Hispanic. Its mission is to use dance to empower low-income youth to strengthen self-esteem, self-discipline and their sense of accomplishment; learn creative problem-solving and inventive capacity; and encourage teamwork, leadership, cooperative learning, well-being and joy. In addition to a ballet and modern dance curriculum, the Wooden Floor offers college-preparatory and career workshops for seventh and eighth grade students. Academic services and pre-college mentoring help students gain the skills they need to graduate from high school on time and succeed in college. The Wooden Floor also provides students’ families with crisis intervention and social service referrals to resolve issues affecting students’ well-being.

Since 2005, 100 percent of seniors at the Wooden Floor have graduated high school on time and enrolled in college, and 42 percent of the program’s 2011 graduates declared science, technology, engineering and math majors in college.

“It’s a tremendous honor to be recognized by MetLife Foundation and the Afterschool Alliance for working to address the creative and academic needs of our middle school children,” said Dawn Reese, the executive director of The Wooden Floor. “The creative outlet and academic support we provide makes a crucial difference for many children facing steep challenges in their everyday lives. The Afterschool Innovator Award is a wonderful way to support our students in all their endeavors!”

The Wooden Floor is featured in an [Issue Brief](#) on the Afterschool Alliance’s [website](#) on how arts enrichment afterschool programs benefit middle school students. The Afterschool Alliance’s Issue Brief series examines the role of afterschool programs in addressing a variety of contemporary issues facing youth, schools and communities.

Organized by the Afterschool Alliance, *Lights On Afterschool* includes more than 7,500 events being held across the country on and around October 18, providing children, parents, community leaders, educators and others an opportunity to come together to urge Congress not to divert funds from the afterschool programs that children and families need. Events also give youth a chance to showcase the skills they learn and talents they develop at their afterschool programs and send the message that millions more kids need quality afterschool programs.

“Afterschool programs are terrific settings for innovation,” said Afterschool Alliance Executive Director Jodi Grant. “In afterschool programs, directors and staff have the flexibility to try creative and unusual approaches to learning and building skills that can help kids succeed in school and in life. We’re so grateful to MetLife Foundation for working with us to highlight and recognize these outstanding programs.”

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The Afterschool Alliance is a nonprofit public awareness and advocacy organization working to ensure that all children and youth have access to quality afterschool programs. More information is available at www.afterschoolalliance.org.

MetLife Foundation was established in 1976 to continue MetLife’s longstanding tradition of corporate contributions and community involvement. The Foundation’s commitment to building a secure future for individuals and communities worldwide is reflected in its dedication to empowering older adults, preparing young people and building livable communities. Since it was established, MetLife Foundation has provided more than \$530 million in grants and \$70 million in Program-Related Investments to nonprofit organizations addressing issues that have a positive impact in their communities. For more information visit www.metlife.org