



NEWS RELEASE
May 22, 2014

CONTACT: [Gretchen Wright](#)
202/371-1999

Afterschool Programs in Baltimore, Chicago, Dallas, Los Angeles, Providence Recognized for Innovation by MetLife Foundation

Winning Programs Focus On Debate, Special Needs Students, At-Risk Youth, Wrap-Around Services, Violence Intervention

The Afterschool Alliance and MetLife Foundation today announced the winners of the 2014 MetLife Foundation Afterschool Innovator Awards. The awards, sponsored by MetLife Foundation, recognize afterschool programs that have used innovative approaches to supporting and benefiting middle school students. The awards were presented to five afterschool programs presented at the “Breakfast of Champions,” a gala event in Washington, D.C. featuring Members of Congress and national Afterschool Alliance champions.

“The middle school years are critical years for a child’s development,” said Dennis White, president and CEO of MetLife Foundation. “Afterschool programs can play a central role in helping middle school students develop confidence and life skills that will help them succeed. We are honored to join the Afterschool Alliance in recognizing each of these exemplary programs for their outstanding work keeping middle school children safe and supported after school.”

The 2014 Afterschool Innovator Award winners are:

Baltimore: BUDL, a debate program that helps students learn to present an argument using evidence, evaluate the merit and credibility of evidence, respond clearly to questions raised about that argument, and listen to and learn from others. These critical thinking skills align closely with the Common Core. Classroom teachers provide coaching and mentoring to students in the program.

Chicago: BUILD, Inc., designed to help students reduce risk-taking behavior, develop personal competencies, and increase their interest in education and community service. The program includes violence and gang prevention and intervention efforts, health and wellness support, educational assistance, mentoring, and opportunities for leadership.

Dallas: Big Thought’s Thriving Minds After School program’s Explorer Reading Club at Thomas C. Marsh Middle School, which focuses on creating an environment where students with special needs can benefit from the supportive environment and the opportunity for social interaction with their peers. The program uses literature to improve students’ reading and comprehension, and develop their critical thinking and analysis skills. Students select their own

books and set their own schedules for finishing the books. Students of all abilities work together and learn to present their thoughts and observations about the books through respectful discussions and constructive feedback.

Los Angeles: the Hope Street Family Center’s Youth Center, which offers structured afterschool programming and wraparound services for more than 300 students, including 100 middle schoolers. The program is a partnership between the California Hospital Medical Center, the University of California, Los Angeles, and community residents. The Youth Center has four major components: academic support and enrichment; promoting social skills, positive peer interactions and cultural identity; supporting parent engagement in school; and providing supports to improve parenting skills and family stability.

Providence: AS220 Youth, which offers free arts courses in such areas as game design, photography, drawing, painting, mixed-media, writing and web development across three sites: a state juvenile detention center, an alternative middle school for students at-risk of dropping out of school and a Youth Studio. The program uses digital badges, student portfolios and skill sheets to document and track youth progress. Each student in the program works with a mentor and receives counseling to help with things like teen parenthood and gang involvement.

Every program honored as an Afterschool Innovator has been or will be highlighted in an [Issue Brief](#) on the Afterschool Alliance’s website addressing the ways in which 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.

“Afterschool programs do so much for students – helping them discover new talents, develop new skills, and have new experiences – all in social environments that help those students feel safe and supported,” said Afterschool Alliance Executive Director Jodi Grant. “There is great potential in these programs to make an important and lasting difference in lives of middle school students who participate in them. We are pleased to work with MetLife Foundation to recognize and honor the programs that are excelling in this area.”

The “Breakfast of Champions” is part of the 13th annual *Afterschool for All Challenge*, sponsored by the Afterschool Alliance, which brings together hundreds of educators, parents, afterschool leaders and advocates from around the country for a series of events and meetings with Members of Congress. After the Breakfast, attendees headed to Capitol Hill for meetings with their senators and representatives to discuss the ways afterschool programs benefit children, families and communities.

#

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.