



NEWS RELEASE
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Grand Rapids Mayor George Heartwell Honored as an Afterschool Champion in Nation's Capital

*Parents, Educators, Students, Afterschool Leaders, City and State Leaders
Urge Congress to Reject Proposed Funding Cut*

WASHINGTON, D.C. – The Afterschool Alliance today honored Grand Rapids Mayor George Heartwell for his support for afterschool programs at the “Breakfast of Champions,” a gala event in Washington, D.C. Mayor Heartwell was one of 16 individuals and four organizations honored for their tireless work on behalf of afterschool programs. He was nominated by the Michigan Afterschool Partnership.

Mayor Heartwell has a long history of advocating for children’s issues. As City Commissioner, he was instrumental in establishing Our Community’s Children (formerly the Office of Children, Youth and Families).

As Mayor, he has called for an afterschool program in every public school and serves as Chair of the Expanded Learning Opportunities (ELO) Network, a community collaborative of 100 partners dedicated to ensure that every child has access to quality afterschool programs. The ELO Network recently received the prestigious Ready by 21 Quality Counts! grant from the Forum for Youth Investment. Mayor Heartwell has advocated for city investment in afterschool programs throughout his tenure, ensuring that the Grand Rapids Parks and Recreation Department offers afterschool programming to more than 5,000 youth.

The “Breakfast of Champions” is part of the seventh annual *Afterschool for All Challenge* which brings together hundreds of parents, educators, children, program directors and advocates from around the country for a series of events and meetings with Members of Congress. The 2008 *Challenge* is co-sponsored by the National League of Cities and the Afterschool Alliance. Following the “Breakfast,” the advocates fanned out across Capitol Hill for meetings with their U.S. Senators and Representatives, and congressional staff.

“Parents, children and communities rely on afterschool programs to keep kids safe, inspire them to learn and help working families,” said Afterschool Alliance Executive Director Jodi Grant. “But federal funding isn’t keeping up with the demand for afterschool, and President Bush proposes to cut federal afterschool funding even further. We’re in our nation’s capital this week to honor afterschool champions and remind lawmakers that these cuts are short-sighted and counterproductive. All kids need the opportunities that afterschool programs provide. Bipartisan

support in Congress defeated the last proposed cut to afterschool programs, and we are seeking bipartisan support again this year so we can counter the President’s proposal and bring quality afterschool programs to all children who need them.”

This year, President Bush proposed cutting the federal budget for afterschool programs by \$281 million and converting the successful 21st Century Community Learning Centers afterschool initiative (21st CCLC) into a risky voucher system. If Congress agrees to his proposal, 300,000 students would lose access to afterschool programs.

Other state champions honored at the *Afterschool for All Challenge* are: Boise Mayor David Bieter; Columbia Mayor Bob Coble; St. Paul Mayor Christopher Coleman; Kacy Conley, YMCA of Central Maryland in Baltimore; Omaha Mayor Mike Fahey; Savannah Mayor Otis Johnson; Morgantown Mayor Ron Justice; Charlotte City Council Member James Mitchell; Missouri State Representative Danie Moore; New York City Commissioner of the Department of Youth and Community Development Jeanne Mullgrav; San Francisco Mayor Gavin Newsom; Linda Robinson, Kentucky Department of Education; New Hampshire State Senator Kathleen Sgambati; Maxine Quintana, Denver Mayor’s Office for Education and Children; and Pennsylvania State Representative Jake Wheatley.

The Afterschool Alliance and MetLife Foundation also presented the first-ever MetLife Afterschool Innovator Awards at the “Breakfast of Champions” to four organizations that have developed and implemented innovative afterschool practices. The awardees are profiled in *Afterschool Innovations in Brief*, a series of Issue Briefs developed by the Afterschool Alliance with funding from MetLife Foundation. They are: The After-School Corporation in New York; LA’s BEST in California; The Native Youth Club in South Dakota; and Lincoln Community Learning Centers in Nebraska.

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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.