



NEWS RELEASE
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Sioux Falls Afterschool Program Receives Afterschool Innovator Award

*Parents, Educators, Students, City and State Leaders
Urge Congress to Increase Afterschool Funding*

WASHINGTON, D.C. – The Afterschool Alliance and MetLife Foundation today recognized the Native Youth Club in Sioux Falls, South Dakota as an Afterschool Innovator for involving the community in its program and forging partnerships between school and community. Native Youth Club is one of four organizations being honored at the “Breakfast of Champions” as an Afterschool Innovator. Each has been profiled in *Afterschool Innovations in Brief*, a series of Issue Briefs developed by the Afterschool Alliance with support from MetLife Foundation.

The staff and leadership of the Native Youth Club consider community involvement a vital component of the program. They regularly invite tribal elders to teach students about Native American customs and bring in high school volunteers to mentor younger students. Through the program, students also have the opportunity to showcase Native American dances at local ethnic celebrations, and keep tribal traditions alive.

Research shows that community involvement can help afterschool programs close the achievement gap for students from diverse cultural and socioeconomic backgrounds. Other benefits include:

- greater relevance of curriculum for students;
- increased student responsibility for learning;
- improved linkages between school and community;
- improved problem-solving, teaming, higher order thinking, time management, and other vital skills that benefit students’ school achievement and workplace readiness;
- expanded learning environments;
- greater motivation of reluctant learners;
- enhanced problem solving and conflict management skills; and
- reduced behavior and truancy problems.

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,” advocates met with their U.S. Senators and Representatives and congressional aides.

“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.”

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

The other organizations honored with MetLife Afterschool Innovator Awards are LA’s BEST in California, Lincoln Community Learning Centers in Nebraska, and The After-School Corporation (TASC) in New York.

At the “Breakfast of Champions,” the Alliance also honored 16 individuals as Afterschool Champions. They are: Boise Mayor David Bieter; Columbia (SC) Mayor Bob Coble; St. Paul Mayor Christopher Coleman; Kacy Conley, YMCA of Central Maryland in Baltimore; Omaha Mayor Mike Fahey; Grand Rapids Mayor George Heartwell; Savannah Mayor Otis Johnson; Morgantown (WV) 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.

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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.