



MEMORANDUM

TO: Editorial Page Editor
FROM: Jodi Grant, Executive Director, Afterschool Alliance
RE: Americans Want the Lights On After School for our Children & Youth
DATE: October 12, 2007

On October 18, approximately 1 million students, parents, educators, and business and community leaders will participate in *Lights On Afterschool* rallies at some 7,500 locations across the nation and at U.S. military bases around the world. The events will both celebrate the vital contribution afterschool programs make to students and families, and remind policy makers and community leaders of the need to provide the funding and support necessary to keep the lights on for many more kids after school.

Quality afterschool programs make a huge difference for children and their families. They keep children safe in the sometimes perilous afternoon hours. They inspire students to learn by providing help with homework, lessons that complement the school curricula, and exposure to opportunities and activities that can't be squeezed into the regular academic day – trips to science laboratories and robotics facilities, field trips to museums and arts performances, athletics, clubs, and much more. In addition, afterschool programs help working parents by solving the problem of finding safe, reliable, appropriate activities for their children during the afternoon hours before parents get home from work.

The recently released results from the first-ever national *T-Mobile Huddle Up Afterschool Survey* (http://www.afterschoolalliance.org/news_events.cfm#4000695) underscore parents' support for afterschool. The survey found that 90 percent of parents say having a safe, positive place for their child after school will keep their child safe and away from criminal activity.

Thousands of those parents are participating in *Lights On Afterschool* rallies across this country this month. This year's *Lights On Afterschool* is also the kick-off for a national celebration of the tenth anniversary celebration of federal 21st Century Community Learning Centers. The landmark initiative has transformed afternoons for millions of kids by funding quality afterschool programs in communities across the nation. In its early years, the initiative grew quickly, evolving from a successful pilot effort to a \$1 billion funding stream providing grants to afterschool programs around the nation. But since then, funding has stalled.

The *No Child Left Behind Act* promised greater resources to meet the enormous need for afterschool programs for kids across the nation, mapping out a plan for modest but steady increases in afterschool funding. If that roadmap had been followed, states would have had \$2.5 billion available from the federal government this year to support afterschool. But 21st Century Community Learning Centers increases never materialized. Instead, across-the-board funding cuts have actually shrunk federal afterschool funding over the last few years and it stands today

at less than \$1 billion. The result is that millions of children leave school each weekday afternoon with no adult-supervised activity waiting for them, no help with homework in sight, and no constructive activities to engage them. That's the dynamic that has made the afternoon hours prime time for juvenile crime and for a range of risky behaviors by kids.

Lights On Afterschool highlights the promise of afterschool programs by shining a spotlight on the many activities afterschool programs offer. Across the country, *Lights On Afterschool* events next week will include student artwork and essays, carnivals, open houses, street fairs and much more to showcase the benefits that students, parents and communities derive from afterschool. In addition, for the first time, the Empire State Building in New York City will recognize *Lights On Afterschool* by shining yellow lights at the top of the building on October 18th.

Please consider an editorial in conjunction with *Lights On Afterschool* next week that reminds federal lawmakers that we need more funding for these critical programs. If you'd like to peg it to a *Lights On Afterschool* event in your community, there are thousands listed on our website, www.afterschoolalliance.org, where you will also find a wealth of information on afterschool programs. Or feel free to contact Lisa Lederer or Gretchen Wright at the Afterschool Alliance media office, 202/371-1999, and they will put you in touch with a local organizer. Thank you!