



NEWS RELEASE
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**At Congressional Ceremony, Afterschool Alliance Presents
Champion Award to Farrell and Sharon School Districts
21st Century Community Learning Centers Program**

***Nation's Leading Afterschool Advocacy Organization
Honors Pennsylvania Afterschool Program***

WASHINGTON, DC – The Afterschool Alliance presented its Afterschool Champion Award to the 21st Century Community Learning Centers C.O.O.L. (Children's Opportunities for Outside Learning) Program in Farrell and Sharon School Districts, at a Congressional Breakfast here today. The award recognizes the program's work to improve academic achievement in students. Senator Rick Santorum (R-PA) was scheduled to present the award to: Lynne Powell, Community Outreach Specialist from Farrell Area School District; Dawn Blaus, C.O.O.L. Project Coordinator for Sharon School District; and Farrell Area School District Board Member Sadie Benham and her daughter, Cherish Benham, who participates in the C.O.O.L. program.

“We congratulate the 21st Century Community Learning Centers C.O.O.L. Program for its deep commitment to improving student achievement and expanding students' appreciation for their community,” said Afterschool Alliance Executive Director Judy Y. Samelson. “Through its partnerships with numerous community groups, the C.O.O.L. program provides a safe, enriching environment for students and helps them learn more about themselves and their community. We're proud to recognize this remarkable program for its work.”

“I am honored to receive this award on behalf of the C.O.O.L. Program, but I am even prouder of our program's accomplishments in both Farrell and Sharon School Districts,” said Powell in accepting the award. “Our afterschool programs provide a vital service to our community by helping working families, keeping kids safe and, best of all, expanding children's educational opportunities after school.”

The Farrell and Sharon School Districts together coordinate the 21st Century Community Learning Centers C.O.O.L. Program at six school sites. The program serves students in grades three through nine and their families, offering educational, health, recreational and cultural activities and services.

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Following homework and snack time, students can participate in a variety of enrichment activities such as art, science, drama, research, math and computer skills. The programs schedule regular field trips, monthly family events and classes for parents.

Community involvement is a major component of the C.O.O.L afterschool program. Organizations and agencies – including the Shenango Valley Urban League, Penn State Cooperative Extension, UPMC Horizon, and Neighborhood Based Family Intervention Services – give students classroom curriculum, demonstrations and educational events.

The Afterschool Champion Award was presented during the Afterschool Alliance’s annual *Breakfast of Champions*, part of its Afterschool for All Challenge on Capitol Hill. More than 300 afterschool providers and advocates participated in the *Breakfast*, joined by more than a dozen Members of Congress. In addition to the C.O.O.L. Program, the Afterschool Alliance honored: Nortel Networks; Time Warner; the 21st Century Afterschool Program at Geary County Schools in Junction City, Kansas; and the Richland County School District One After School Programs in South Carolina.

After the *Breakfast of Champions*, participants fanned out across Capitol Hill to urge lawmakers to support full funding for the 21st Century Community Learning Centers initiative, the federal government’s chief funding stream for afterschool programs across the nation. The President has proposed freezing afterschool funding at \$1 billion for the fourth consecutive year. If approved, the proposal would leave afterschool funding at just half the level promised in the landmark “No Child Left Behind Act of 2001.” Full funding for afterschool at the authorized \$2 billion level would create afterschool opportunities for an addition 1.4 million children. Millions more children who need afterschool programs do not have access to them.

A new Afterschool Alliance household survey, funded by the JCPenney Afterschool Fund and released this week, found that more than 14 million K-12 youth are responsible for taking care of themselves after school, and these children spend an average of nearly seven afternoon hours per week unsupervised. Afterschool programs offer young people safe, enriching, fun and engaging places to go once the school day ends. Research shows that afterschool programs are a good investment. Youth who participate have been shown to perform better in school and to hold greater expectations for the future, while children who are unsupervised during the afternoons are at greater risk of becoming involved with crime, substance abuse and teenage pregnancy.

The event is sponsored by the Afterschool Alliance, a nonprofit public awareness and advocacy organization supported by a group of public, private, and nonprofit entities working to ensure that all children and youth have access to afterschool programs by 2010. Information is available at www.afterschoolalliance.org

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