

NEWS RELEASE
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Ten Years of *Lights On Afterschool!*

Rallies All Across Nation to Focus on New State Data Exploring How America's Children Spend their Afternoons, From Study Supported by JCPenney Afterschool Fund

Kids, families, educators, community leaders, policy makers, celebrities and others across the country will gather in schools, community centers, parks, malls, state capitols and elsewhere on October 22 for the 10th annual nationwide rally for afterschool. The Afterschool Alliance organized the first *Lights On Afterschool* in 2000, and it has grown to include more than 7,500 events across the country and at U.S. military bases worldwide each year. *Lights On Afterschool* is the only nationwide rally for afterschool programs.

In advance of *Lights On Afterschool* this year, the Afterschool Alliance will release the second *America After 3 PM: A Household Survey on Afterschool in America*, the most in-depth study ever to explore how America's children spend their afternoons. Funded by the JCPenney Afterschool Fund, a charitable organization committed to inspiring children to be smart, strong and socially responsible, the original study was released in 2004. It found that 14.3 million kindergarten through 12th graders took care of themselves after the school day ended. At the time, just 6.5 million children were in afterschool programs – but the parents of another 15.3 million children said their children would participate if an afterschool program were available.

The 2009 study, designed to measure progress over the last five years, is also funded by the JCPenney Afterschool Fund and includes updated information on afterschool participation nationally and in all 50 states. The Afterschool Alliance and JCPenney Afterschool Fund will release it on October 6 at an event at the U.S. Department of Education. State data will be featured a few weeks later at *Lights On Afterschool* events around the country.

Lights On Afterschool rallies this year are expected to involve more than a million people who will urge leaders to support the afterschool programs that keep children safe, inspire them to learn and help working families. The events give youth a chance to showcase the skills they learn and talents they develop at their afterschool programs, and to send the message that millions more kids need quality afterschool programs. (A growing list of rallies is posted at www.AfterschoolAlliance.org.)

“We are proud to celebrate the 10th anniversary of the only nationwide rally for afterschool programs,” said Afterschool Alliance Executive Director Jodi Grant. “*Lights On Afterschool* has become an important event in large cities and small towns across the nation, as more and more people recognize how important it is to keep the lights on for children after the school day ends. We still have a lot of work to do to make quality afterschool programs available to all students, but the overwhelming public support for afterschool programs will help us reach that goal.”

The federal investment in afterschool has lagged far behind the need. The *No Child Left Behind Act* authorized \$2.5 billion for the 21st Century Community Learning Centers (the chief federal funding stream for afterschool) in FY2007, and funding stands at less than half that today.

The recession also is taking a serious toll. Ninety-five percent of respondents to a survey of nearly 1,500 afterschool providers programs conducted by the Afterschool Alliance this spring said the recession is affecting their communities, and 60 percent report seeing more kids going hungry or families struggling to provide food for children. Yet afterschool programs are unable to provide as much help as children need. Three in five respondents said funding for their program is down compared to two years ago, and more than one-third (36 percent) said it is down a lot. In response, programs are first cutting items like field trips, reducing activities, and reducing staff pay and benefits. But many also have been forced to add or increase fees (38 percent), reduce professional development (34 percent), increase staff/student ratios (28 percent), reduce the number of children they serve (28 percent), or reduce the hours or days they are open (25 percent). Eighty-six percent of respondents say children in their communities need afterschool care and are unable to access it.

As part of this year's *Lights On Afterschool* celebration, Bright House Networks will air a new documentary on the benefits of afterschool, featuring the personal stories of youth and families across the country. Bright House Networks produced the first "After the School Bell Rings" cable special in conjunction with last year's *Lights On Afterschool*. To view the 2008 show, visit <http://www.youtube.com/user/afterschool4all>.

Actress Rhea Perlman is a spokesperson for *Lights On Afterschool* and California Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger is Founding Chair, a position he has held since 2001.

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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.

To find a Lights On Afterschool event, visit www.AfterschoolAlliance.org.