



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
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***Lights On Afterschool* to Kick Off This Weekend With DC Soccer Fiesta Oct. 7; West Coast Kickoff in L.A. Oct. 8**

Thousands of Rallies around the Nation Next Week

The Afterschool Alliance's annual *Lights On Afterschool*, a nationwide series of rallies for afterschool, will launch this weekend with a bi-coastal kickoff. On the east coast, the Alliance will join in a soccer-themed event in Washington, D.C. on Saturday. On the west coast, the Beyond the Bell afterschool program will host an afterschool festival in Los Angeles on Sunday, featuring television's Hercules, Kevin Sorbo, and 4,000 children. The Afterschool Alliance's signature inflatable light bulb will fly above both events.

Over the course of next week, thousands of sites across the nation will host *Lights On* rallies of their own, most on October 12, *Lights On Afterschool Day*.

In **Washington, D.C.**, the Afterschool Alliance will participate in *Soccer Fiesta*, Saturday, October 7, from 2 PM to 6 PM near RFK Stadium. The event is jointly sponsored by the American Youth Soccer Organization, Cartoon Network, and Major League Soccer, in conjunction with D.C. United. The event will feature a carnival area, live cartoon characters, games and prizes, soccer clinics, visits from Major League Soccer players, and free soccer balls and t-shirts.

In **Los Angeles, California**, Beyond the Bell Expanded Learning and Enrichment Programs will celebrate *Lights On Afterschool* with a west coast afterschool kickoff at Birmingham High School from 10 AM to 3 PM on Sunday, October 8. More than 20 afterschool programs from throughout Los Angeles will attend to rally, celebrate and raise awareness about the importance of afterschool programs. Some 4,000 students are expected to participate in activities representative of the Beyond the Bell curriculum. Organizers will also hold a ceremony featuring Afterschool Alliance spokesperson Kevin Sorbo of the television show, "Hercules: The Legendary Journeys," and local dignitaries. This year's event in California will have extra significance because the state is about to launch a new and significant funding stream for afterschool programs, the result of California voters' adoption of Proposition 49 in 2002.

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Organized by the Afterschool Alliance, *Lights On Afterschool* is the nation's largest rally for afterschool. *Lights On Afterschool* was launched in October 2000 with 1,200 events across the country. Last year, a million people rallied at 7,500 events to show their support for afterschool programs.

“This year's *Lights On Afterschool* will send a clear message about the value our communities place on afterschool programs,” said Afterschool Alliance Executive Director Jodi Grant. “Parents know that afterschool programs keep kids safe, inspire them to learn and help working families. And they understand why afterschool is such a critical investment in our future. That's an important message because funding shortages are hitting afterschool programs hard, leaving too many children without adult supervision in the afternoon hours.”

Next week and later in October, the inflatable light bulb will also fly over *Lights On Afterschool* events in Concord and Fresno, California; Boise, Idaho; Evansville, Indiana; St. Paul, Minnesota; Meridian, Mississippi; Camdenton, Missouri; Cincinnati, Ohio; Nashville, Tennessee; Houston, Texas; and Burlington, Vermont.

Research shows that 14.3 million kindergarten through 12th graders care for themselves after the school day ends. The parents of more than 15 million children nationwide say their children would participate in an afterschool program if one were available.

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 by 2010. More information is available at www.afterschoolalliance.org.

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Note to Media: For help finding a local *Lights On* event, contact Lisa Lederer or Gretchen Wright at 202/371-1999.