

## Afterschool-For-All

On Wednesday, May 24 2006; more than five hundred parents, youth, city leaders, educators and advocates from around the country visited Capitol Hill to encourage Members of Congress to increase funding for afterschool programs as part of the fifth annual, *Afterschool for All Challenge*. Sponsors of the Challenge event included: *The Charles Stewart Mott Foundation, The Atlantic Philanthropies, The John S. and James L. Knight Foundation, The Open Society Institute, Microsoft, NAMM, The Wallace Foundation, FowlerHoffman LLC, T-Mobile USA, Washington Partners LLC, Winning Connections and Time for Kids*. To prepare for their "Hill" visits, advocates spent the previous day in workshops and panels with legislators, funders and community leaders from across the country who provided insight and advice on afterschool advocacy and topics such as math and science in afterschool, afterschool for older youth, election year opportunities and statewide advocacy.

"The Afterschool for All Challenge is an empowering opportunity for afterschool supporters' from across the country to speak with their federal representatives and join forces with their colleagues to advocate for afterschool programs," said participant Alana Kulesa, Youth Program Manager from the Children's Museum of Pittsburgh. "The delegation from the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania was a powerhouse of afterschool practitioners and participants and made the case for quality afterschool programs which benefit our children so greatly."

The day began with a *Breakfast of Champions* at which Providence, Rhode Island mayor, David N. Cicilline; Columbus, Ohio mayor, Michael B. Coleman; and former Florida Secretary of State/Orlando, Florida mayor, Glenda E. Hood spoke on behalf of a group of mayors being honored for their efforts to make afterschool programs available to all families in their cities. After the *Breakfast of Champions*; students, educators, parents and afterschool leaders fanned out across Capitol Hill for more than 200 meetings with Members of Congress and staff. In the meetings, they discussed the benefits afterschool programs provide, and urged Congress to increase funding for afterschool.

Shileste Overton-Morris, Program Manager, for the 21st Century Community Learning Center Technical Assistance Center in Pennsylvania, emphasized the need for funding and support for PA 21<sup>st</sup> CCLC's. "I encourage you and your fellow representatives to join the Congressional Afterschool Caucus so that you can help give Pennsylvanian students the option of high-quality, safe, afterschool learning activities critical to success in life and to their parent's ability to work," she summarized in her presentation addressing Pennsylvanian legislators.

At lunchtime, Senators Barbara Boxer (D-CA), Ted Stevens (R-AK) and Craig Thomas (R-WY) joined the call to increase afterschool funding. Local, State and National office-holders were on hand to pledge their commitment to making afterschool available to all children and youth. Throughout the day, advocates sounded the alarm that funding for the bi-partisan *No Child Left Behind* Act has fallen far behind authorized levels; \$2.5 billion is authorized for the 21st Century Community Learning Centers (21st CCLC) next year. If the initiative were funded at *No Child Left Behind* levels, 1.5 million more children would have access to quality afterschool programs, leaders stated.

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“If Pennsylvania and the nation is to be successful in training and educating our young people to compete in the future global economy - we must think about innovative ways to provide learning opportunities beyond the traditional classroom and invest in strategies that are research-based,” concluded Kisha Bird, Project Director for the Pennsylvania Statewide Afterschool Youth Development Network.

The Afterschool for All Challenge was a success at creating a forum for policymakers and advocates to voice concerns that face afterschool. However, there is still more that needs to be done. According to a report published by the Afterschool Alliance, just 8% of children in Pennsylvania working families are in afterschool programs, while 28% of children in Pennsylvania working families are “latchkey kids” with no adult supervision in the afternoon.

Encourage your Pennsylvania representatives to become more involve by joining the Afterschool Caucus so that they may help increase funding for afterschool programs making it available in all communities and school districts. If you would like to learn more information about afterschool in Pennsylvania, please visit [www.psaydn.org](http://www.psaydn.org).

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