



## 2008 AFTERSCHOOL YEAR IN REVIEW A YEAR OF DILIGENCE AND PROMISE

### Introduction

The afterschool community began 2008 facing a proposed \$300 million cut to afterschool—a challenge defeated handily—with 40,000+ advocates contacting Members of Congress in just two days. In October, one of the largest *Lights On Afterschool* rallies ever was held, and the Afterschool Alliance published the stories of so many whose lives have been transformed by afterschool in *America's Afterschool Storybook*.

The year 2008 was full of challenges and affirmations for afterschool. In February, President Bush released his Fiscal Year 2009 budget proposal, asking Congress to cut funding for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Community Learning Center (21<sup>st</sup> CCLC) initiative, the only federal funding stream dedicated to afterschool, from the current \$1.1 billion level to just \$800 million. Throughout spring and summer, as Congress worked on the Fiscal Year 2009 appropriations bill, afterschool advocates were quick to reach out to Congressional leaders to remind them of the importance of afterschool and urge them to reject the President's budget for 21<sup>st</sup> CCLC.

While it appears that FY2009 funding is no longer at risk, the current economic crisis leaves future funding for afterschool vulnerable. There is uncertainty about the cost of the recovery package being considered by Congress and the impact those recovery efforts could have on other federal spending. However, the Obama administration has pledged to double the funding for 21<sup>st</sup> CCLC, and with continued outreach by afterschool advocates, providers and families, law makers will likely remain committed to increasing funding for afterschool.

Fortunately, voters indicated their growing support for afterschool, even in the face of economic stress. An Election eve poll confirmed that voters from all demographic groups and political parties still strongly support afterschool programs. In fact, three in four voters (76 percent) think that Congress and their local policy makers should increase funding for afterschool programs, up 10 percent from a similar poll conducted in 2006.

The demand for afterschool services is great, and will only increase in this economic downturn. The stresses on children, families and communities are being exacerbated. Parents are struggling to pay the bills, with many looking for extra hours at work and worried about keeping their jobs. More children are left hungry each day. Budget constraints are leading to radical policy changes, such as four-day school or work weeks, the elimination of school bus routes and new fees for support services, including

afterschool programs. Afterschool programs face their own budget challenges – many are being forced to reduce services, increase fees or even shut doors, just when families need their support most.

The past year presented the afterschool community with many obstacles, most notably the economic crises, but also many opportunities for growth. The year 2008 saw the celebration of ten years of 21<sup>st</sup> CCLC, the only federal initiative dedicated to supporting afterschool programs, and the first increase in 21<sup>st</sup> CCLC funding since 2002 made its way to states and communities in 2008. There are now 3,309 grants funding afterschool programs serving more than 1 million children and youth in 9,824 school-based and community-based centers across the country. Evaluations and teacher reports have revealed positive results in behavior and achievement for students who regularly attend 21<sup>st</sup> Century Community Learning Centers. The continued support by federal and state legislators clearly shows they recognize the need for afterschool, and that they are willing to fund it in the face of historic fiscal difficulties.

The 2008 Afterschool Alliance Year In Review highlights key developments in the afterschool field, including growth in resources and support for afterschool, and provides an overview of the opportunities likely to come in 2009. The 2008 Year In Review also includes quotes from several of the individuals featured in America's Afterschool Storybook, which was released this year in celebration of 10 years of 21<sup>st</sup> CCLC.

## GROWING RESOURCES

### Federal Resources

The year started out on high note celebrating the late-2007 passage of the FY08 appropriations, which brought the first increase in 21<sup>st</sup> CCLC funding since 2002. The celebration was short lived when, in February 2008, despite urging from all 14 women Senators to increase funding for 21<sup>st</sup> CCLC, President Bush released his Fiscal Year 2009 budget proposal, asking Congress to cut funding from the current \$1.1 billion level to just \$800 million.

Throughout spring and summer, Congress worked on the Fiscal Year 2009 appropriations bill and afterschool advocates were quick to reach out to Congressional leaders to remind them of the importance of afterschool and urge them to reject the President's budget for 21<sup>st</sup> CCLC. The results of this advocacy are not yet fully known, but it appears that Members of Congress were convinced. The response by Congress was immediate. Members of Congress specifically criticized the proposed cuts at appropriations hearings; the Afterschool Alliance was invited to testify at an appropriations hearing; and the House Education and Labor Committee convened a hearing focused on the impact of the proposed afterschool cuts on children and families.

In my county, the opportunity for theater is very limited, which is a problem for students like me who love to act but do not have the chance to do so. 21st Century has made a difference in the lives of students by helping bring in Missoula Children's Theatre Company.

- Emileigh Burns,  
Marrowbone, NY

The House Appropriations Committee's pending bill not only rejects President Bush's proposed cut to 21<sup>st</sup> CCLC, it increases funding by \$50 million, and adds \$55 million to the Child Care and Development Block Grant (CCDBG). The Senate Appropriations Committee bill also rejects the proposed cut. While it holds funding for 21<sup>st</sup> CCLC level at \$1.1 billion, it includes a \$75 million increase for CCDBG. Congress adjourned in October without completing these bills for Fiscal Year 2009. In order to keep the federal government running, on September 30, Congress passed and President Bush signed a short-term Continuing Resolution which funds federal programs, including 21<sup>st</sup> CCLC, at existing levels through March 6, 2009. In January 2009, the incoming 111<sup>th</sup> Congress will pick up the work of making funding decisions for Fiscal Year 2009.

### State Resources

The year 2008 was a challenging fiscal year for state governments. Many states and local governments faced a reduction in revenues and anticipate upcoming deficits. These tight fiscal times make the work of state advocates harder, but even more critical, as the field strives to build additional state and local supports for afterschool programs. Despite these barriers there were some promising developments at the state level in 2008.

In **California**, afterschool funding faced a serious threat from legislators aiming to put a measure on the ballot that would erase the current guaranteed funding of \$550 million for afterschool programs. The funding, created by Prop 49, a ballot initiative championed by Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger in 2002, was the first state-level proposal committed to statewide afterschool funding. Governor Schwarzenegger vetoed the measure to put the funding commitment back on the ballot, so the immediate threat has passed. A long-term threat remains, however, because of the state's on-going and dire fiscal situation.

The **Georgia** General Assembly again allocated \$14 million in federal Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) dollars in the budget to continue supporting afterschool programs in community-based organizations and schools. This program served over 19,000 children and youth across the state in 2008. Also, \$20.3 million TANF dollars will be transferred to the state's child care subsidy program for FY09. These dollars will support between 5,000 and 6,000 children and youth from low-income families.

In **Iowa**, \$1 million from the Healthy Iowans Tobacco Trust was approved to support afterschool programs in FY09, a 10 percent increase from the FY08 amount. In FY07 this amount was a mere \$150,000. Additionally, the state legislature earmarked \$100,000 as a match for the Iowa Afterschool Alliance, the statewide afterschool network.

Today, as an accomplished young woman, I realize that the most important factor that contributed to my personal success was my involvement in afterschool programs. As Miss Montana I have the opportunity to share my story with parents, educators, policy makers, and, most importantly, other latchkey children.

- Jennifer Hepner,  
Great Falls, MT

The **Kansas** State Legislature approved \$400,000 in continuation funding for FY09 to support afterschool programs that target middle school students.

In **Massachusetts**, the state legislature increased afterschool funding for the Afterschool and Out-of-School Time grant program from \$2 million to \$5.5 million in the FY09 budget.

**New Mexico** enacted legislation that provides \$1.3 million in funding for afterschool enrichment at schools, and an additional \$1.8 million to sustain existing 21<sup>st</sup> CCLC programs.

The **Washington** state legislature passed a bill that adds \$16 million to support student graduation with extended learning supports. The legislation is aimed at 8<sup>th</sup>, 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> graders, and allows carryover funds to support at risk 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> graders who may not pass the 8<sup>th</sup> grade proficiency exam. Allowable uses of funds include: before and afterschool programs and summer learning programs. Washington state has also enacted \$3 million dollars over a two year period to create an afterschool and before school competitive grant program. The legislation was developed and supported by the Washington Afterschool Network.

## ENHANCING QUALITY

### Federal Efforts

In September of 2008, Senator Benjamin Cardin introduced the *Giving Incentives to Volunteers Everywhere Act* which offers an amendment to the Internal Revenue Code of 1986 to allow the Secretary of the Treasury to permit volunteers to claim mileage reimbursements on their income tax forms. This legislation makes several direct mentions of volunteers in afterschool programs and is, therefore, a very favorable bill for the afterschool community. It is likely that this bill will be quickly picked up in the 111<sup>th</sup> Congress for a quick attempt at passage early in 2009.

In July, Senator Joseph Biden introduced the *Child Protection Improvements Act* of 2008 to establish a national system of checking on the criminal history of any volunteer working with children. The legislation sets up a partnership with the FBI and the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children to allow any youth serving entity to process a background check via fingerprinting for a nominal fee. It appears likely that Senator John Ensign will be shepherding this bill through the 111<sup>th</sup> Congress, and a pilot program is in place through most of next 2009 to test the fingerprint background check system

### State Quality Initiatives

In **Washington** state, as specified by the 2007 general assembly, Schools Out Washington received quality support funding to help local programs adopt proven strategies. This significant boost to quality support of programs, matched by funding from The Atlantic Philanthropies, has positioned Schools Out Washington, the statewide

afterschool network, to make a profound difference in how programs incorporate successful strategies to produce desired outcomes for children.

Building on the expertise of the network partners, the **New York** State Afterschool Network (NYSAN) created both a self assessment tool and a training program for managers of funding streams to support the growth of quality measures in programs and therefore the likelihood of achieving desired outcomes.

Identified in state legislation as the organization to conduct a study on afterschool program quality, **Maine**'s afterschool network set out to learn how a large number of programs approach and achieve quality. The report is due to the legislature in January 2009.

The **South Carolina** Afterschool Alliance received \$250,000 for FY09 to continue the work they began in FY08 providing training and technical assistance to afterschool programs throughout the state.

## A GROWING AFTERSCHOOL COMMUNITY

The afterschool community continued to grow, both in size and sophistication, over the course of 2008. Afterschool advocates used a variety of vehicles to show their support for afterschool and to attract the attention of policy makers, the media and the public at large.

### *Afterschool for All*

In 2008, *Afterschool for All* was relaunched with updated communications materials including a new brochure, webpage and advocacy toolkit that was distributed to afterschool advocates nationwide. To date, the *Afterschool for All* partner list totals more than 21,927 partners—an increase of nearly 30 percent over the past year.

In addition, the *Afterschool for All* campaign proved to be an effective tool for state networks to enhance their grassroots advocacy initiatives including: growing databases of community supporters; building relationships with grass-top leaders; strengthening grassroots advocacy efforts; increasing inter-organizational collaboration and increasing their visibility in the community.

### *Afterschool for All Challenge*

The 2008 *Afterschool for All Challenge* was a tremendous success. More than 500 advocates, providers, parents and students participated in the *Afterschool for All Challenge* and visited more than 200 Congressional offices. Hundreds more afterschool

*The challenges confronting low-income students are felt particularly keenly in the school district's afterschool programs. More than nine in ten afterschool students receive free and reduced price lunch. With the help of grant funds from the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Community Learning Centers (21<sup>st</sup> CCLC) initiative, afterschool program staff are working hard to meet these children's needs.*

*-St. Paul, Minnesota*

supporters who could not make it to Washington, D.C. made their voices heard too. In the week following the *Challenge*, 400 emails were sent to Congress, further reinforcing the need for more afterschool funding.

In addition to sessions focused on the value of afterschool and helping prepare youth for the global economy, health and wellness, costs and financing, programs for older youth the *Afterschool for All Challenge* featured the "Breakfast of Champions," where Senators Cochran (R-MS), Ensign (R-NV), Nelson (D-NE) and Reed (D-RI), and Representatives Kennedy (D-RI), Kildee (D-MI), Lowey (D-NY) and Regula (R-OH) were honored for their support for afterschool. In addition, 16 state champions and four MetLife Innovators were recognized. Mayors David Cicilline of Providence, RI and Gavin Newsom of San Francisco, as well as celebrity chef Tyler Florence also participated in the "Breakfast of Champions."

As a direct result of the more than 200 visits to Congressional offices, the month of May saw a spurt of growth in the Afterschool Caucuses. The Caucuses membership jumped to 128 members. New members that joined immediately following the *Afterschool for All Challenge* included: Representatives Rick Boucher (D-VA), Andre Carson (D-IN), Susan Davis (D-CA), Ben Chandler (D-KY), Solomon Ortiz (D-TX) and Ed Whitfield (R-KY).

### *Lights On Afterschool*

The year 2008 marked one of the biggest *Lights On Afterschool* rallies. Given the budget cuts many programs are experiencing, it was great to see that so many realized the importance of promoting afterschool. More than 7,500 *Lights On Afterschool* events were registered, and several key states saw big increases in events. Of particular note, Florida, a key election year state, saw an increase of 85+ rallies, up to 548 events. In California, where afterschool faced an effort by legislators to undo the state's commitment to fund afterschool for all, the number of events jumped 40 percent, from 544 to 758. Celebrations were many and varied: from a celebration at a military base in Korea to a tree-lighting in Alaska; from an "Afterschool for All Art Car" in Arkansas to an event featuring energy conservation in Texas; from a program with the Governor of Maryland to a rally on the steps of the capital in Sacramento, CA. Additional highlights include:

- In Mississippi, Mary Peavey from Peavey Electronics showcased Afterschool Not Idle and once again received widespread coverage and helped spread the word about the need for quality programs.
- In Florida, Reinaldo Llano from Bright House Networks produced and aired *After the School Bell Rings*, a thirty minute television show on the need for afterschool programs. Among those featured, Providence, RI Mayor David Cicilline and celebrity chef Tyler Florence. *After the School Bell Rings* can be viewed at <http://www.youtube.com/user/afterschool4all>.

I like the activities they offer, I like that I have a place to hang out with my friends, and I especially like the Community Learning Center (CLC) program. Before I came to the CLC, I had a really bad math phobia which made me stressed out about school.

-Amy Princiotta,  
Gardiner, ME

- Press coverage was strong. A message from “Cheers” Rhea Perlman about the importance of afterschool programs was heard by more than 16 million radio listeners nationwide.
- The Empire State Building lit up for *Lights On Afterschool*, and an image of the building with a message about *Lights On Afterschool* appeared on the Times Square Jumbotron.
- *Lights On Afterschool* went "green" this year by replacing its symbol—a standard incandescent light bulb—with a compact fluorescent light bulb.
- America’s Afterschool Storybook was unveiled, see <http://www.afterschoolalliance.org/storybook/gallery.cfm>.

### ***Lights On Afterschool* Online Rally and Facebook Fan Page**

The Afterschool Alliance launched a social networking presence on Facebook with the very first *Lights On Afterschool* online rally. Celebrity chefs Tyler Florence and Joey Altman, along with Time magazine columnist Joel Stein, signed up. The virtual rally received a total of 138 RSVPs. The “fans” of the Afterschool Alliance posted messages about how excited they were about *Lights On Afterschool* and how important it is to support afterschool. The Afterschool Alliance “fan” base on Facebook is growing everyday and now totals 332 fans.

### **STRONG SUPPORT FROM VOTERS**

A 2008 Election eve and Election night poll showed that voters strongly support afterschool programs, and want federal, state and local law makers to increase funding for them. The poll was conducted by Lake Research Partners with bipartisan analysis by Lake and The Tarrance Group for the Afterschool Alliance.

According to the survey, nearly nine in ten voters (89 percent) say that, given the dangers young people face today, afterschool programs are important. Four in five voters (83 percent) agree there should be some type of organized activity or safe place for children and teens to go after school every day that provides opportunities for them to learn. And 76 percent want the new Congress and their newly elected state and local officials to increase funding for afterschool programs.

I guess what I mean to express is that, if it weren't for Higher Achievement (and my fourth grade teacher, Ms. Diggs), I would never have come out of my shell.

- Tyra Bell,  
Washington D.C.

This latest voter polling shows support growing over past years, with three in four voters (76 percent) agreeing that afterschool programs are "an absolute necessity" for their community. That support is up 10 percent from polling conducted in 2006. Also, men's intensity of support for afterschool programs is increasing. Today, 63 percent of men strongly agree there should be some type of organized activity or safe place for children/teens to go after school every day that provides opportunities for them to learn. In 2006, just 53 percent of men strongly agreed. In addition, support for afterschool programs holds strong across all demographic, ideological and party lines. Ninety-four percent of Democrats, 83 percent of Independents and 71 percent of Republicans agree there's a need for an organized activity or safe place for children/teens, as do 73 percent

of conservatives. Majorities of voters of all races and ages, from all regions, and parents as well as non-parents, agree.

Also in 2008, new research from Peter D. Hart Research Associates, for the Charles Stewart Mott Foundation, found that parents as well as education policy leaders recognize the need to increase the availability of high-quality learning opportunities outside the regular school day. More than two in three parents (68 percent) say they are satisfied that there are sufficient educational and enrichment opportunities available for their children in school, but just under half (49 percent) say the same about learning opportunities outside of the regular school day and school year by way of afterschool, weekend, and summer programs. In fact, just 14 percent of parents say "there are plenty of educational and enrichment programs for young people in my community," while nearly three times as many (39 percent) cite "a serious lack of educational and enrichment programs for young people in my community."

The research also finds strong support for the ideas championed by the Mott Foundation's "New Day for Learning" initiative to reform how, when and where children learn. When asked to identify reforms that would improve education, parents give strongest support to three reform measures: expanding project-based and hands-on learning; giving students more real-world learning opportunities, such as internships and out-of-classroom learning; and increasing access to afterschool and summer learning programs.

## **SUPPORT FROM FEDERAL POLICY MAKERS**

In light of the growing afterschool community and the strong support from voters, it's not surprising that federal elected officials also demonstrated support for afterschool in 2008. In addition to previously described efforts to increase existing funding streams and enhance quality, federal lawmakers demonstrated their support through membership in the afterschool caucuses, through letters encouraging increased funding and by introducing new legislation that would benefit afterschool.

The year 2008 saw an increase in bipartisan federal support for afterschool programs. The Congressional Afterschool Caucuses grew to 128 members – 90 in the House Caucus and 38 in the Senate Caucus. Nine new members joined the House Caucus this year, including Rick Boucher (D-VA), Andre Carson (D-IN), Ben Chandler (D-KY), Jim Cooper (D-TN), Susan Davis (D-CA), Lincoln Diaz-Balart (R-FL), Bill Foster (D-IL), Solomon Ortiz (D-TX), and Ed Whitfield (R-KY). Senators Evan Bayh (D-IN), Robert Casey (D-PA) and John Thune (R-SD) joined the Senate Caucus. Unfortunately, the Republican co-chair of the House Afterschool Caucus, Congressman Ralph Regula retired in 2008. The Caucus is currently seeking a Republican co-chair.

The House and Senate Afterschool Caucuses, the American Association of School Administrators, Save the Children, the National Rural Education Advocacy Coalition and the National Center for Family Literacy co-hosted a briefing on rural afterschool. Mark Shriver, Vice President and Managing Director of U.S. Programs for Save the Children, Jimmy Cunningham, Superintendent for Danville Public Schools in Arkansas and

Charles Harrington, Director of Maine Sea Coast Mission/The EdGE described the unique benefits of and challenges to rural afterschool programs and the pivotal role programs play in the lives of young people.

### Afterschool Related Legislation Introduced in 2008

On September 17, Representatives Betty McCollum (D-MN) and Nita Lowey (D-NY) introduced the “*After School Partnerships Improve Results in Education (ASPIRE) Act*” (H.R. 6928), which would establish and expand afterschool programs for middle and high school students in order to increase student engagement, improve school success and graduation rates, and provide opportunities to increase interest in high-demand career opportunities. It would also provide opportunities for students to gain credit towards graduation through learning done outside the traditional classroom. The legislation calls for a national demonstration project, creating multi-state, multi-site afterschool programs, as well as for state administered local grants. All grants would go to partnerships that include a state or local education agency and at least one partnering agency, such as a career technical student organization, institution of higher education or tribal college, nonprofit organization, community-based organization, tribal organization, business or labor union. The legislation also sets aside resources for evaluation and technical assistance to ensure high quality programs.

On September 24, Senators Blanche Lincoln (D-AR) and Susan Collins (R-ME) introduced the “*Investment in After-School Programs Act of 2008*” (S. 3545), which calls for a pilot program to establish or improve rural afterschool programs. The bill calls for grants of \$50,000 or more to programs to invest in projects or activities needed to create or strengthen rural afterschool programs. The funds could be used for transportation, professional development and training, access to technology, staffing and planning grants, among other things. Grants would be administered by the U.S. Department of Agriculture and given to local education agencies, community-based organizations, or other public or non-profit organizations in rural communities. Priority would be given to grant applicants who have partnerships in place. The bill also includes a small set-aside for evaluation and dissemination of best practices.

On June 18, the House Education and Labor Committee marked up and favorably reported the “*No Child Left Inside Act*” (H.R. 3036), championed by Representative John Sarbanes (D-MD), which would strengthen environmental education and teacher training in schools K-12, through work outside the classroom. The stated goals of this bill dovetail with many existing afterschool programs, and would provide additional support for afterschool.

When I turned 15, I went to work for Bernalillo County Parks and Recreation and received "hands-on" training and work experience working as a recreational aide, leader, supervisor, and coordinator with children of all ages. I truly enjoyed providing recreational opportunities for youth. I continued to work in afterschool settings as I grew older. I knew I had found my calling.

- Lanny Leyba,  
Albuquerque, NM

Further, new extended-day legislation was introduced. In August, Senators Kennedy (D-MA), Bingaman (D-NM) and Sanders (I-VT) introduced the “*Time for Innovation Matters in Education (TIME) Act*” (S.3431), which calls for a federal expanded learning time pilot project to lengthen the school day, week and/or year. The Afterschool Alliance had the opportunity to review and comment on draft legislation and was extremely pleased to see that the final bill incorporated those comments and addressed the concerns of the afterschool field.

As the 111<sup>th</sup> Congress convenes in 2009, the Afterschool Alliance will continue work on these legislative initiatives and many others which will be under consideration.

## LOOKING AHEAD - OPPORTUNITIES IN 2009

This next year will likely be characterized by a lot of hard work in the afterschool field as programs struggle to maintain funding and to meet the hefty expectations on the part of families, children and communities. Fortunately, this field has always exhibited incredible resourcefulness in the face of challenges and has typically greeted those challenges with a spirit of innovation and resiliency. The year 2009 will be no exception.

With a new administration and new Congress taking office, there will be many opportunities for afterschool advocates to make known the benefits of afterschool. Just before taking office, President Obama charged Vice President Joseph Biden with his first official duty, to head up a task force on working families. In addition to job creation and other priorities to strengthen the economy, Biden specifically cited afterschool as a key support for working families.

President Obama named Chicago School System Chief Executive Officer Arne Duncan to be the nation's next Secretary of Education. Duncan is known to afterschool supporters for his successful efforts to build flexibility into the supplemental education services system, and *No Child Left Behind* overall. Known as a pragmatic reformer, in 2006 he called on Congress to double funding for *No Child Left Behind*.

President Obama and his Cabinet took office in 2009, along with a number of new Members of Congress. The new Administration and Congress will be addressing critical issues impacting afterschool, including: the recovery and reinvestment package; appropriations for afterschool programs for fiscal years 2009 and 2010; the reauthorization of *No Child Left Behind*; and other federal legislation that could provide potential funding streams for afterschool. The Afterschool Alliance will mobilize the afterschool community to act

OneWorld Now! (OWN), a Seattle based after school language, leadership program, and study abroad has had a profound impact on my life...My experiences in the global leadership courses at OWN have inspired me to become a catalyst for social change and to help others realize their goals.

- Philmon Haile,  
Seattle, WA

quickly, and continuously, to show the new President and Congress how quality afterschool programs, and the afterschool approach, can improve the lives of children, families and communities.

During his campaign, President Obama had proposed doubling funding for afterschool, in addition to funding summer learning programs for one million more children. In 2008, the Afterschool Alliance had a series of meetings and conversations with the transition team. We will continue to work with the new Administration to help realize that promise through investments in 21<sup>st</sup> CCLC, CCDBG, summer learning, policies that support the New Day for Learning framework and other relevant funding sources.

*"We'll look at everything from college affordability to after-school programs, the things that affect people's daily lives."*

- Vice-President Joe Biden,  
ABC's *This Week* interview

While the afterschool field is faced with challenges, there will also be many promising opportunities in 2009. Federal law makers will be busy revisiting existing funding streams and considering new policies and supports for children, families and communities. The Afterschool Alliance will be working with them every step of way to ensure that the need for and benefits of afterschool programs are an important consideration in policy decisions. The accomplishments over the last decade of 21<sup>st</sup> CCLC have certainly been something to celebrate and the next decade should be as highly successful. With nearly nine in ten voters seeing the importance of kids having access to high quality afterschool programs, despite the economic downturn we are experiencing, it seems more than likely that voters and law makers alike will make afterschool a high priority in the upcoming year.

Afterschool programs have become a vital underpinning for communities and families. Afterschool programs reduce the stress on working families, helping parents to balance work and family while cutting unexpected absences from work – impacts that are especially important in these difficult economic times. But afterschool programs are also about the future. Around the nation, afterschool programs are improving school attendance, leveling the playing field for disadvantaged youth, and increasing high school graduation rates. Afterschool programs have developed, tested, and refined innovative ways to engage kids in learning, allowing them to adopt healthier lifestyles, explore science, math, the arts, and discover different career paths. The Afterschool Alliance will work closely with the afterschool community in 2009 and beyond to make quality, affordable afterschool available to all.