



## MEMORANDUM

February 7, 2008

To: Editorial Page Editors, Writers and Columnists  
From: Jodi Grant, Executive Director, Afterschool Alliance  
Re: Bush Budget Proposal Would Devastate Federal Afterschool Initiative

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This week, President Bush released a budget proposal that would cut the immensely popular 21<sup>st</sup> Century Community Learning Centers (21<sup>st</sup> CCLC) initiative from the \$1.1 billion it is receiving this year to just \$800 million in FY09. At a time when more than 14 million K – 12 children in our nation are unsupervised in the afternoons, that cut would deny afterschool programs to some 300,000 students. It would be disastrous for afterschool programs, and for the children and families they serve.

This is the second time President Bush has proposed a severe cut to afterschool programs. In 2003, a similar proposal touched off a tidal wave of grassroots support for afterschool programs so strong that a Republican-controlled Congress rejected it. The President's afterschool proposal this year deserves to be immediately dismissed as well.

With millions of children unsupervised after school, funding for these programs should go up, not down. That's what the President agreed to in the *No Child Left Behind Act*, it's what children and families need, and it's what Congress should provide.

But the proposed funding cut wasn't all. President Bush also proposes to substantially overhaul the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Community Learning Centers initiative by transforming it into a voucher program. This is a risky and unwise move that Congress should reject.

A voucher program for afterschool would undermine existing public, private, community and faith-based partnerships that are working well, and destabilize afterschool programs by making their funding even more precarious. 21<sup>st</sup> Century Community Learning Centers grantees receive federal support that lasts three to five years, giving programs the chance to build quality and leverage community resources. A voucher system that encourages students to migrate in and out of programs, taking funding with them as they come and go, would pull the rug out from under quality programs that are currently serving families in need.

Furthermore, the President is trying to solve a problem that doesn't exist. Community organizations, including faith-based groups, are already eligible for and active participants in 21<sup>st</sup> CCLC grants. There is simply no benefit to such a radical overhaul.

Unfortunately, too many families do not have a choice of quality afterschool programs and a vouchers-only funding system will make choices even harder to come by. By turning the 21<sup>st</sup> CCLC program – which provides the core funding needed to hire quality staff, offer healthy

snacks and provide enrichment activities – into a voucher program, the Administration would make afterschool choices even harder to find, especially in rural communities.

If we want to increase choices for parents, we need to provide more public and private funds to create new programs and expand existing programs so they can serve more of our children. The proven way to do that is for the federal government to provide multi-year grants that offer reliable funding that can be used to hire staff, recruit volunteers, develop curricula and leverage community resources – all of which contribute to quality programs.

If Congress agrees to the President's devastating proposal, millions of children and families that need quality afterschool programs will lose. Numerous studies have found that afterschool programs keep kids safe, inspire them to learn, and help working families. Americans know it, which is why they support increased funding for afterschool in overwhelming numbers. I urge you to editorialize against this dangerous and ill-advised proposal, and to encourage the Congress to summarily reject it.

If you have questions or need further information, including information on what the funding cut would mean in your state, please contact Lisa Lederer or Gretchen Wright at 202/371-1999, or visit [www.afterschoolalliance.org](http://www.afterschoolalliance.org). Thank you.