



NEWS RELEASE
March 3, 2005

CONTACT: Gretchen Wright
Christie Constantine
202/371-1999

**Pawtucket Students Produce
Winning Public Service Announcement for National Contest**

*Afterschool Alliance Names Youths' PSA Promoting Afterschool
One of Six Best in Nation*

WASHINGTON, D.C. – A Pawtucket, Rhode Island, student has been selected by a panel of celebrity judges as the winner of the Afterschool Alliance's *Don't Be An American Idle* contest, which challenged kids aged 9 to 17 to devise public service announcements (PSAs) promoting afterschool in radio, television, and print formats. The PSA won the contest's print category in the 13 to 17 age group, and is one of six winning entries nationwide.

“What a great contest and how thrilling to see the future kids that can be on American Idol being so creative due to these terrific afterschool programs,” said Michael Orland, American Idol's musical director, band leader and arranger. Other contest judges included actors Danny DeVito and Rhea Perlman; television's Judge Glenda Hatchett; Youth Speaks Executive Director James Kass; H2Ed Vice President Patricia Wang; and themusicedge.com's Laura Johnson, among others.

“All the entries we received were amazingly creative and clever,” said Afterschool Alliance Interim Executive Director Jen Rinehart. “Afterschool programs help kids channel their energy and creativity and achieve remarkable things. Our contest winners are more evidence of the great benefits of afterschool.”

Afterschool student Nery Vargas of Goff Community School in Pawtucket, working with Goff Program Provider Chris Kane, developed two story boards with the help of teacher Margaret Lopez that highlight the benefits of afterschool programs. In one, an afterschool student improves his math, science and geography skills, and also gains confidence on the soccer field and basketball court thanks to an afterschool program. The second story board warns kids about eating unhealthy foods or watching endless hours of television instead of participating in an afterschool program.

-more-

Add One

“Afterschool programs are about more than just being there,” said Vargas. “It’s about using your time wisely. The kids who do see a difference in their lives.”

“We’re very proud of Nery for this achievement, and equally proud of the richness of our program at Goff Community School,” said Margaret Lopez, director of the Goff Community School. “As educators it’s exciting to see our students take advantage of the opportunities we work so hard to provide. This award exemplifies the kind of creativity and hard work of which our students are capable.”

“As the name of the contest suggests, kids in afterschool programs engage in constructive, educational activities when the school day ends, as opposed to being idle, or engaged in a variety of inappropriate behaviors,” added Rinehart. “By keeping kids safe, afterschool programs provide peace of mind to millions of working parents who would otherwise worry about their children each afternoon.”

The other contest winners are from the YMCA of Greater Erie in Erie, Pennsylvania; the Bruce Royer Teen Advocates Animation Program in Fresno, California; the Alvord Unified Half-Time Program in Riverside, California; the “Girls Taking Control” afterschool program at the YWCA of Manchester, New Hampshire; and the LIFE After School program at John W. Price Elementary School in Lancaster, Pennsylvania. All winning programs received digital video cameras.

In November 2000, the Afterschool Alliance joined with the Advertising Council and the Charles Stewart Mott Foundation to launch a highly successful series of PSA campaigns promoting public support for afterschool programs. Print and broadcast PSAs from the third phase of the campaign began running in mid-2004 – humorous spots contrasting the mischief bored children can get into when unoccupied in the afternoons with the constructive and fun activities in afterschool programs.

Research conducted for the Afterschool Alliance has found that more than 14 million kindergarten through 12th-graders take care of themselves after the school day ends, including almost 4 million middle school students in grades six to eight. Studies show that this is precisely the time of day when juvenile crime, drug and alcohol abuse and other risky behaviors by youth increase.

As part of its ongoing youth engagement campaign, the Afterschool Alliance is also sponsoring a youth essay contest, in which students ages 9 to 17 write essays describing why afterschool programs have provided them with “Something Way Better to Do.” Top prizes of \$1,500 will be awarded to the winning essay for students in two age groups – grades 5-8 and grades 9-12. More information is available at www.afterschoolalliance.org.

Winning PSAs can be viewed at www.afterschoolscene.com.

#

The Afterschool Alliance is a nonprofit public awareness and advocacy organization supported by a group of public, private, and nonprofit entities working to ensure that all children and youth have access to afterschool programs by the year 2010. More information is available at www.afterschoolalliance.org.