

Advocating for Afterschool

By Danielle Bowen, Director, Nevada Afterschool Network

drbowen@nevadafterschoolnetwork.org

775-691-0273

Last week, representatives from the Nevada Afterschool Network, Washoe County School District, Clark County School District and Las Vegas Parks and Recreation joined hundreds of afterschool directors, staff members, students and other advocates from across the country to spend three days in Washington D.C. for the ninth annual *Afterschool for All Challenge*, sponsored by the [Afterschool Alliance](#) in conjunction with the National AfterSchool Association. We learned about how to educate policy makers, networked, and met with Members of Congress and their aides to encourage them to increase funding for afterschool.

Highlights of the *Challenge* included a rally for afterschool programs on Capitol Hill, and a “Breakfast of Champions” at which we honored various champions of afterschool. We also heard from young people from around the country about how important afterschool programs have been in their lives. Over the course of the three-day conference, we heard from two television celebrities – actor Hill Harper from “CSI – NY,” and Judge Glenda Hatchett. **Guitarist Mark Bryan of Hootie and the Blowfish** was on hand to entertain and offer his support for afterschool programs. It was inspiring and motivating!

While on Capitol Hill, we had the opportunity to talk to Senator Ensign and Senator Reid, staff members from Representatives Dean Heller, Shelley Berkley and Dina Titus office about how important afterschool programs are in our community and all they do for children and working families.

We carried critical messages about the benefits offered by afterschool programs. President Obama’s recent budget proposal for fiscal year 2011 effectively cuts funding for the 21st Century Community Learning Centers (21st CCLC) afterschool initiative by folding another program into the same funding stream. We let lawmakers know that, if the President’s proposal is adopted, funding for afterschool will be reduced by \$13 million and some 13,000 fewer children across the country will have access to afterschool programs they need.

Just as important, the President’s Blueprint for Education Reform – the Administration’s recommendations for the reauthorization of the *Elementary and Secondary Education Act* (formerly *No Child Left Behind*) – would restructure the 21st CCLC initiative in several ways that could make it harder for afterschool programs to survive. Among other things, the Blueprint also calls for an end to state-administered grants, pulling grantmaking back to Washington. Some states and communities will win, others will lose, and rural communities that may not have expert grant writers are likely to suffer.

We've seen modest progress on federal funding for afterschool in the last few years, and are hopeful that, as lawmakers learn more about the work we do in these programs, momentum will continue.

Last year, the Afterschool Alliance released [new research](#), sponsored by the JCPenney Afterschool Fund, that told us just how far we are from making afterschool available to all who need it. Among the most telling findings was that the parents of more than 18 million children not already in afterschool programs say they would sign their kids up if a program were available to them locally. That's exactly the problem, of course: not enough programs to meet demand.

Judy Schroder from Las Vegas is the Afterschool Ambassador for Nevada, and her trip to Washington was one of several outreach activities she's been involved in. Our hope is that, by educating lawmakers about how afterschool programs keep kids safe, inspire students to learn and help working families, we will have a chance at securing more money for afterschool programs so fewer kids will be on the streets and more kids have access to the programs they need. That was a message our lawmakers needed to hear, and we were proud to deliver it!

For more information on how you can help, visit the [Afterschool Alliance](#) or the [Nevada Afterschool Network](#) web sites.

Contact Information:

Danielle Bowen, Nevada Afterschool Network 775-691-0273

Denise Benson, Washoe County School District 775-333-6038

Judy Schroeder, Afterschool Ambassador for Nevada 702-229-3312