



Several hundred children, parents, business and community leaders joined Mayor Street at a rally at dusk on October 19th to kick-off National Lights On Afterschool Day, which was the following day. More than 30 events took place in Philadelphia joining over 7,000 events nationwide.

Students from several after school programs performed during the program that culminated with a count-down by Mayor Street and Cheryl Ransom-Garner, Commissioner, City Department of Human Services and 20 first and second grade students to a fantastic light show that concluded the program by signing "This Little Light of Mine."

Commissioner Ransom-Garner professed the importance of after school programming to the lives of families in Philadelphia. "At the Department of Human Services, our primary goal is to protect children from abuse and neglect. Far too many children and youth in Philadelphia and elsewhere are neglected in the hours after."

"Numerous academic and law enforcement studies have proven that children tend to get into trouble - either as victims or perpetrators of crime - between the hours of 3:00 p.m. and 6:00 p.m. Similarly, these same studies have proven that after school and youth development opportunities are an extremely effective deterrent to youth crime, stimulate children's minds, engage their imagination, boost their sense of self-esteem and keep them out of harm's way."

Sponsored locally by the Philadelphia region's After School and Youth Development (ASYD) Network, the rally emphasized the importance of keeping lights on and doors open at after school programs. Speakers at the event lauded the tremendous job Philadelphia has done in expanding the number of programs available to children and youth. However, they also noted that there are still not enough programs in Philadelphia and around the country to serve all of the children and families that need them.

"It is important that we work together on issues that are vital to all of us! We face funding cuts as well as a need for higher quality programs," said A. J. Keirans, Director of Best Practices, Philadelphia Safe and Sound and member of the ASYD Network Steering Committee. "Together we can educate and influence policy and decision-makers to better understand the benefits and value of after school programs for our children and our communities."

"The citizens of Philadelphia have seen for themselves that high-quality afterschool programs make a world of difference in turning around low performing schools," said Paul Vallas, CEO, School District of Philadelphia. "Afterschool programs, like the District's highly successful 'Power Hour,' offer a chance to reinforce and supplement the curriculum by offering students new and different opportunities that further engage them in school. Studies show that afterschool programs improve academic achievement, reduce grade retention and increase student attendance and interest in school."

Among the speakers at today's kick-off rally were Mistress of Ceremonies, Loraine Ballard Morrill, News and Community Affairs Director, Clear Channel Radio Philadelphia; Mayor John F. Street; Cheryl Ransom-Garner, Commissioner, Philadelphia Department of Human Services; Paul Vallas, CEO, Philadelphia Public Schools; A. J. Keirans, Director of Best Practices, Philadelphia Safe and Sound; and Nicholas Torres, President of Congreso de Latinos Unidos.

According to the city's Report Card 2005, more than 44,000 children have the opportunity to attend after school programs in Philadelphia.

Finding a program in Philadelphia has never been easier. An on-line search engine is available at www.philasafesound.org or parents can call 215.586.0747 for assistance in finding a program in their community or near a particular school. There are more than 700 programs listed in this data base across Philadelphia.

The Philadelphia region's After School and Youth Development Network is a collaborative of after school and youth development providers and advocates that have joined forces to support the providers of after school programs and to work closely with the newly formed statewide network.

Philadelphia Safe and Sound is a leading child advocacy non profit. Its mission is to improve the health and well-being of children and youth in Philadelphia. The agency fosters change and reform within major public systems that serve children and families. This is accomplished in collaboration with government, foundations, corporations, and community groups through the integration and leveraging of resources, research, policy analysis and program development.

For more information, contact Philadelphia Safe and Sound at (215)568-0620.