

After School Day at the Capitol Celebrates Champions and Advocacy

March 14th marked the third annual After School Day at the Capitol with a diverse program of speakers and the presentation of the 2007 Children's Champion awards to Representatives Andrew Fleischmann and Denise Merrill.

The ever engaging Fleischmann spoke of the educational system in Connecticut and the dire need for quality after school programs.

"We have real challenges to address in the state. The education gap is totally unacceptable. This is a moral issue that should weigh on everyone," said Fleischmann. He closed by thanking the after school professionals for all they do to "level the playing field" for all Connecticut children.

Representative Merrill echoed Fleischmann's sentiment. As a parent and former teacher, Merrill emphasized the importance of having a positive influence on youth.

"We have an obligation to invest in our young people," said Merrill.

The capacity crowd of providers, parents, students and legislators listened intently as New Britain High School junior Niomi Figueroa articulated the importance of the after school program at the Opportunities Industrialization Center and stressed its value to students making the transition from middle school to high school.

Speaking on behalf of parents, Kathy Gustavsen, herself a veteran elementary educator, spoke passionately about her daughter's after school program, CASTLE, in Colchester.

"Not only is my kindergarten daughter safe, but she is enriched. She is thriving," said Gustavsen.

The successful event helped to further educate legislators of the importance of after school.



Rep. Andy Fleischmann receives "Children's Champion" award from Rep. Anne Ruwet



Michelle Doucette Cunningham, Rep. Denise Merrill and Rep. Betty Boukus