

## **Program Spotlights After-School Activities**

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Tri-lingual bingo, salsa and art classes are among the activities to be showcased Thursday as after-school programs in Bridgeport join others across the state and nation observing the 8th annual Lights On After School Day.

More than two dozen rallies are planned in Bridgeport and the region, as well as nearly 100 statewide, to spotlight after-school programs as part of a national event underscoring the importance of the activities to children's lives.

In most locations, the programs feature an open house, a showcase of student talent and a reception.

"They all will be doing a little something," said Tammy Pappa, director of the city's Lighthouse program, an umbrella for a range of after-school activities.

Madison School will showcase its ballroom dancing, Read will highlight magic and Marin may have a talent show.

At the Six-to-Six Interdistrict Magnet School, which runs its own after-school program for 75 of its 435 students, a tri-lingual bingo — numbers will be called in English, Spanish and Mandarin Chinese — will kick off the celebration. Also scheduled is a student-produced slide show and salsa dancing.

Christopher Labelle, director of Six-to-Six, said on a normal day after classes, most students are engaged in homework help and some kind of physical activity. There is a walking club, art classes and swimming.

Jennifer Peifer, a spokeswoman for the Connecticut After School Network, said the rallies are a great opportunity for educators, policy-makers, and civic leaders to support after-school initiatives.

"It's to raise awareness. It lets people know these programs are vital and necessary to help families," she said.

Also Thursday, the Empire State Building in New York will be illuminated in conjunction with the event.

Lights On After School Day was launched in October 2000. The event grew in 2001 to more than 3,600 events, and more than 7,500 in 2006. This year, more than 1 million people are expected to participate.

"Too many after-school programs have been forced to cut back on hours, services and staff because of inadequate budgets at the federal, state and local levels," said Michelle Doucette Cunningham, executive director of the Connecticut After School Network.

"With over 160,000 kids in Connecticut going home to an empty house every day, we simply can't afford to overlook the obvious need for quality programs."

For a complete list of Lights On rallies, visit [www.ctafterschoolnetwork.org](http://www.ctafterschoolnetwork.org)