



NJSACC, the Network for New Jersey's
Afterschool Communities

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**NEW JERSEY AFTERSCHOOL PROGRAMS TURN PARKS INTO CLASSROOMS
NJ Launches First-Ever Statewide Event to Celebrate Afterschool
Through Outdoor Programs**

Trenton, NJ – New Jersey afterschool programs will connect children with communities through a weeklong event, “Celebrate Afterschool! Outdoors in the Garden State.” Events will take place May 11-15, 2009. Students will plant gardens, play outdoor games, create environmental art and learn about healthy living, among other activities. Family and community members are invited to participate in hands-on environmental activities. Special guests will lead activities and discussions.

New links are emerging between outdoor play and children’s cognitive and emotional development. When children play in nature, their play is more imaginative, fostering language and teamwork skills. They also tend to develop healthier relationships with their peers.

“Afterschool programs have a unique opportunity to build these skills in children,” says Diane Genco, executive director of NJSACC the network for New Jersey’s afterschool communities, which organized the event. “Afterschool programs can work with children in creative ways that aren’t bound by high stakes testing goals or by 45 minute blocks of time. They can use a local park or even a parking lot, as their classrooms,” she continues.

State Department of Education Commissioner Lucille Davy concurs. “Bringing afterschool outdoors has the potential to creates the next generation of environmental stewards and provides numerous benefits to schools, communities, and the planet that will have long-lasting effects,” says Davy.

Genco also hopes the weeklong event will call attention to the importance of afterschool in student's educational and personal lives. Afterschool programs have been linked to scholastic achievement, improved school attendance, quality homework time and better student behavior. Beyond academics, a ten-year study conducted by the Harvard Family Research Project, reported that participation in afterschool programs is associated with increased self-esteem and lower levels of depression and anxiety.

State legislators, who are scheduled to vote on afterschool funding in June, are invited to the events. NJSACC is also reaching out directly to legislators to discuss the future of afterschool programs.

About Celebrate Afterschool!

New Jersey School-Age Care Coalition (NJSACC) is the guiding force behind the *Celebrate Afterschool! Outdoors in the Garden State* campaign. Their purpose is to build lasting public support for affordable, high-quality afterschool programs across New Jersey. Led by a public-private partnership and funded in part by the Charles Stuart Mott Foundation, the campaign builds public awareness and support; offers guidance for parents, providers and advocates; strengthens relationships with policymakers, funders, practitioners and parents; and shares best practices. For more information, see Njsacc.org/celebrateafterschool

Notable Events Open to the Media

Most Events will take place between 3:30 and 5:30 PM

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|-----------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Monday May 11 | Trenton After School Program
801 West State Street
Trenton, NJ 08618
<i>Environmental sing-along and nature workshop in partnership with 4H</i> |
| Tuesday, May 12 | LEAP Academy 21 st Century Community Learning Center
639 Cooper Street
Camden, NJ
<i>Celebrate Afterschool! fair with outdoor games, gardening, healthy snacks, student-led neighborhood tours and more.</i>
4-7 PM |
| Thursday May 14 | Haddonfield Child Care
Haddonfield Central/Middle School
Lincoln Avenue and Chestnut Street |

Haddonfield, NJ 08033

Planting of dinosaur garden to commemorate the 150th anniversary of the Haddonfield dinosaur.

Friday May 15

Rutgers Gardens/ City of New Brunswick YSS

112 Ryders Lane

New Brunswick, NJ 08901-8519

Planting of ethnic vegetable garden with scavenger hunt and garden games.

Friday May 15

Red Bank 21st Century Community Learning Center

76 Branch Avenue

Red Bank, NJ 07701-2202

Nature carnival

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