

November 20, 2009

On October 22<sup>nd</sup> Sports & Arts in Schools Foundation schools participated in the national day of recognition for after-school programs, "Lights on After-School." I spent the day visiting SASF celebratory events in Brooklyn. At the end of the day, I met an extraordinary young man at a middle-school in Sheepshead Bay. Jerome is an eighth grader, lives a few blocks from the school in public housing, and was looking forward to my visit.

Jerome was dressed for the occasion – a crisp white shirt, dark tie and pants, polished shoes. He had checked the Sports & Arts website, found the name of the head of the organization, and wanted to thank him for our Champions Club. He introduced himself and said he wanted to shake my hand because he really liked the after-school program. The program at Jerome's school is targeted for students who have missed 40 or more days of school. Once enrolled, a student cannot attend the after-school program unless they have been present for the entire day of school. Jerome has not missed a day of school since he has been in our program.

We talked, and Jerome told me some of the things he got to do everyday from 3 – 6 p.m. – "lots of sports," "trips to cool places," and "making new friends." He was enthusiastic, confident, and filled with purpose.

I also learned that Jerome is a special needs student. During the school day, Jerome attends special education classes, but during his after-school program, he is able to interact with students at all learning levels. As I saw at the event, Jerome is well-liked by his friends in the after-school program, and the new confidence he has acquired in the program is positively affecting his classroom performance. Most importantly, our guidance counselor is helping Jerome with his high school application and we are working to get Jerome into Midwood which has a great record with high school special needs students.

In existence for over 17 years, SASF is one of the largest providers of school-based after school and summer programs in New York City- serving approximately 50,000 low-income students in over 300 schools (grades 1-12). The SASF program model combines academic enrichment with a variety of high-quality sports, performing arts and visual arts activities which are taught by trained professionals. Through these programs, SASF addresses three of the greatest threats currently affecting underserved youth in the United States – low high school graduation rates, high obesity rates, and increased violence among young people.

SASF serves terrific students like Jerome in every borough and every neighborhood throughout New York City. As we approach the Holiday Season, please consider a contribution to SASF to support the critical work we are doing. You can mail your gift with the enclosed donor card, or you can donate through our website: [www.sasfny.org](http://www.sasfny.org). Please call me at (347) 417-8120 to learn more. Thank you for your generosity.

Sincerely,

Jim O'Neill  
President