

LEXINGTON PARK, MD - Congressman Steny H. Hoyer (D-MD) today visited the 21st Century Community Learning Center (21st CCLC) at Lexington Park Elementary School. He observed their activities and spoke to some of the 80 students who attend this federally funded program on an average day.

“I believe 21st Century Community Learning Centers are critical for two reasons,” Hoyer said.

“First, this program, which typically serves high-need student populations, provides critical academic enrichment. The academic programs provided by 21st Century Community Learning Centers help close the achievement gap, and have been shown to demonstrate academic performance.

“Second, this is the only federal program that is dedicated to providing a safe place for students to go during the critical after-school hours. We know that the after-school hours are the most likely for children to get into trouble, so it is important to find children a safe and nurturing place to be during this time.”

According to the Afterschool Alliance, 25% of K-12 youth in Maryland are responsible for taking care of themselves. “This center gives those children a safe alternative.” Hoyer said.

Despite increasingly tighter federal budgets, Hoyer has fought to maintain funding for 21st Century Community Learning Centers, saying he knows how important they are to “our communities, to student academic achievement, and to the families that are served.”

He expressed his dismay at President Bush and the Republican Congress for failing to make that same commitment. “Last year President Bush proposed to freeze this program for the 5th year in a row, and then Republicans in Congress approved a budget that cut that amount by another \$10 million,” Hoyer said. “If the 21st Century program were fully funded, as President Bush promised at the signing of No Child Left Behind—then Maryland could have double the number of afterschool programs—and give roughly 22,000 more children a safe place to go during these critical hours.”

Hoyer vowed to do everything in his power to ensure that the federal government keeps up their end of the bargain. “I will continue to fight to make certain that federal funding is maintained and increased so that every area of the state can be served,” Hoyer concluded.

21st Century Community Learning Centers Program, which is federally funded and now administered by the State, serves 1.4 million students across the country, and 18,600 students in Maryland.

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