



Lights are definitely on after school

By Elysse James Staff

LONG BEACH — Music sounded and girls twirled in colorful skirts at the Cesar Chavez Elementary School gym on Saturday.

The Long Beach After School Advocacy Partnership's "Lights On After School" celebration of after school programs drew about 700 people to the campus at 730 W. Third St., said Ed Robinson, CEO for the International Center for Education and Sports, or ICES.

The event featured presentations by students, booths touting after school programs and a ceremony honoring professional athletes and outstanding community members.

Three executive assistants, chosen to award medals to the honorees, were fifth-graders Davis and Christopher Clark, and fourth-grader Heidy Cazares.

Students lined up at a booth to shoot baskets at a plastic basketball hoop.

"(ICES is) an after school program to help kids discover their strengths and talents so in the future they will make better decisions," site director Hector Olivares said as he handed a basketball to the next eager student. "It's a great environment. Kids love it. It's free that's the awesome part."

The ICES program consists of three hours after school split between homework and activities.

Camp Fire USA also had a booth to recruit new members. The group bases its activities on the state's curriculum so subjects are reinforced after school, said Victoria Miles, assistant director of Camp Fire USA for Patrick Henry Elementary School.

At the YMCA Youth Institute booth, volunteers showed off digital images and graphics on Apple MacIntosh computers.

"We are here to show what we do to help kids be more active," said Phyras Men, a digital arts instructor for the YMCA.

Honorees felt the same way.

"I am a big advocate of children not staying at home and watching television," said Cassandra Azevedo, an international water polo player. "My brother and I always were outside doing something. Television and games are becoming so important to some kids but it's really important that they get out."

At the Peace Builders booth, people praised others on brightly colored squares of paper.

"The program is shown to significantly increase attention rates and reduce the instances of bullying, injuries, nurse visits and increases the child's self-confidence," said Ebone Anderson, assistant director and business developer for Peace Builders.

Most attendees were part of an after school program or supporting someone who was.

Lafayette Elementary School fourth-grader Candice Nichols said Program WRAP taught her to get along with others and fight less.

Rony Ojeda said after school programs helped his two sons stop fighting.

"They stay every day and play baseball at the school," Ojeda said. "They're behaving better. They spend more time at school so they don't have much time to fight."

Roy Anglin was there to support the programs that he said helped his daughter overcome shyness.

"She did that instead of coming home and watching TV," he said. "Before she went there, she was very shy, now she can do anything."