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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

### **A Wider Circle Marks Partnership with Johnson Middle School**

**Washington, DC**, April 16, 2010 – In February, David Markus, the new principal of the lowest-achieving school in our nation’s capital, walked into the office of A Wider Circle’s founder and said, “We need your help.” Six weeks later, A Wider Circle has already created a unique learning and development center at the school – a place they call The Campus, where students can be surrounded by college banners and posters. To help these children receive the education they deserve in a school environment conducive to learning, A Wider Circle initiated a partnership with Johnson Middle School, celebrating it Wednesday with a ribbon-cutting ceremony. Through this partnership, A Wider Circle’s support of the capital area’s most vulnerable children takes a significant step forward.

Johnson Middle School is a school where toilets don’t work, stairwells have no lights, windows are broken, and test scores are the lowest in DC. Those who gathered at the April 14 ribbon-cutting – JMS staff, students, and their families, A Wider Circle staff and volunteers, and other community members – have much to celebrate with the partnership, realizing that the support and improvements that are so desperately-needed are finally on their way. “I have been here eight years and this is the best program we’ve ever had – and we really need it,” JMS’s football coach shared at the ribbon cutting.

This month, A Wider Circle began in-school tutoring at JMS three days a week. Currently, children identified by teachers as struggling in class are referred and engaged in one-on-one tutoring with A Wider Circle staff, interns, and volunteers. This personalized approach allows students to improve their self-esteem and confidence, receive emotional support and encouragement, progress at their own pace, and participate in lessons more tailored to their needs. Tutors act as teachers and mentors for children who are reading or calculating math equations at up to six or seven years below their grade level.

Robert Haderly, an eighth-grade math teacher at JMS, finds it easier to teach because of the partnership with A Wider Circle. “The dynamics of the class have changed significantly because of this resource. When you pull out the students that struggle in the class, I am left with a more manageable classroom.

The students that you provide individual support to have an easier time focusing, and I can keep teaching my class without disruption,” says Haderly.

To complement the in-school tutoring, the partnership will expand to include after-school enrichment programs two days a week. The programs will focus on self-esteem, mental and physical health, and exposure to the arts. This Healthy Minds and Bodies program will build on Michelle Obama’s “Let’s Move” physical fitness campaign and will include the Girls on Track program which encourages self-confidence as girls train once a week to ultimately participate in a 5K run.

Beautification days have already been held and will continue to be scheduled, including much-needed projects such as painting, repairs, and trash pick-up, finally offering attention to areas that have been ignored for years. Beyond providing the physical improvements for the school and an emotional uplift for the students and staff, the beautification projects also bring together community volunteers from the region for the common purpose of helping these children and improving their learning conditions.

To enable the children and their families to live in a stable and dignified home, A Wider Circle will provide them with furniture and other basic need items. “For a lot of the students, the school is the only stable environment for them, they are all dealing with so many different issues at home that they rely on the school for stability,” January Morrison, a reading teacher at JMS, explained. For these families, as A Wider Circle has done for tens of thousands of other families, they will furnish their homes with beds, cribs, kitchen tables, dressers and more for those children and adults currently sleeping on the floor and without a table at which to eat their meals. To round out the parents’ education and improve their opportunities, twice per year A Wider Circle will offer their eight-week Life Skills and Professional Development workshop series on topics ranging from nutrition and stress management to resume writing and financial planning.

The programs A Wider Circle offers at Johnson will build in students the skills and self-esteem necessary for them to persevere in school and ultimately look to college as their next step. Daily, at Johnson Middle School in Southeast Washington, DC, students pass by their own hand-painted words - “All our dreams can come true!” The writing on the wall is clear – they are dreaming of the possibilities and, with the help of A Wider Circle, the possibilities will become realities.

**About A Wider Circle:** A Wider Circle, [www.awidercircle.org](http://www.awidercircle.org), a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization located in Silver Spring, Md., accomplishes their mission to help individuals and families lift themselves

out of poverty utilizing a unique, holistic approach to serving families in need throughout the capital region. The organization provides beds, dressers, cribs, and other basic need items, free of charge, to families transitioning out of shelters or simply living without life's necessities. A Wider Circle furnishes the homes of thousands of people per year – children and adults who are sleeping on the floor and keeping their clothing in plastic garbage bags. A Wider Circle also goes into low-income schools, shelters, and community centers to lead educational workshops on topics ranging from healthy self-esteem and stress management to resume writing and financial planning. A Wider Circle has been named “one of Greater Washington’s finest small charities” by the Catalogue for Philanthropy.

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