Gaithersburg, Md -- January 17, 2008 – An environmental project spearheaded by the students of Crellin Elementary school in rural western Maryland is changing the way a whole community approaches environmental stewardship.

The project, known as Crellin Elementary Corps of Discovery, evolved after students at a 2003 science camp noticed orange water seeping from a school playground area into a nearby stream. The seepage turned out to be acid mine drainage from water flowing under residual coal and mine waste that had been deposited on the site decades earlier when Crellin was mining town. In addition to the seepage issue, the property adjacent to the school contained a slag pile of mining waste and a garbage dump.

With the assistance of their principal, the Maryland Department of Natural Resources and the Maryland Bureau of Mines, the students set off on a mission to clean up their environment. Solutions to the acid mine drainage and troublesome playground property included neutralizing the orange seepage, acquiring the property, and cleaning and restoring the property and playground. The playground is currently being redeveloped with a local history theme researched by the students.

“Crellin Elementary now expands outside our school walls,” said Dana McCauley, Crellin Elementary School Principal. “Our entire community has become our classroom. The school, the community and the environment are intertwined to provide learning opportunities for every student.”

The effort ultimately involved 650 local volunteers, several state and federal agencies, and numerous other organizations and project partners.

McCauley added that “The collaboration that has occurred among the school, families, project partners, and community has given our students a real sense of being part of something larger – of making a difference in their community.”

The 6th annual National Civic Star Award, sponsored by the American Association of School Administrators (AASA) and Sodexho, Inc., honors excellence in school district and community
partnerships that enrich student knowledge and achievement. The Crellin Elementary Corps of Discovery program is focused on engaging students and empowering them to develop strategies and work towards environmentally-friendly solutions. The program fosters a sense of civic responsibility, develops student leadership skills and increases the entire community’s understanding and commitment to environmental sustainability.

“The National Civic Star awards program recognizes the vitality of a community is intricately linked to the success of its schools,” said Paul Houston, AASA executive director. “The Crellin Elementary Corps of Discovery program is a perfect example of this partnership at work – the students, community, project partners and government all contributed to the program’s success and in turn a cleaner environment.”

The 2008 National Civic Star Award will be presented at AASA’s National Conference on Education, February 14 - 17 in Tampa. Garrett County Public Schools will receive $10,000 ($5,000 for the Corps of Discovery program and $5,000 for the district’s scholarship fund). In addition, Garrett County Public Schools, along with 24 state winners, will be recognized during both a conference general session and a special private award ceremony hosted by Sodexho. All the winning programs will be profiled in a supplement to an upcoming edition of The School Administrator.

“The Crellin Corps of Discovery program truly embodies the spirit of school-community partnerships. Developing civic-minded students who are engaged in their communities and willing to take on challenging issues creates long-lasting societal benefits,” said Lorna Donatone, president of Sodexho School Services. “It is with great pride that we present the 2008 National Civic Star Award to the Garrett County Public Schools.”

About AASA
AASA (www.aasa.org), founded in 1865, is the professional organization for more than 13,000 educational leaders across the United States. AASA’s mission is to support and develop effective school system leaders who are dedicated to the highest quality public education for all children. AASA’s major focus is standing up for public education.

About Sodexho, Inc.
Sodexho, Inc. (www.sodexhoUSA.com) is a leading integrated food and facilities management services company in the U.S., Canada and Mexico, with $7.3 billion (USD) in annual revenue and 125,000 employees. Sodexho serves more than ten million customers daily in corporations, health care, long term care and retirement centers, schools, college campuses, government and remote sites. Sodexho, Inc., headquartered in Gaithersburg, Md., is a subsidiary of Sodexho Alliance (www.sodexho.com). Sodexho, Inc. funds the Sodexho Foundation (www.helpstophunger.org), an independent charitable organization that, since its founding in 1999, has made more than $9.2 million in grants to fight hunger in America.