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Afterschool Alert

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AFTERSCHOOL PROGRAMS: HELPING KIDS COMPETE IN TOMORROW'S WORKFORCE

Preparing youth for success in tomorrow's workforce is of increasing concern to our nation's schools, communities, policymakers and businesses. Afterschool programs are uniquely situated to help. Afterschool programs have proven to help youth develop the skills – from leadership to communications to critical thinking – that are needed in the 21st Century workplace. The afterschool setting provides additional time for learning, and allows for engaging instructional methods, such as project-based learning, real world application and smaller group sizes.

Tomorrow's Leaders Need the Skills of the Future

Civilization is on the brink of a new industrial order. The big winners in the increasingly fierce global scramble for supremacy will not be those who simply make commodities faster and cheaper than the competition. They will be those who develop talent, techniques and tools so advanced that there is no competition.

– National Science Foundation¹

In 2000, the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) reported that increased competition on a global scale was giving rise to a trend of “high-performance workplaces” in which flexible, decentralized work practices are carried out by multi-skilled workers. NCES acknowledged that, at the time of the report, these types of workplaces were in the minority and were clustered in a few industrial sectors. However, NCES predicted that, in the near future, the skills required of front-line workers may increase to include proficiency using a variety of machines and technology, and personal skills such as flexibility, problem-solving, responsibility, teamwork, and initiative. NCES also predicted that in an increasingly service-based economy, the need for critical-thinking and social skills would also increase.² More recently, the Department of Education has asserted that “today's flexible workplaces rely on people who can handle multiple tasks, interact well with colleagues, respond to varying customer needs, identify problems and make quick decisions on how to fix them.”³

While three-quarters of the jobs in the labor market are in the service-sector, the fastest job growth in this economy is currently in jobs that require some type of formal postsecondary education.⁴ There is concern that the future's workforce will not be sufficiently prepared to meet this growing need for more skilled workers, as the U.S. Chamber of Commerce reports that only 32 percent of high school graduates are prepared for college coursework.⁵ Additionally, the majority of both college professors and employers report that recent high school graduates are unable to write clearly and lack adequate grammar and spelling skills. The cost of workers who are unprepared and unqualified for higher-paying jobs is being shouldered by American business, which is spending more than \$60 billion a year on training in basic skills, including remedial reading, writing and mathematics.⁶

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According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, job growth appears to be greatest in the computer technology sector. The number of jobs such as software engineer and support specialist, network and computer systems administrator and analyst, and database administrator are projected to increase by between 60 and 100 percent between 2000 and 2010. This too, is of concern to business. As Intel Corp chairman Craig R. Barrett recently wrote in *Business Week*, “science and technology are the engines of economic growth and national security in the U.S., and we are no longer producing enough qualified graduates to keep up with the demand.”⁷ According to the National Academy of Sciences, this concern is warranted. In the U.S., just 32 percent of undergraduates receive their degrees in science and engineering, compared to 36 percent in Germany, 59 percent in China and 66 percent in Japan.⁸ A lack of preparation for the jobs of tomorrow will not only mean lack of access to higher-paying jobs for the future workforce, it may also mean that our nation may not be as well equipped to compete in the global economy.

Core Competencies for a New Age

For America to stay economically productive and competitive, increased skills and competencies will be needed. In 1991, the Secretary’s Commission on Achieving Necessary Skills (SCANS) of the U.S. Department of Labor examined the implications of a rapidly changing economy and labor market on education.⁹

SCANS identified five core competencies and a three-part foundation of skills and personal attributes that, combined, are necessary for success in the workplace. The five competencies are:

- Resources – time and money management, and the ability to allocate materials, space and staff;
- Interpersonal Skills – the ability to work on teams, teach others, serve customers, take the lead, negotiate, and work with people from culturally diverse backgrounds;
- Information – the ability to acquire and evaluate data, organize and maintain files, interpret and communicate data, and use technology to process information;
- Systems – the ability to understand social, organizational, and technological systems, monitor and correct performance, and design or improve systems;
- Technology – the ability to select appropriate equipment or tools, utilize technology for specific tasks, and maintain technological equipment.

Underlying these competencies is a core set of skills, or personal attributes, that workers must possess. These include:

- Basic Skills – reading, writing, arithmetic, mathematics, listening and speaking;
- Thinking Skills – creative thinking, decision making, problem solving, “seeing things in the mind’s eye,” knowing how to learn, and reasoning;
- Personal Qualities – responsibility, self-esteem, sociability, self-management, and integrity.

Although it is clear that youth need a full range of basic, thinking and personal skill sets in order to be successful after high school, thinking skills and personal qualities are most important to employers. A recent survey commissioned by The Conference Board, the Partnership for 21st Century Skills, Corporate Voices for Working Families, and the Society for Human Resources Management finds that four out of five of the most important skills needed by recent high school graduates are applied thinking and personal skills rather than basic skills. The five most important skills currently valued by the nation’s largest employers are professionalism, teamwork, oral communication, ethics and social responsibility, and reading comprehension. Within the next five years, higher order thinking skills and personal qualities are expected to increase in importance for both high school and college graduates.¹⁰

One year after the release of SCANS, in 1992, the Carnegie Council on Adolescent Development report, *A Matter of Time: Risk and Opportunity in the Out-of-School Hours*, noted that in the face of increasing global competition in the workforce, American youth were not gaining the knowledge and skills needed to be competitive with other industrialized nations.¹¹ Today's youth agree that they lack the knowledge and tools needed to be successful once they complete their secondary education. A survey conducted for Achieve, Inc. shows that 40 percent of public high school graduates say they are unprepared for college or work.¹² Current education reform efforts must address the growing skills gap in order to ensure that our nation's high school and college graduates are prepared to be successful in the future workforce.

Legacy of Critical Thinking & Skill Development in Afterschool Programs

Quality after school programs provide a unique venue in which young people can develop the range of skills they need to enter the 21st Century workplace.

– Corporate Voices for Working Families

The afterschool field recognizes that preparing the future workforce to be competitive in the global economy is something that quality programs can contribute to. In fact, they have been helping young people develop such skills for decades.

The genesis of today's afterschool program can be traced back to the turn of the century and the desire of 'boys clubs', settlement houses and churches and other religious organizations to provide safe, supervised environments for children during the after school hours. Over time, as more dual income households emerged, numerous other organizations, including school systems, helped make sure that children had safe, enriching after school experiences.

One of the best known efforts to bring schools into the provision of afterschool programs is the work of Frank J. Manley, a physical education director with Flint public schools in Michigan, and local industrialist and philanthropist Charles Stewart Mott. Together they worked to develop the concept of a "lighted schoolhouse," community schools with doors that stayed open after hours to serve as neighborhood centers, offering an array of services and activities, including afterschool programs, for members of the community.

Over the years, community schools and afterschool programs continued to expand to additional communities. Among other things, these centers nurtured the development of the core skills – basic, thinking and personal - referenced more than 50 years later in the U.S. Department of Labor SCANS report as key to a competitive future workforce.¹³ However, it wasn't until the federal government began investing in afterschool programs that the trend of providing afterschool programs really began to catch on across the country.

Afterschool Programs Today

In 1997, Congress appropriated \$40 million for the U.S. Department of Education's 21st Century Community Learning Centers Program (21st CCLC), an initiative geared toward creating afterschool programs throughout the nation. The Mott Foundation pledged its support to this initiative because of its close connection with the foundation's earlier work.¹⁴ Currently, 21st CCLC funds 9,643 afterschool programs in communities across the country. In addition to 21st CCLC, many states and cities are investing in afterschool and numerous corporations and foundations have added afterschool to their portfolio of giving.

As afterschool grows, a range of practices are being refined and in turn, these practices are being replicated in programs throughout the nation. An Afterschool Action Kit, created by the Afterschool Alliance with support from JCPenney in 2000, and distributed by the U.S. Department of Education, outlined the numerous features of quality afterschool programs. Many of these are activities that promote the development of skills that have been identified as necessary for a highly-skilled workforce. Some of these include:

- Working collaboratively in small and large groups;
- Applying arithmetic in real-world contexts;
- Conducting experiments and other projects using a variety of materials;
- Exposure to experiences from a wide diversity of cultures and ethnic groups;
- Practicing verbal and self-expression skills through book talks and presentations;
- Exploring ethics and values;
- Discussing diverse ideas and opinions with peers and adults;
- Learning experiences that emphasize reasoning and problem-solving skills, and
- Utilizing informational resources and technology to complete projects.

In addition, a 2000 DeWitt Wallace Reader's Digest Fund study on preparing youth for the future, reported that to help young people develop the higher-level skills required for today's workforce, youth-serving programs must "combine rigorous academic work with opportunities for young people to apply what they are learning."

Since 2000, numerous afterschool evaluations and studies of promising programs continue to identify practices that help children and youth succeed, both in school and out.

Afterschool in Practice

By applying practices like those outlined by Wallace and the Afterschool Action Kit, afterschool programs are now demonstrating hard outcomes in the development of academic skills and in determining students' success.

- In 2003-2004, 45 percent of all 21st CCLC program participants improved their reading grades, and 41 percent improved their math grades. (U.S. Dept of Education and Learning Point, 2005.)
- A report on the state's 21st CCLCs from the University of Florida found that the program was effective in improving students' academic performance, school attendance, disciplinary actions and social behaviors. (Harvard Family Research Project Afterschool Evaluation Symposium, September 2005.)
- The Anne Arundel County school district in Maryland's study revealed that participants attended school more regularly and had slightly higher proficiency ratings in reading and math. Also, teachers perceived increases in students' overall achievement in school and their confidence in learning. (Harvard Family Research Project Afterschool Evaluation Symposium, September 2005.)
- A study of 21st CCLC-funded afterschool programs in New England found that children who participated in the 21st CCLC-funded program had significantly higher reading achievement and were rated by teachers as holding greater expectancies of success. (Mahoney, Lord and Carryl, Child Development, July/August 2005.)
- Students in a statewide program in California improved their standardized test scores (SAT-9) in both reading and math by percentages almost twice that of other students and also had better school

attendance. The program cut high school drop out by 20 percent. (University of California Irvine, May 2001 and March 2006)

- Students (pre-k through 8th grade) in The After-School Corporation (TASC) supported afterschool programs improved their math scores and regular school day attendance compared to non-participants. High school level afterschool participants passed more Regent exams and earned more high school credits than non-participants. (Policy Studies Associates, July 2004)

In addition, the skills gained in afterschool go beyond those that can be measured by grades and test scores. These are the types of skills cited by so many as key to developing the workforce of the future. The following are just a few examples:

- *Afterschool programs have been proven to nurture critical thinking, leadership development and job success*

Junior Achievement was started in 1919 as a collection of small afterschool business clubs in Springfield, Massachusetts, to teach students about entrepreneurship and prepare them for the workforce. During the 2001-2002 program year, JA and its 112,732 volunteers offered more than 4.1 million students nationwide programs, both during and after school, on economics, running a business, international trade, problem-solving, math, personal finance and job shadowing. Research shows that JA programs have a significant effect on student learning. JA participants have better understanding of economic concepts, better critical thinking skills, better leadership skills and are better at succeeding at a job than non-participants.¹⁵

- *Afterschool programs are teaching young people to process information using technology, think creatively, communicate and work in teams*

The ECHOES afterschool program uses the media arts to engage middle- and high school youth in journalism, photography and graphic arts projects that explore their school and local communities. Says program director Xavier Leonard, “We do not consider technology as an objective in learning. What is more important is how we appropriately use technology to enrich learning that counsels youth to reflect on everyday life and become aware of issues around them, their family, community, and the world.”¹⁶

Discovery Youth, a program of the San Jose Children’s Discovery Museum, is an afterschool program for youth ages 10 to 14. Participants use media technology such as digital video equipment and video editing software to create health awareness projects that educate younger youth and peers about health-related topics such as smoking prevention. In this way, participants in this program are able to master the health education content while adding technology skills.¹⁷

- *Afterschool can provide hands-on experiences in the real world and the workforce, and help develop student’s understanding of the world and society*

After School Matters (ASM) in Chicago is a partnership between the city, the Chicago Public Schools, the Chicago Park District and the Chicago Public Library that offers apprenticeships and other enrichment activities to more than 20,000 teens. The city’s teens told the program operators that they wanted to learn “authentic skills,” and these skills they learn frequently benefit the city.¹⁸

- *Afterschool offer youth opportunities to use technology and apply this knowledge to real-world settings*

Participants in the Mary Lee Gete Educational Foundation Computer Academy afterschool program at Wilson Elementary in Lynwood, California spend several days a week developing competencies in skills ranging from using word processing to create letters to friends to developing PowerPoint presentations on what they'd like to be when they grow up.¹⁹

As the skills needed to compete in the workforce of the future continue to evolve, so will the practices of afterschool programs. Today, afterschool programs fulfill many needs, not the least of which is helping to keep America competitive. The extra learning time, and time to develop leadership, teamwork and problem-solving skills, are essential to ensuring that today's youth are prepared for tomorrow's workplace.

¹ National Academies Committee on Science, Engineering, and Public Policy. National Academy of Sciences. *Rising Above the Gathering Storm: Energizing and Employing America for a Brighter Economic Future*. Executive Summary, Prepublication Copy. Washington, D.C.: 2005.

² U.S. Department of Education. National Center for Education Statistics. *Vocational Education in the United States: Toward the Year 2000*, NCES 2000-029, by Karen Levesque, Doug Lauen, Peter Teitelbaum, Martha Alt and Sally Librera. Project Officer: Dawn Nelson. Washington, D.C.: 2000.

³ U.S. Department of Education. Office of Vocational and Adult Education. *The High School Leadership Summit Issue Papers: The Economic Imperative for Improving Education*. Downloaded December 2005.

⁴ U.S. Department of Education. Office of Vocational and Adult Education. *The High School Leadership Summit Issue Papers: The Economic Imperative for Improving Education*. Downloaded December 2005.

⁵ Afterschool Alliance. *Issue Brief #20: Older Youth Need Afterschool Programs*. Updated October 2004.

⁶ Afterschool Alliance. *Issue Brief #22: Afterschool Programs: A Wise Public Investment*. Updated November 2005.

⁷ Business Week. "A Corporate Science Project" by Craig R. Barrett, December 19, 2005.

⁸ National Academies Committee on Science, Engineering, and Public Policy. National Academy of Sciences. *Rising Above the Gathering Storm: Energizing and Employing America for a Brighter Economic Future*. Executive Summary, Prepublication Copy. Washington, D.C.: 2005.

⁹ U.S. Department of Labor. The Secretary's Commission on Achieving Necessary Skills. *What Work Requires of Schools: A SCANS report for America 2000*. Washington, D.C.: 1991.

¹⁰ The Conference Board, Inc., the Partnership for 21st Century Skills, Corporate Voices for Working Families and the Society for Human Resources Management. *Are They Really Ready to Work? Employers' Perspectives on the Basic Knowledge and Applied Skills of New Entrants to the 21st Century U.S. Workforce*. Washington, D.C.: 2006.

¹¹ Afterschool Alliance. *Issue Brief #15. Afterschool: The Natural Platform for Youth Development*, Updated January 2003.

¹² The Forum for Youth Investment. *Ready By 21 Advocates' Series Action Brief # 2 Ready for Work*. September 2006.

¹³ Charles Steward Mott Foundation. *Afterschool Programs: giving hope and help to all our children. Remarks by William S. White, President*. July, 2005.

¹⁴ U.S. Department of Education. *Afterschool Programs: Vision 2000 and Beyond*, Afterschool Alliance, U.S. Department of Education, Disney Learning partnership and Disney Institute. 2000.

¹⁵ Afterschool Alliance. *Issue Brief #19. Afterschool: A Natural Platform for Career Development*. Updated August 2004.

¹⁶ ECHOES program profile, downloaded from youthlearn.org on February 2, 2006.

¹⁷ Harvard Family Research Project. Graduate School of Education. From the Out-of-School Time Program Evaluation Bibliography. Downloaded on January 20, 2006.

¹⁸ Afterschool Alliance. *Issue Brief #18. Afterschool Programs Strengthen Communities*. Updated January 2004.

¹⁹ Afterschool Alliance. *Issue Brief #5. Afterschool & Technology Training*. Updated December 2001.