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**Department of Education Q/A Contains Misleading Language;
More Likely to Confuse than Clarify on How 21st CCLC Funds Can Be Used**

Statement of Afterschool Alliance Executive Director Jodi Grant

“Yesterday’s long awaited Q/A document from the Department of Education, intended to clarify permissible uses of 21st Century Community Learning Centers (21st CCLC) funding for state and local educators and policymakers in 21st CCLC waiver-approved states, will sow confusion not clarity. In doing so, it rewrites the law, leaving Congress on the sidelines. Worse, there are contradictions in the document as well as inconsistencies with the Department’s own FY2014 budget documents. The new Q/A betrays an effort by the Administration to fund a longer school day or year by draining resources from afterschool programs and the families and children they serve.

The document is rife with contradictions. While the Q/A asserts that the Department’s 21st CCLC waivers to state educational agencies only affect *when* 21st CCLC services may be provided, it offers examples of suggested uses for 21st CCLC funds that go far afield. By the Department’s new interpretation, afterschool money could be diverted to pay for ‘additional time for teacher collaboration and common planning,’ or ‘redesigning the whole school day to use time more strategically.’ Such activities are entirely inconsistent not just with the assertion that the new policy only affects when services may be offered, but also with current law.

For several years now, the Administration has made no secret of its desire to divert afterschool funding to support its extended learning time (ELT) initiative. This latest document — not a law, not a regulation, not even formal guidance to grantees, but instead a Q/A — is the latest attempt to accomplish that policy objective.

While the document creates confusion regarding implementing ELT, the Q/A is clear that afterschool, summer, before-school and weekend programs will continue to be funded and that school community partnerships should continue to receive priority. It also points out that ELT efforts must add ‘significantly’ more time (without setting a minimum number of hours) and that state educational agencies have a responsibility to ensure that local grantees are using funds properly.

The mention of the need for significantly more time is in keeping with the original intent of the law. Congress intended the 21st CCLC initiative to help working families by providing safe, supportive, and engaging activities for kids during the sometimes perilous afternoon hours. However, the Administration immediately contradicts itself by offering examples that envision uses of 21st CCLC funds that essentially support a longer school calendar or an expansion of the regular school day by as little as 50 minutes. Neither approach will satisfy the daily needs of working families.

Moreover, the Department has yet to come to grips with the economics of its own proposal. The 21st CCLC funding stream is too small to support the Administration's extended learning time ambitions. Afterschool programs provide more hours of quality programming to students and families than extending the school day in the manner the Administration envisions. In the end, the Administration's approach would serve fewer communities, and the program would have considerably less impact.

The conflicting descriptions of how to support ELT with 21st CCLC that this document serves up are bound to confuse state and local educational agencies, policymakers and afterschool providers. Fortunately, both this document and the original legislation are clear that school-community partnerships that provide afterschool, summer, before-school and weekend programs are allowable uses of funds. And, more than a decade of research shows that they are cost-effective investments that help keep kids safe, inspire them to learn, and help working families.

We urge Congress to take a close look at this document and at the Administration's plans for 21st CCLC, and to act to protect the afterschool programs America's kids and families need and deserve. Investments in expanded learning time should come from funding streams that are better aligned with school redesign, not from a congressionally approved before school, afterschool and summer learning funding stream. Research shows that 21st CCLC is an effective program that improves students' social, behavioral and academic performance. Shoehorning the 21st CCLC program into the regular school day should not be done."

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The Afterschool Alliance is a nonprofit public awareness and advocacy organization working to ensure that all children and youth have access to quality afterschool programs. More information is available at www.afterschoolalliance.org.