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CSAS Departs After Making Tremendous Progress on STEM and Afterschool

Statement of Afterschool Alliance Executive Director Jodi Grant

Earlier this week, the Coalition for Science After School announced plans to sunset in early 2014, concluding a decade of impressive work advancing the cause of science education in afterschool programs. I have been privileged to serve on the organization's advisory board, so I've seen up close the outstanding work of the organization.

When CSAS came on the scene in 2004, afterschool programs had barely begun to tap their STEM (science, technology, engineering and mathematics) potential. With CSAS's leadership, the contributions of several other state and national organizations, and countless hours of hard work by educators in the field, afterschool programs are now rightly recognized as a vital force for STEM. Across the nation today, afterschool and summer learning programs are offering kids hands-on, sleeves-rolled-up opportunities to build robots, plant and tend gardens, learn about biology and rocketry, and so much more.

Along the way, programs have underscored one of many elements that differentiate them from the regular school day: the experiential approach to learning for which afterschool is so perfectly suited.

In its short organizational life, CSAS made tremendous contributions to the afterschool movement, highlighting the potential for high quality STEM programming in the afterschool and summer learning space. Through conferences and various other programs it showcased the rich array of programming being conducted in afterschool programs, setting the stage for ever more interest and growth. CSAS's collaboration with Time Warner Cable on "The Connector," an online clearinghouse of activities and resources to inspire young people to develop STEM skills, has helped highlight the types of programs available to parents and local communities.

We've come a long way during CSAS's life, and its organizational impact is in evidence across the afterschool landscape, with many more providers embracing STEM education, and the demand for high quality programming increasing dramatically. The progress on STEM has also served to strengthen the connections between the afterschool community and the museum and academic communities.

There's more to do on STEM, of course, building on CSAS's fine work. We'll miss our colleagues at CSAS, but together with the many other organizations active on afterschool and STEM issues, we look forward to future STEM growth.

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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.