



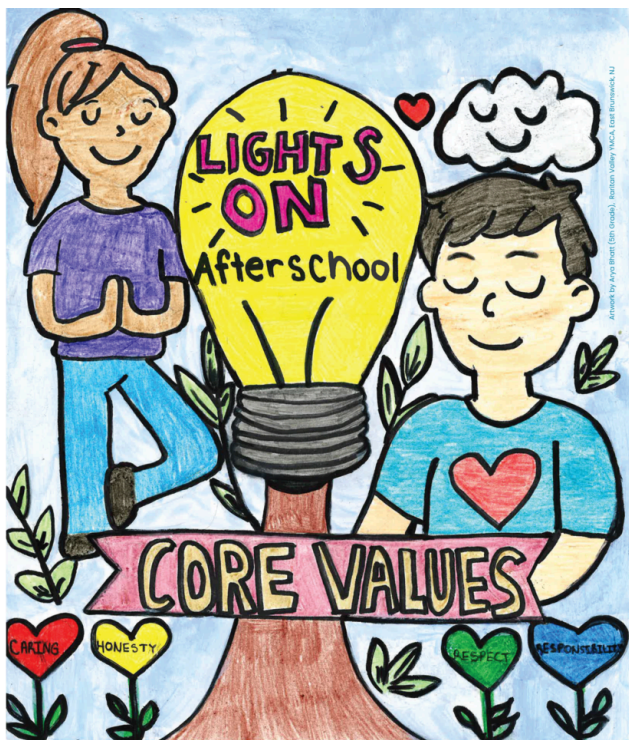
NEWS RELEASE

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Spotswood Sixth Grader Wins National Art Contest

*Memorial Middle School's Arya Bhatt Designed This Year's
Lights On Afterschool Poster*



Sixth grader Arya Bhatt designed the winning artwork for this year's *Lights On Afterschool* rally, which will be printed on 50,000 posters and will be seen by more than a million people at *Lights On Afterschool* events held in every state on and around October 23rd. Bhatt's drawing features two students meditating in a garden with four heart-shaped flowers symbolizing core values that afterschool programs help students develop: honesty, caring, respect and responsibility. Bhatt drew from her experiences in the Raritan Valley YMCA afterschool program to design the poster.

Organized by the [Afterschool Alliance](https://afterschoolalliance.org), *Lights On Afterschool* is the only national rally for afterschool. *Lights On Afterschool* events underscore the need to invest in afterschool programs, which keep students safe, inspire them to learn, and give working parents peace of mind that their children are safe and learning when the school day ends.



Some 8,000 *Lights On Afterschool* events are expected to take place across the country this October at schools, parks, community centers, museums, 4-Hs, Boys & Girls Clubs, YMCAs, and other venues. Events will feature science fairs, student achievements, family fun nights, academic contests, lawmaker visits, awards ceremonies, student art and performances, community service activities, sporting competitions, trunk-or-treat events, and much more.

Bhatt attended the Raritan Valley YMCA afterschool program for two years at Spotswood Elementary School. The program offers homework help, healthy snacks, nutrition and physical education, hands-on enrichment activities, life skills education, STEM (science, technology, engineering and math) projects, art and literature expos, and opportunities for community service.

“My favorite part of the Raritan Valley YMCA afterschool program was all of the arts and crafts activities we got to do. The counselors and other students in the program always encouraged my love of art, which gave me the confidence to design and submit this poster,” Bhatt said. “I love the Raritan Valley YMCA program because it gave me and continues to give my little brother a safe, fun place to try new things after school while our parents work. For my *Lights On Afterschool* poster, I wanted to illustrate our experience in the program while also shining a light on the important values my afterschool program has helped me learn.”

“We are so proud of Arya’s incredible accomplishment, and especially proud that she used her creativity to highlight the core principles our program seeks to instill in students each day,” Raritan Valley YMCA School Age Director Brenda Dempsey said. “The mentorship, guidance and support afterschool programs provide help students like Arya grow into leaders and reach their full potential. Through hands-on activities at the Raritan Valley YMCA, we work to inspire all of our students to develop their unique talents and use those talents to serve their community, just as Arya has done. We are thrilled that her hard work will be displayed in communities all over the country as the nation celebrates the critical support afterschool programs provide students and their families.”

“Arya’s terrific artwork powerfully illustrates the impact afterschool programs have for millions of students like her,” said Afterschool Alliance Executive Director Jodi Grant. “All students should have access to quality afterschool programs, but unmet demand for these programs has soared and federal funding for afterschool programs faces serious threats. It’s more important than ever to shine a light on the vital role afterschool programs play in our communities and rally for more investments, so no student is left unsupervised or without opportunities to learn when the school day ends.”

A large and powerful body of evidence demonstrates improvements in grades, school attendance, behavior, and more among children who participate in afterschool programs. Researchers have also found that students in afterschool programs are more engaged in school and excited about learning, and they develop work and life skills such as problem solving, teamwork, and communications.

Capital One and Clear Channel Outdoor are proud supporters of *Lights On Afterschool 2025*.

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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.