



NEWS RELEASE

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Houston Students' Digital Artwork Wins National Contest

*Sofia Espinoza and Elizabeth Figueroa Designed This Year's
Lights On Afterschool Poster*



RAD ART afterschool program participants Sofia Espinoza and Elizabeth Figueroa designed the artwork that is being printed on 50,000 posters to be displayed at thousands of *Lights On Afterschool* events across the country on and around October 24. The fourth and fifth grade students' digital painting features a breakdancing robot, a rocket, a painter, a laboratory scientist and more, symbolizing the diverse interests students explore in afterschool programs.

Lights On Afterschool is the only national rally for afterschool programs. It is organized by the [Afterschool Alliance](https://www.afterschoolalliance.org) to celebrate the critical support that programs provide youth and families and to highlight the need for more investment in afterschool. More than 1 million

people are expected to gather at some 8,000 events across the country for *Lights On Afterschool*, now in its 25th year. Events will feature science fairs, student performances, family fun nights, academic contests, student art shows, lawmaker visits, community service activities, sporting competitions, and much more. Usher is the honorary chair of *Lights On Afterschool* this year.

Espinoza and Figueroa created their design while participating in RAD ART, a key component of the Houston Healthy Hip-Hop initiative in Houston, Texas. The art program is facilitated in partnership with the Harris County Department of Education CASE for Kids program at Crespo Elementary, which is funded by a federal 21st Century Community Learning Centers (21st CCLC) grant. Students take part in art, dance, sports, STEAM (science, technology, engineering, art and math) activities, homework help, and more.

“We designed our poster by thinking about all the different jobs and what you can become, and how you can explore that in afterschool programs,” Espinoza said. “I’m never bored in my afterschool program because there is so much to do. We learned graphic design from our mentor, Mr. Chris, and worked very hard on the design because we were determined to do our best. I want others to know that you should follow your dreams and never give up, and that afterschool programs can help you achieve your dreams.”

“What I love most about my afterschool program is the positive energy it brings me because of all the fun activities,” Figueroa said. “Afterschool programs are important because they help students’ mental and physical health and keep students entertained and engaged. That’s a message we wanted to spread with our *Lights On Afterschool* poster.”

“We are so proud of Elizabeth and Sofia for using their talents to spread the word about the transformative potential of afterschool programs,” said Crespo Elementary After-School Coordinator Quetzaly Harper. “Afterschool programs make a meaningful difference by providing a safe, nurturing environment, supporting working parents, and serving as a space for guidance and mentorship. We are thrilled that our students’ hard work will be displayed in communities across the country as the nation comes together to celebrate afterschool.”

“Every student deserves access to a quality afterschool program to spark their passions and help them reach their potential. The design by Elizabeth and Sofia is a terrific representation of the heights these programs help students reach,” said Jodi Grant, Executive Director of the Afterschool Alliance. “Unfortunately, due to lack of funding, tens of millions of students are missing out on the essential support that afterschool programs provide, putting them at risk for isolation, dangerous behaviors, and other harms. We need to invest more in afterschool programs, which keep students safe, inspire them to learn, and give parents peace of mind.”

This year, *Lights On Afterschool* comes as the federal pandemic relief that has helped afterschool programs meet rising costs and address growing needs winds down. The unmet need for programs is enormous. Today in the United States, for every child in an afterschool program,

four more are waiting to get in. Nearly 25 million children not in an afterschool program would be enrolled, if a program were available to them, [according to a 2022 survey](#) of approximately 1,500 parents commissioned by the Afterschool Alliance and conducted by Edge Research. In recent years, Congress has failed to significantly increase funding for 21st CCLC, the chief federal funding stream for afterschool and summer learning programs.

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 critical work and life skills such as problem solving, teamwork, and communications.

Capital One and Clear Channel Outdoor are generous sponsors of *Lights On Afterschool* this year.

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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.