



NEWS RELEASE

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NASA, 4-H, and STEM Superheroes Plan Fun, Educational STEM Activities for *Lights On Afterschool* 2024

Afterschool students across the country will have the chance to meet and ask questions of NASA's first female launch director as part of the kick-off for *Lights On Afterschool* this year. Now in its 25th year, *Lights On Afterschool* is the only national rally for afterschool programs. More than 1 million people are expected to participate in some 8,000 events in every part of the nation on and around October 24.

For *Lights On Afterschool*, NASA is inviting afterschool programs and youth to join a live virtual event with Charlie Blackwell-Thompson, NASA's first female launch director, on Wednesday, October 16 at 4 p.m. ET. Blackwell-Thompson oversees the countdown and liftoff of NASA's Space Launch System (SLS) rocket and Orion spacecraft for the Artemis missions. In November of 2022, she led her team during the first launch of Artemis – an uncrewed flight test of SLS and the Orion spacecraft. She is now preparing for Artemis II, the first crewed Artemis mission. The virtual event is being held in partnership with the STEM Next Opportunity Fund. During the live Q&A, students will ask Blackwell-Thompson questions about space exploration and career paths in STEM (science, technology, engineering and math). To participate, afterschool programs should [register for the NASA event](#).

Lights On Afterschool is organized by the [Afterschool Alliance](#) to highlight the need for more investment in afterschool programs, which keep kids safe, inspire them to learn, and give working parents peace of mind that their children are safe, supervised, and learning after the school day ends. Usher is honorary chair of *Lights On Afterschool* this year.

The Afterschool Alliance is also partnering with 4-H to bring the [4-H STEM Challenge](#) to afterschool programs around the country for *Lights On Afterschool*. This year's challenge was developed by 4-H educators from Louisiana State University AgCenter, North Dakota State

University, Penn State Extension, and University of Nebraska–Lincoln. More than 500 Challenge kits will be distributed leading up to *Lights On Afterschool*; they include hands-on activities for youth ages 8-14 to help them learn about food security, how it affects people locally and globally, and how youth can co-create more food-secure communities.

In addition, **STEM Superheroes** and **The KidWind Project** are teaming up with the Afterschool Alliance to donate copies of “Everyday Superheroes: An Energy Coloring & Activity Book” to several afterschool locations to promote energy literacy and careers. This interactive resource empowers afterschool kids to build, color, and doodle their way to discovering energy careers.

“We are immensely grateful to the generous partners who are leading *Lights On Afterschool* events this year to broaden students’ horizons and offer memorable STEM experiences. These events are fantastic examples of afterschool’s power to inspire the next generation of STEM leaders,” said Afterschool Alliance Senior Vice President of STEM and Youth Engagement Anita Krishnamurthi. “Each day, afterschool programs across the country provide innovative, hands-on opportunities that help students envision themselves in STEM careers. We appreciate the efforts of NASA, 4-H, and STEM Superheroes to showcase critical opportunities afterschool programs provide. But due to lack of funding, too many students are missing out. There is an urgent need for more funding for afterschool programs.”

A growing number of afterschool programs are helping youth develop the STEM skills needed to address the issues they care about. The Afterschool Alliance’s CYESS initiative, the Collective for Youth Empowerment in STEM and Society, is working to expand opportunities for young people to use STEM skills for social good. [CYESS](#) offers resources, research, and examples for programs.

In addition to the activities above, thousands of local afterschool programs will hold events on and around October 24 for *Lights On Afterschool* this year, taking place at schools, 4-Hs, Boys & Girls Clubs, YMCAs, museums, public parks, community centers and other places. Events will feature student performances, science fairs, family fun nights, academic contests, student art shows, lawmaker visits, community service activities, sporting competitions, and much more. Many will highlight programs’ STEM offerings.

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.