



Youth Afterschool Ambassador Program
A Project of the Afterschool Alliance

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**Atlanta International School Student One of Nine in Country to
Serve as a Youth Afterschool Ambassador for 2021/2022**

*Ramaya Thomas Will Work to Raise Awareness About Importance and Value of
Afterschool Programs*

Washington, D.C. -- The Afterschool Alliance announced today that Ramaya Thomas, a student at the VOXATL afterschool program and at Atlanta International School, is serving in its 2021/2022 class of Youth Afterschool Ambassadors. Thomas is one of just nine students from across the country selected for the honor. She was chosen on the basis of her essay in a competition held earlier this year.

The nine Youth Ambassadors promote the value of afterschool programs by sharing their experiences in these programs and their views about the role afterschool programs play in their communities. They write for the [Afterschool Snack](#), the Afterschool Alliance blog, about the importance of afterschool programs. Several Youth Ambassadors, including Thomas, spoke at a National Youth Town Hall for *Lights On Afterschool*, the only national rally for afterschool programs, on October 28. The Youth Ambassadors will also connect with members of Congress and their aides as part of the Afterschool for All Challenge next spring.

“We are delighted that Ramaya is part of this year’s class of Youth Afterschool Ambassadors,” said Jodi Grant, Afterschool Alliance Executive Director. “She has powerful personal experience that speaks to the importance of afterschool programs in her life and the lives of other youth. As the pandemic continues disrupting the lives of so many young people, their schools and communities, it is especially important that we continue to share the benefits these essential programs provide. Afterschool programs keep students safe, inspire them to learn, provide peace of mind to working parents, and also help children re-engage and recover during this difficult

time. But too many young people don't have a program available to them. Ramaya will do a terrific job spreading the word about the need for more support for afterschool programs.”

“I’m so excited to be a Youth Afterschool Ambassador,” Thomas said. “When I was younger, I was shy and often afraid to speak up, but throughout my life afterschool programs have boosted my confidence and helped me find my true authentic self. In particular, VOXATL has helped me improve my English grades, discover my love of writing, publish my journalism in VOX, WABE and CNN, and find the power of my voice. The Harvard Debate Diversity Project and my mock trial team also taught me perseverance and inspired me to pursue a career in law. I’m thrilled to share about these experiences as a Youth Afterschool Ambassador to build support for afterschool and ensure all students can access afterschool programs, which have been life-changing for me.”

The nine Youth Afterschool Ambassadors in this class come from California, Georgia, Maine, Maryland, New York, Illinois, Utah, Virginia, and Washington. They are:

- **Kyla Anderson**, from East St. Louis, Illinois’ Southern Illinois University Edwardsville East Saint Louis Charter High School’s 21st Century Community Learning Centers Afterschool Program, age 17
- **Brock Brewer**, from Kelso, Washington’s Youth And Family Link Afterschool Program, age 16
- **Kaiya Jones**, from Ellicott City, Maryland’s Howard County Library System Teen Advisory Board Afterschool Program, age 15
- **Juliana Montell**, from Gardiner, Maine’s Boys & Girls Clubs of Kennebec Valley Afterschool Program, age 16
- **Belen Perez**, from Alexandria, Virginia’s Community Lodgings Afterschool Program, age 14
- **Naomi Porter**, from Los Angeles, California’s Boys & Girls Club at LA Harbor EntrepreYOUership Afterschool Program , age 16
- **Noah Shaw**, from Murray, Utah’s Miller Family Boys & Girls Club Afterschool Program, age [AGE]
- **Ramaya Thomas**, from Dallas, Georgia’s VOXATL Afterschool Program, age 17
- **Zhonghui Zheng**, from New York, New York’s Global Kids Afterschool Program, age 17

The most recent [America After 3PM household survey](#) of more than 31,000 families, commissioned by the Afterschool Alliance, finds that for every child in an afterschool program in the United States, three more are waiting to get in. The families of 24.6 million children — more than ever before — are unable to access a program. Many report cost as a barrier. There are significant inequities, with Black and Latinx children unable to access the afterschool programs

their parents want for them.

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

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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

VOX is Atlanta's home for uncensored teen publishing and self-expression. As a nonprofit organization, VOX offers free after-school programming and media resources for metro-Atlanta teens. Since 1993, diverse Atlanta-area teens have joined VOX to become better prepared for their futures, connected to their peers and supportive adults, and valued as leaders and communicators in our community.