



Afterschool Ambassador Program: Legacy of Leadership

News Release

February 23, 2026

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Lindsey Blevins of Tuscaloosa Named One of 16 Afterschool Ambassadors in United States This Year

*Blevins Will Work to Make Quality Afterschool and Summer Learning Programs Available to
More Students and Families, Locally and Nationwide*

Washington, DC – The Afterschool Alliance has selected Lindsey Blevins, 21st Century Community Learning Center Program Director at the Tuscaloosa City Schools, to serve as a 2026 Afterschool Ambassador – one of just 16 leaders in the entire nation chosen for the honor this year. Afterschool Ambassadors continue supporting local afterschool programs while serving the one-year Afterschool Ambassador term during which they engage with policy makers and community leaders to organize events and in other ways grow support for the afterschool and summer learning programs that students and families rely on.

“The country urgently needs strong afterschool advocates, so we are thrilled that Lindsey Blevins will serve as an Afterschool Ambassador for the Afterschool Alliance this year. She will help spread the word that too many children and youth are without the afterschool programs that help them succeed in school and in life,” said Jodi Grant, executive director of the Afterschool Alliance. “This is a pivotal year when we must continue building support for these essential programs, which keep kids safe, inspire them to learn, and give parents peace of mind that their children are safe and supervised after the school day ends. Blevins is exactly the kind of champion we need.”

“I am honored to represent Tuscaloosa and the state of Alabama to increase awareness and support for afterschool and summer programs this year,” said Blevins. “Every day, I see the powerful impact high-quality afterschool and summer programs have on students and families. These programs spark curiosity, strengthen academic skills, and create meaningful connections with caring adults. They give students the opportunity to explore their interests, build confidence, and discover what they’re capable of. I am proud to be part of the afterschool movement and to be a 2026 Afterschool Ambassador.”

Tuscaloosa City Schools’ 21st Century Community Learning Center programs serve students across ten school-based sites, including elementary, middle, and high schools. These afterschool and summer programs provide academic support aligned with school-day learning, hands-on enrichment in STEM and the arts, mentoring, physical activity, healthy snacks and meals, and opportunities for college and career exploration. The programs also prioritize meaningful family engagement through regular communication, family events, and shared learning experiences. Through strong partnerships with local organizations and community leaders, the programs expand learning beyond the school day while supporting student achievement and working families.

Each Ambassador will organize a major event for *Lights On Afterschool*, the Afterschool Alliance's annual rally for afterschool. Most of the thousands of local *Lights On Afterschool* events will be on or around Thursday, October 22, 2026.

The 2026 Afterschool Ambassadors are:

- **Alabama, Tuscaloosa:** Lindsey Blevins, Tuscaloosa City Schools
- **Alaska, Fairbanks:** Lindsay Weaver, Fairbanks North Star Borough School District
- **Arkansas, Hot Springs:** Amos Gray, High Impact Movement, Inc.
- **Arkansas, Texarkana:** Tina Jones, Four States Urban Development Project
- **DC, Washington:** Katrina Owens, DC SCORES
- **Florida, Miami:** Sean Prospect, South Florida After-School All-Stars, Inc.
- **Indiana, Indianapolis:** Christine (Chrissy) Balak, Central Indiana Educational Service Center, MSD of Pike Township Schools
- **Mississippi, Cleveland:** Tracy Henshaw Cameron, Delta Area Association for Improvement of Schools
- **Mississippi, Hattiesburg:** Jo Hawkins-Jones, Going Beyond Apprenticeship 21st CCLC Program
- **North Dakota, Grafton:** Lori Zahradka, North Valley Career and Technology Center
- **Oklahoma, Oklahoma City:** Les Thomas, Urban Bridge
- **Pennsylvania, Milton:** Travis Stevens, Central Susquehanna Intermediate Unit, STEAMS Afterschool & Summer Programs
- **Pennsylvania, Pittsburgh:** Ana Kay Yaghoubian, Building for Success in School and Life, United Way of Southwestern Pennsylvania
- **Texas, Dallas:** Angelica Portillo, Dallas Afterschool
- **Virginia, Arlington:** Paula Fynboh, Aspire Afterschool Learning
- **West Virginia, Shinnston:** Michelle Frase, Buzz Learning Academy

A [2025 household survey](#) found that the parents of 29.6 million children want afterschool programs for their children – but less than 7 million kids are currently enrolled. Another 22.6 million children would attend an afterschool program if it were available. That means three in four kids whose parents want afterschool programs for them (77%)—including many in middle- as well as low-income families – are being left behind. Cost and accessibility are the barriers many families cannot overcome. It's no wonder that 89% of parents favor public funding for these programs. Ninety-five percent of parents with children in afterschool programs are satisfied with the program their child attends.

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, more 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.