



## **Afterschool Ambassador Program: Legacy of Leadership**

### **News Release**

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### **Dr. Tracy Henshaw Cameron of Cleveland Named One of 16 Afterschool Ambassadors in United States This Year**

*Cameron 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 Dr. Tracy Henshaw Cameron, Executive Director of the Delta Area Association for Improvement of Schools at the DAAIS 21<sup>st</sup> Century Learning Afterschool Program, 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 working locally 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 Dr. Cameron 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 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. Cameron is exactly the kind of champion we need.”

“I am pleased and excited to have the opportunity to work with the Afterschool Alliance to increase awareness and support for afterschool and summer learning programs this year,” Cameron said. “I’ve seen up close the many ways these programs help students succeed and help families overcome challenges. That’s especially important now, as so many families are struggling with high costs, and too many students are disengaged. Afterschool and summer programs are uniquely positioned to help students connect with peers and caring mentors, explore their interests, and discover their passions. I am proud to be part of the afterschool movement and to be a 2026 Afterschool Ambassador.”

The Delta Area Association for the Improvement of Schools (DAAIS) 21st Century Community Learning Centers program provides high-quality afterschool and summer learning opportunities for students across multiple Delta school districts, serving hundreds of children at several school-based sites throughout the region. The program offers a safe, supportive environment where students receive homework assistance, academic enrichment, STEM (science, technology, engineering and math) and robotics activities, literacy development, college and career readiness experiences, social-emotional learning, mentoring, physical fitness, and access to healthy snacks and meals. Through strong partnerships with local school districts, community organizations, higher education institutions, and

volunteers, DAAIS works to close learning gaps, expand opportunities, and help students build the skills and confidence needed for long-term academic success.

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](http://www.afterschoolalliance.org).

*The Delta Area Association for the Improvement of Schools (DAAIS) is a regional education service agency dedicated to strengthening teaching, learning, and student outcomes across the Mississippi Delta. Through collaborative partnerships with local school districts, community organizations, and higher education institutions, DAAIS provides professional learning for Delta Area Educators whose districts are members of DAAIS, grant-supported initiatives, student enrichment programs, and innovative resources that expand opportunities for children and families. The DAAIS 21st Century Community Learning Centers program extends this mission by delivering high-quality afterschool and summer learning experiences that support academic achievement, social-emotional growth, and college and career readiness for students in participating districts.*