



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

### **News Release**

February 23, 2026

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### **Tina Jones of Texarkana Named One of 16 Afterschool Ambassadors in United States This Year**

*Jones 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 Tina Jones, Program Director at the Read and Rise 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 with 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 Tina Jones 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. Jones 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,” said Jones. “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.”

Read and Rise afterschool and summer program has proudly served over 500 students in the last three years. The program is currently housed at the Washington Community Development Center, but has mobility to serve at other locations. It operates under the nonprofit, Four States Urban Development Project. The program mainly serves first through seventh graders, while tutorials are available for other grades. The Read and Rise program aims to close achievement gaps in reading and math while offering tutorials, homework helpers, enrichment activities in science and STEAM (science, technology, engineering, arts and math) concepts, social studies, community involvement, and character building. The program offers small group tutoring along with interactive hand-on-activities. The Read and Rise program is year-round and completely free. It partners with other businesses and nonprofits in the

community to provide excursions and other enhancement programs. Students registered through the community center are able to sign up for transportation and meals.

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).

*Read and Rise is turning pages into power in Texarkana, Arkansas. Free afterschool and summer hands-on-fun for local students boost reading, math, and science, engineering, kinesthetic and arts explorations, while closing gaps and sparking joy! One book, one pose, one discovery at a time, its kids rise and the community soars! Join the Rise! #ReadandRise*