



Afterschool Ambassador Program: Legacy of Leadership

News Release

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Katrina Owens of Washington, DC Named One of 16 Afterschool Ambassadors in United States This Year

*Owens 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 Katrina Owens, Executive Director at the DC SCORES, 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 Katrina Owens 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. Owens 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,” said Owens. “I’ve seen firsthand how these programs help students succeed and support families facing challenges. At a time when so many families are navigating rising costs and students are feeling disengaged, afterschool and summer programs provide safe spaces to build friendships, connect with 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.”

Since 1994, DC SCORES has partnered with schools across the District to provide free afterschool programs that combine soccer, poetry, and service-learning. The program hires and trains more than 300 school-day staff to lead its programs, strengthening the connection between the school day and out-of-school time. Today, it serves more than 3,500 kids at 68 public elementary and middle schools. Through its whole-child approach and strong feeder pattern, engaging kids from 1st to 8th grade, it builds lasting relationships, fosters a strong culture of belonging, and creates sustained positive impact

in young people's lives. Its vision is to transform Washington, D.C. into a Poet-Athlete City. By 2030, DC SCORES aims to reach every Title 1 elementary and middle school in the District and help raise a generation of healthy, resilient, and empowered poet-athletes.

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.

DC SCORES was founded in 1994 by Julie Kennedy, a DC public school teacher who wanted to provide after-school opportunities for girls in her class. By sharing her passion for soccer and poetry, Kennedy created an accessible program of activities that helped her students express themselves creatively and grow strong. Today DC SCORES serves more than 3,500 young people across 68 elementary and middle schools in the District of Columbia through soccer, poetry, and service-learning programs. Its programming builds teams of poet-athletes, young people who are committed to their physical, emotional, and social wellbeing.

Since 1994, the DC SCORES model has been replicated in twelve other cities across North America under the umbrella organization America SCORES, which annually serves more than 25,000 poet-athletes of all genders and a diverse range of backgrounds.