



NEWS RELEASE
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Afterschool Programs Help Students Gain Math, Science Skills, Experts Tell Congress

WASHINGTON, DC – At a special Capitol Hill briefing today, experts discussed how afterschool programs teach science, technology, engineering and math skills through fun, engaging activities such as computer programming, robotics, 3-D digital animation and much more. Sponsored in conjunction with the Senate and House Science, Technology, Engineering and Math Caucuses, and the House and Senate Afterschool Caucuses, the briefing was held to address the nation’s need to keep pace with other industrialized countries in these fields and the role afterschool programs can play.

With the U.S. Labor Department predicting that jobs requiring training in science, technology, engineering and math will increase by more than 50 percent from 1998 to 2008, and experts worried that the U.S. is losing its competitive edge, afterschool programs are doing critical work to prepare students. But there are not nearly enough afterschool programs for the students who need them, the experts said. Today, just 6.5 million children attend afterschool programs, while 14.3 million take care of themselves after the school day ends.

The briefing featured Eric Jolly of the Science Museum of Minnesota; Lucy Friedman of The After-School Corporation (New York City); and Amy Heit of Girls Inc. of Washington County, Maryland. Afterschool Alliance Executive Director Jodi Grant moderated the event, which included a demonstration of hands-on science experiments that are being used in afterschool programs.

“Every day, afterschool programs around the country are teaching children why volcanoes erupt, how snakes digest their food, the skills to program tomorrow’s computers, and what the Hubble Telescope is enabling us to discover about our universe,” Grant said. “Quality afterschool programs help students explore their world, from nature to technology. We need more afterschool programs, so every student will have these opportunities.”

The experts cited a number of examples of afterschool programs helping students explore the sciences, sometimes targeting low-income students and working in cooperation with local museums, universities or businesses. For instance, since the early 1980s, Girls Inc. Operation SMART[®] has engaged 617,000 girls and young women in hands-on, inquiry-based explorations of the natural world, and more than 1,000 Girls Inc. programs in the U.S. and Canada are giving girls experience with power tools and computers.

A web-based survey of more than 1,600 afterschool programs, released by the Afterschool Alliance this month, found that 75 percent of the nation's afterschool programs operated at or above maximum capacity during the 2005/2006 school year. Nearly nine in ten respondents (86 percent) said there are children in their community who need afterschool programs and don't have access to them.

Today's briefing was sponsored by the Coalition for Science After School, the Afterschool Alliance, the National Science Teachers Association and the National Council of Teachers of Mathematics in conjunction with the Senate and House Science, Technology, Engineering and Math (STEM) Education Caucuses and the Senate and House Afterschool Caucuses.

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 by 2010. More information is available at www.afterschoolalliance.org.

The Coalition for Science After School is a strategic alliance among individuals and organizations from STEM education, youth development, and out-of-school time programs. The Coalition's mission is to coordinate and mobilize community stakeholders to strengthen and expand opportunities for young people to do and learn science in after-school settings.

The Arlington, VA-based National Science Teachers Association is the largest professional organization in the world promoting excellence and innovation in science teaching and learning for all. NSTA's current membership includes more than 55,000 science teachers, science supervisors, administrators, scientists, business and industry representatives, and others involved in science education

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