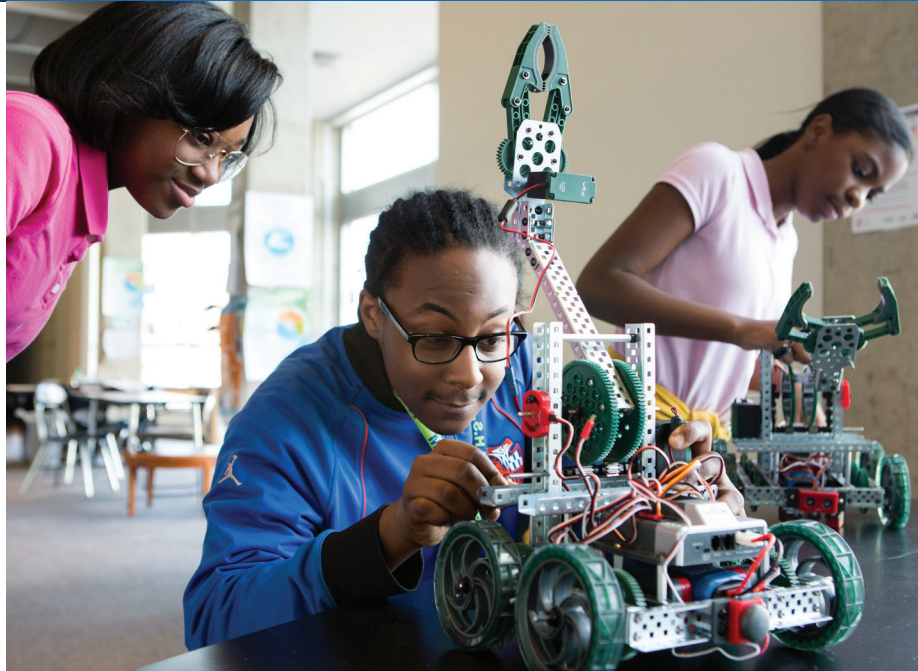


### The Opportunity

All youth should have access to afterschool programs. Not only do they provide a safe place to go after school, but they also provide children with additional help that they may not be getting throughout the day. Afterschool programs provide opportunities to explore new hobbies and activities, as well as connections to trustworthy adults within the school district. Volunteering in the Gadsden City Schools 21<sup>st</sup> Century Afterschool Program gave me a deeper appreciation for the power of afterschool.

### In Practice

The Gadsden City Schools 21<sup>st</sup> Century Afterschool Program serves more than 70 9<sup>th</sup> through 12<sup>th</sup> grade students, most of whom are considered economically disadvantaged. It addresses challenges in math and literacy achievement by providing opportunities for academic enrichment and remediation, such as daily homework help, tutoring, and credit recovery. It also aims to improve attendance for the regular school day, increase parental involvement in events, and improve student behavior. It offers students activities, events, service learning opportunities, and many other experiences to help them grow and thrive. Throughout the academic year, the program runs four days a week under the direction of one school administrator and three regular teachers, who also give student volunteers extensive training to help them best support the afterschool program's participants. Past activities and events focused on cultural diversity, drug prevention, environmental literacy, financial literacy, nutrition lessons, and other opportunities designed to enhance student academic success. They offered career exploration days, enrichment in fine arts and dance, STEAM, physical education, and character education. As part of their service learning, students also created care packets for their local animal shelter and helped prepare a meal for their local veterans.



### YOUTH SPOTLIGHT

**Willany Sayles**

**Gadsden City Schools 21<sup>st</sup> Century Afterschool Program, Gadsden, AL**

"One way my afterschool program has made a positive impact on my life has been through incredible experiences. I'll never forget when we all came together to build a robot that could pick up and transport soda cans and other small items. This activity taught me the importance of communication and teamwork, skills that can be used throughout my life. Our afterschool program is all about creating a positive environment for all students. Every day, the students who attend our program come in dedicated, excited and ready to help others. It's truly a wonderful place to be! The sense of accomplishment and pride we felt when our robot completed its task was incredible. It was a moment that brought us all closer together and made us realize the power of collaboration. I'm grateful for the opportunities and support provided by my afterschool experiences. It has helped shape me into a more confident and capable individual."



## Outcomes

In 2022–2023, the Gadsden City Schools 21<sup>st</sup> Century Afterschool Program served 79 students. According to student surveys, 100% of the students felt that the afterschool program helped them improve their grades. Program data shows that over 50% improved their math grades between their first and second semesters, and 26% improved their literacy grades. 100 percent of surveyed parents also believed their children’s behavior had improved because of lessons on character development and more than 60 days of service learning opportunities provided to participating students. Lastly, 54% of students needed to improve their attendance during the regular school day, and all of those students made improvements.

## The Challenge

Despite 87% of Alabama parents supporting public funding for afterschool programs and 80% of voters nationally wanting federal, state, and local leaders to provide more funding for afterschool programs, too many young people are missing out. Nearly 25 million children are not in an afterschool program but want to be, including more than 335,000 children in Alabama. Greater investment in afterschool and summer programs is needed to make sure that all young people have the same opportunities as the youth in Gadsden City Schools 21<sup>st</sup> Century Afterschool Program.

### Willany’s Tips

To better serve youth:

- ▶ Make more activities and opportunities available, including opportunities for students to explore and try new things!
- ▶ Expand size and number of local afterschool programs, so more spaces are available for students who want to join