



NEWS RELEASE

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CONTACT: [Lisa Lederer](#)

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Afterschool Alliance Joins U.S. Department of Education in Launching ‘Engage Every Student Initiative,’ Historic Federal Commitment to Giving Every Student Access to High-Quality Out-of-School-Time Learning

Washington, D.C. – The U.S. Department of Education is today announcing the [Engage Every Student Initiative](#), a bold new call to action to utilize American Rescue Plan funds, as well as other state and local monies, to ensure that every child who needs access to a high-quality out-of-school-time (OST) program has one. The [Afterschool Alliance](#) is one of five coordinating organizations in this historic new public-private partnership, along with the School Superintendents Association (AASA), National League of Cities, National Summer Learning Association, and National Comprehensive Center. The *Engage Every Student Initiative* will work with more than 20 allied organizations to ensure the country does everything possible to provide all students access to these critical learning and development opportunities. The Department of Education launched the new initiative during [National Summer Learning Week](#).

“Quality out-of-school-time programs have always supported students’ academic, social, and emotional growth, but as we recover from the pandemic, these opportunities have never mattered more,” said U.S. Secretary of Education Miguel Cardona. “We need bold action, especially for low-income students and students of color who have historically struggled to access quality afterschool programs and rich summer learning experiences. This new partnership cements the Department of Education’s commitment to ensuring that all students have access to meaningful, enriching out-of-school programming, not just some of the day, but all day, all year round.”

“By helping ensure that every child can access quality afterschool and summer learning programs, the *Engage Every Student Initiative* will provide tremendous benefits, not just for students and families but also for our workforce, our economy, and our country. The afterschool community thanks Secretary Cardona for his visionary leadership,” said Afterschool Alliance Executive Director Jodi Grant. “It is especially important now, as children and youth face academic, social, and mental health challenges created by the pandemic. Afterschool and summer programs offer myriad benefits. Investing in them will strengthen our country now and for years to come.”

The Afterschool Alliance’s [America After 3PM study](#), which has tracked afterschool and summer learning program participation since 2004, finds an urgent need for the *Engage Every Student Initiative*. Even before the pandemic, the study finds, [the families of 24.6 million children](#) were unable to access an afterschool program, with low-income, Black and Latinx families most likely to be left behind. In fact, for every student in an afterschool program, three more were waiting to get in. The most recent study also found that nearly 14 million children whose parents wanted to enroll them were not in summer

programs in 2019. The household survey of more than 31,000 U.S. parents of school-age children was conducted by Edge Research for the Afterschool Alliance.

The *Engage Every Student Initiative* launch included a welcome from U.S. Secretary of Education Miguel Cardona, recorded remarks from U.S. Secretary of Labor Marty Walsh and panels featuring educational leaders from partner organizations. They included, from the Afterschool Alliance, Afterschool Ambassadors Angela Henry from Kansas and Suzette Harvey from Florida, as well as Youth Ambassadors Noah Shaw from the Miller Family Boys & Girls Club in Utah and Angeles Mejia from the HANDY program in Florida. In addition, state-level afterschool allies, including Laveta Wills-Hale from the Arkansas Out of School Network and Eric Billiet from the Minnesota Department of Education, spoke. Students from high schools and colleges across the country attended the event, which concluded with remarks from U.S. Deputy Secretary of Education Cindy Marten.

Today's announcement builds on the more than two decades of work to build and grow 21st Century Community Learning Centers, the chief federal funding stream for afterschool and summer learning programs. The American Rescue Plan provided historic resources to expand access to OST programs, which support student learning and have lasting, positive impacts on children and youth.

"Afterschool and summer learning programs offer critically important opportunities for students to learn life skills, engage with their peers, and build relationships with caring adults and mentors in addition to the academic support they are providing at this time when many students have experienced learning loss," Grant added. "But too many young people are missing out, and there are disturbing trends in terms of which students have access to afterschool programs. We are incredibly hopeful that the *Engage Every Student Initiative* will make it possible for all students to participate in afterschool programs, which help them build the resilience, hope, and connectedness they need to succeed in school and in life."

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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.