NEWS RELEASE
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San Antonio Seventh Grader Wins National Art Contest

Folks Middle School’s Lydia Ireland Designed This Year’s
Lights On Afterschool Poster

Seventh grader Lydia Ireland's winning design for this year's Lights On Afterschool poster features a ballet slipper, a chess piece, a computer mouse, a football and more radiating from a glowing lightbulb to symbolize the many passions students develop at their afterschool programs. Ireland drew on her experience in her school’s art, gardening and music afterschool clubs to create the drawing, which is being printed on 50,000 posters and will be seen by more than a million people at Lights On Afterschool events across the country on and around October 26th.

Organized by the Afterschool Alliance, Lights On Afterschool is the only national rally for afterschool. Each year Lights On Afterschool events underscore the need to invest in afterschool programs, which provide fun, hands-on learning opportunities and offerings that can include homework help; mentors, healthy snacks and meals; computer programming; robotics; art, dance and music; job and college readiness; sports and fitness activities; opportunities to think critically, collaborate, and communicate with peers and adults; and more.
Some 8,000 of Lights On Afterschool events are expected to take place across the country this October, including science fairs, student performances, academic contests, art shows, community service activities, fun runs, visits from lawmakers, and more. Events will be held at schools, 4-Hs, Boys & Girls Clubs, YMCAs, parks, museums, community centers, and other places.

“For my Lights On Afterschool artwork, I wanted to try to capture all of the things available to kids to be a part of once the regular school day ends,” Ireland said. Having discovered her passion for art when she was very young, Ireland helped restart her school’s afterschool art program last year after a few years of inactivity. She serves as a student leader in the program, and has helped spread the word to other students and design the club’s t-shirts. Today, about 60 students take part in the club.

“What I love most about my school's afterschool art program is getting to work on big projects that I couldn't do by myself, and getting to collaborate with other kids who share my interest in art to make something big,” Ireland continued. “All students should have the opportunity to pursue their passions after school, and I wanted to spread that message with my Lights On Afterschool poster design.”

“We are incredibly proud of Lydia’s accomplishment and her drive to spread the word about the power of afterschool programs,” said Jennifer Recio, Folks Middle School art teacher and afterschool art club director. “Our school’s afterschool art program provides a safe place for students who might not be comfortable diving into an art class during the school day to express themselves. That’s especially important amidst the isolation the pandemic has caused. Our whole school community is thrilled that Lydia’s powerful representation of the importance of keeping the lights on after school will be shared with people across the country.”

“Lydia’s drawing is a fantastic illustration of the diverse skills, talents and passions afterschool programs across the country ignite in students each day, which thousands of Lights On Afterschool events will showcase this October,” said Afterschool Alliance Executive Director Jodi Grant. “Afterschool programs keep students safe, inspire them to learn, and give parents peace of mind that their children are safe and learning after the school day ends but before the typical workday ends. Sadly, unmet demand for afterschool programs is at an all-time high. It’s more important than ever to shine a light on the need to invest in afterschool, and the vital role these programs play for students, families and communities.”

Some 24.7 million U.S. children not in an afterschool program would be enrolled, if a program were available to them, according to a survey of nearly 1,500 parents commissioned by the Afterschool Alliance and conducted by Edge Research in May and June of 2022. That is the highest number ever recorded. Unmet demand for afterschool programs is significantly higher among Latino and Black children (at 60% and 54% respectively) than among children overall.
(49%). Cost is the top barrier to enroll, cited by 57% of parents as a reason for not enrolling their child. Ninety percent of parents rate the quality of the program their child attends as excellent (51%) or very good (39%).

Capital One and Clear Channel Outdoor are generous sponsors of *Lights On Afterschool* this year.

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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)._