

To: Secretary of Education
From: Afterschool STEM Hub
Re: Supplemental Priority and Definitions on Meaningful Learning Opportunities [Docket ID ED-2025-OS-0680]
Date: October 27, 2025



Dear Secretary McMahon,

We are grateful for the opportunity to provide input on the Department of Education's Proposed Priority on Meaningful Learning Opportunities. The [Afterschool STEM Hub](#), a coalition of afterschool program leaders, researchers, and STEM education advocates, stands ready to work with you to ensure all our young people have access to meaningful learning opportunities. It is especially pertinent to ensure all youth have access to high-quality STEM (science, technology, engineering, and math) learning experiences so that they are prepared for employment, enrollment, enlistment, or entrepreneurship, and so that they are STEM-literate, engaged citizens. Given that 80 percent of young people's waking hours are spent outside the classroom, afterschool, summer, and other out-of-school time (OST) STEM learning environments (such as libraries, science centers, community-based organizations, amongst others) are crucial partners in providing meaningful learning opportunities that resonate with youth.

STEM learning in afterschool is widespread: nearly 95% of federally funded afterschool programs offer STEM engagement, and almost [75% of parents](#) say the STEM opportunities offered were important when they chose their child's afterschool program. There is substantive research showing the benefits of afterschool STEM programs. An [11-state research study](#) showed that among nearly 1,600 youth in 158 afterschool programs, more than 70% of students reported positive gains in their attitude towards STEM, their personal STEM identity, STEM career knowledge, and 21st-century skills, including perseverance and critical thinking. More specifically, [research demonstrates](#) that participation in a year-long, weekly math-focused afterschool program can improve youth feelings of connectedness with math, especially when grounded in real-world contexts, and that attending programs on a college campus with undergraduate student mentors helps youth envision postsecondary math possibilities for themselves.

Afterschool programs are already bridging the gap between what is learned during the school day and workforce opportunities by offering age-appropriate, community-centered, and learner-driven hands-on STEM experiences. They help to make STEM learning more meaningful and relevant to young people's lives by making connections to real-world applications, thus showing young people the utility and purpose in engaging with STEM. The flexible design of afterschool programs allows for more [differentiated instruction](#) and provides opportunities for youth to engage with mentors who can support their growth in core subject areas while making career connections. Moreover, many schools contract with afterschool program providers so they can provide afterschool programming on-site after the school day hours, making programming more accessible for students and supporting working families.

To achieve the shared vision of enhancing meaningful learning opportunities, we recommend the following:

1. **Include afterschool, summer, and other out-of-school time learning programs as eligible applicants for grant competitions.**

Add: (a)(i)(8) Developing and implementing strategies that provide opportunities for students to participate in hands-on, engaging math activities as part of quality afterschool and summer learning programs.

Modify: (a)(vi) Planning or implementing a new school day schedule to allow more opportunities for meaningful learning, *including expanding access to quality afterschool programs by partnering with community-based organizations.*

2. **Ensure afterschool educators, including those who do not work directly in school-day classrooms, are eligible applicants for professional development opportunities and have access to high-quality instructional materials.**

Modify: (a)(i)(6) Offering high-quality professional development based on strong, moderate, or promising evidence in mathematics for educators *both in schools and who work in afterschool, summer, and other out-of-school time learning programs.*

Modify: (a)(ii) Providing or expanding access to high-quality instructional materials in one or more of the following subjects, *for educators both in schools and who work in afterschool, summer, and other out-of-school time learning programs.*

Modify: (a)(iii) Providing or expanding access to training on implementing high-quality instructional materials in one or more of the following subjects, *for educators both in schools and who work in afterschool, summer, and other out-of-school time learning programs.*

3. **Encourage schools to partner with afterschool STEM programs and expand STEM opportunities in schools receiving 21st Century Community Learning Centers grants.**

Modify: (b)(iv) Implementing, expanding, or scaling high-impact tutoring programs that occur during the regular school day *and during afterschool programs*, are aligned with practices based on strong, moderate, or promising evidence (as defined in [34 CFR 77.1](#)) to accelerate student learning in literacy and mathematics, which may include innovative delivery models or approaches, such as outcomes-based contracting, artificial intelligence (AI), technology-enabled platforms, or strategic partnerships and staffing.

Modify: (c)(ii) Integrating career-connected and work-based learning into K-12 education, including approaches to help all students connect core academic instruction with real-world career skills and foster career awareness, exploration, and advising throughout their education journey, *including through leveraging afterschool and summer learning program opportunities.*

4. **Expand parent and family engagement opportunities.**

Add: (e)(i) *Expand programs that engage and equip parents through workshops on financial literacy, health and wellness, university navigation, and STEM pathways, helping prepare students for high-wage, high-growth careers in STEM fields.*

The afterschool field offers able partners in the push to support the country's ambition to expand meaningful learning opportunities. The Afterschool STEM Hub and our array of national, state, and local partners stand ready to work with you in the development and implementation of this important plan. You can email us at stemhub@afterschoolalliance.org.

Respectfully,

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