AFTERSCHOOL STEM HUB

August 20, 2025

To: Secretary of Education
From: Afterschool STEM Hub
Re: Supplemental Priority on Advancing Artificial Intelligence in Education [Docket ID ED-2025-OS-0118]

We are grateful for the opportunity to provide input on the Department of Education's Proposed Priority on Advancing Artificial Intelligence (AI) in Education. The Afterschool STEM Hub, a coalition of afterschool program leaders, researchers, and STEM education advocates, stands ready to work with you to catalyze and support the increased use of AI in education settings and build AI proficiency among our youth. 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 shaping how young people understand and engage with AI and other emerging technologies.

As AI rapidly becomes a powerful tool harnessed in both professional and personal settings, we risk creating a bigger divide between populations that understand how to utilize it well and those who are unaware. Nurturing and preparing both adults and young people to become AI-literate and proficient is critical for them to participate in an AI-reliant workforce and contribute to its future development responsibly and ethically. We, therefore, applaud the Department of Education for advancing the goal of ensuring all our youth and educators have opportunities to learn about and engage with AI.

STEM learning in afterschool is widespread, with nearly 95% of federally funded afterschool programs offering STEM learning opportunities, and almost 75% of parents stating that 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. A more recent research study demonstrated that youth who participate in afterschool science clubs have higher science identities.

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. Many programs are engaging young people in AI, including real-world applications, through a variety of partnerships, as demonstrated by programs such as STEMarts Lab in New Mexico, the Boys and Girls Clubs of Western Pennsylvania, and Technovation, a national program.

To achieve the shared vision of an AI-literate and proficient citizenry and workforce, we recommend that you include the following within the Priority on Advancing Artificial Intelligence in Education:

1. **Include afterschool, summer, and OST learning programs - or intermediaries that support their infrastructure and capacity in communities - as eligible applicants for grant competitions.**

2. **Ensure afterschool educators, including those who do not work directly in school-day classrooms, are eligible applicants for AI professional development opportunities and access to AI tools in educational settings.**

3. **When building the evidence for appropriate methods of integrating AI into education, consider innovative ideas that streamline and enhance coordination and communication between school-day teachers and afterschool educators.**
   AI could be a powerful tool to improve communications between school-day teachers, afterschool programs, and families, not only alleviating the administrative burden on educators, but also to better support individual student learning needs.

4. **Incentivize effective models for industry collaborations with afterschool and other OST programs.**
   Invest in developing public-private partnerships so both schools and afterschool programs can access cutting-edge AI tools and technologies, as well as mentorship opportunities with industry insiders. These partnerships can also include paid summer internships and apprenticeship programs for high school youth to experience firsthand how AI is being used in industry while providing insights into potential career pathways.

5. **Invest in a robust infrastructure of evidence-based methods to preserve the safety, data privacy, and trust of our youth.**
   Our educational systems and youth-serving organizations must have easy access to reputable best practices on protecting students when they engage in AI learning and when educators use AI to increase efficiency in learning spaces. Increasing educator awareness of necessary safeguards will be an essential part of the plan to advance AI in education, and priority should be given to ideas that incorporate youth perspectives and insights in the development and implementation of safeguarding procedures.

6. **Capitalize on opportunities to expand AI literacy across communities by leveraging the assets of OST programs.**
   Support AI literacy initiatives that connect families to AI concepts and responsible use practices, leveraging OST programs' unique position to engage caregivers and community members in co-learning experiences. This approach not only builds AI understanding among youth but also fosters intergenerational digital literacy, strengthens public trust in emerging technologies, and expands the pipeline of AI-ready learners who are prepared to contribute to the nation's innovation economy and participate in informed civic decision-making.

By providing ongoing support to keep pace with innovation, and tapping into all the learning spaces young people engage in, we can work towards ensuring all our nation's young people understand what AI is, feel competent and confident to use AI responsibly, are prepared to contribute to our nation's shifting workforce needs, and know when and how to leverage AI to solve local challenges they care about.

The afterschool field offers able partners in the push to support the country's ambition to lead the AI revolution. 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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