Afterschool STEM is Key to STEM Workforce Readiness

According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, STEM occupations are projected to grow by more than 10% by 2032, and 20% of all jobs will require a high level of knowledge in a STEM field. Every community also increasingly needs STEM-literate citizens who can engage with and help solve critical issues that impact our society. Afterschool programs are essential partners in STEM education, offering engaging STEM enrichment experiences that support and enhance what is learned during the school day. Research shows that high-quality, expanded STEM learning opportunities can improve academic outcomes, increase college and career readiness, and foster positive youth development. STEM engagement is widespread in afterschool programs now, with 77% of parents saying afterschool programs help children gain interest and skills related to science, technology, engineering, math, and computer science.* With students spending more than 80% of their waking hours outside of school, afterschool programs are recognized as crucial partners in STEM education. We must ensure these programs are sustainably supported and that every young person has access to high-quality programming.

1. **Sustain historical federal investments in afterschool STEM.** Continue to invest in existing STEM education programs at NSF, NASA, NOAA, and other mission-based federal agencies. Their education programs make STEM come alive for young people, inspiring many to pursue STEM degrees and careers. In addition to these vital programs, continue to fully fund the Department of Education's 21st Century Community Learning Centers (21st CCLC; Title IVB of ESSA) and Student Support and Academic Enrichment (Title IV-A of ESSA) grant programs. Nearly 1.4 million youth rely on 21st CCLC, of which 94% offer enriching STEM learning; and Title IV-A ensures schools and afterschool programs have adequate resources for hands-on STEM learning.

2. **Support new investments in afterschool STEM.** In addition to sustaining these existing investments, it is imperative that new investments, such as those supporting AI education, are inclusive of afterschool educators and afterschool programs. The Fusion Workforce Act (H.R. 4999) is a model example of bipartisan legislation inclusive of afterschool.

3. **Celebrate & build awareness around National STEM Day.** November 8th is National STEM Day, which acknowledges the importance of the STEM education ecosystem in developing the workforce of the U.S., nurturing a STEM-literate society, and utilizing STEM to improve people's lives. Please consider co-sponsoring a revised National STEM Day Resolution that reaffirms our responsibility to ensure that all students have access to high-quality STEM education and urges transdisciplinary collaboration across federal agencies to sustain investments in STEM education. If you are interested in this, please email us at stemhub@afterschoolalliance.org, and we can share draft language that was developed through a collaborative process with various organizations working to advance STEM education.

4. **Participate in Lights On Afterschool.** Thousands of events are expected to take place to celebrate the achievements and outcomes of afterschool programs throughout the month of October. We encourage you to attend a local event this month or at another time to see firsthand the impact of afterschool STEM programs on youth and communities. You can see events happening in your district at https://www.afterschoolalliance.org/loaFindEvent.cfm.

Visit afterschoolstemhub.org to learn more

* Afterschool Alliance (2025). America After 3PM - Lost Opportunity: Afterschool in Demand, But Out of Reach for Many. https://afterschoolalliance.org/documents/AA3PM-2025/AA3PM-Lost-Opportunity-Afterschool-in-Demand-But-Out-of-Reach-for-Many-Full-Report-2025.pdf