



Additional Policy Issues and Optional Asks: *Afterschool for All Challenge 2026*

While there are several primary requests of Congress to be made at Hill meetings during the 2026 *Afterschool for All Challenge* (funding for 21st CCLC, funding for CCDBG, and *Lights On Afterschool*), additional policy issues may arise during your meetings. In some cases, staff or members of Congress may bring these up; in other cases, you may wish to raise these issues if they are particularly relevant to programs in your state or to your state policy efforts. See the House and Senate Afterschool Activity tables for lists of members engaged in each of the following Congressional activities.

Afterschool Caucus

The House and Senate Afterschool Caucuses were established in 2005 and work to build support for afterschool and summer programs and increase resources for quality afterschool and summer care. Senators Lisa Murkowski (R-Alaska) and Tina Smith (D-Minn.) serve as co-chairs of the Senate Afterschool Caucus for the 119th Congress. The House Afterschool Caucus is in a leadership transition. You can thank members of the Caucus for their support.

STEM and Afterschool

Thank you for securing STEM education in FY26 Appropriations!

Thank you for passing the FY26 Commerce, Justice, Science, and Related Agencies Appropriations (H.R. 6938). The bill secures funding for STEM education programs, many of which support afterschool, across various federal agencies. Thank you for ensuring young people across our nation continue to have exciting experiences that inspire them in STEM. This will certainly pay dividends for our future STEM workforce needs while ensuring we have a STEM-literate society.

Build awareness around the *Supporting Afterschool STEM Educators Act*.

As the importance of STEM in society and the workforce continues to grow, attention to afterschool STEM educator recruitment, preparation, and retention must be prioritized to ensure that all youth have access to consistently high-quality programs. We anticipate that the *Supporting Afterschool STEM Educators Act* will be introduced during the week of March 9. The bill will provide the infrastructure and framework necessary to comprehensively support the professional development needs of afterschool STEM educators. Interested offices can reach out to Sen. Jeanne Shaheen (D-NH), the bill's sponsor, to learn more.

Child Care and Development Block Grant Reauthorization

U.S. Senators Deb Fischer (R-Neb.), Kirsten Gillibrand (D-N.Y.), Susan Collins (R-Maine), and John Hickenlooper (D-Colo.) introduced the **Child Care Modernization Act (S. 2828)** last fall to reauthorize and improve the Child Care and Development Block Grant (CCDBG) to help provide quality, affordable child care for America's working families. The bill would:

- Strengthen child care services by moving states to use cost estimation models for setting provider rates, which will adequately compensate child care providers.

- Ensure parental choice by allowing states to develop a mixed delivery system of child care and preschool for children up to age 5, as well as before-school, after-school, and summer care for school-age children.
- Increase child care supply by introducing a new grant program within the CCDBG framework to assist providers in creating and expanding the supply.
- Improve state child care plans by strengthening support for families and communities, reducing program barriers, and increasing access and affordability to serve more families.
- Assist in-home and rural child care providers by providing technical assistance, including strategies to support best business practices, and the development and use of shared services initiatives such as family child care home provider networks.
- Reduce duplicative regulatory burdens on child care providers by ensuring states review their state and local health and safety requirements to identify redundancies and oversights.

Safety and Prevention

AFTER SCHOOL Act: Senators Marsha Blackburn (R-Tenn.) and Catherine Cortez Masto (D-Nevada) reintroduced the bipartisan *Advancing Frequent and Tailored Education to Rebuild Safe Communities and Help Orchestrate Opportunities and Learning (AFTER SCHOOL) Act* (text for [S. 1571](#)) in May 2025. The AFTER SCHOOL Act would establish a new, \$15 million, non-competitive formula grant program through the Department of Justice to help schools and nonprofit organizations establish, maintain, and strengthen afterschool programs. School districts and nonprofits in counties with a juvenile offense rate above 10% would be eligible to receive funds through this non-competitive grant.

Youth Workforce Development

The Youth Workforce Readiness Act, H.R. 2910, is bipartisan legislation led by Reps. Josh Harder (D-Calif.) and Brian Fitzpatrick (R-Pa.) that would:

- Create a federal grant program to support investments and partnerships that will build knowledge, skills development, and learning experiences that prepare young people for the 21st-century workforce and boost their economic potential over a lifetime.
- Establish a competitive grant through the Department of Labor’s Employment & Training Administration for eligible national, youth-serving, out-of-school time organizations providing programs for youth between the ages of 6 and 18.

Programs will focus on **four overarching pillars** that support youth workforce readiness, including:

- **Essential skill development:** Supporting social-emotional development through every developmental stage in both formal and informal learning experiences.
- **Career exposure:** Targeted programming through community business partnerships providing discovery opportunities, career assessments, planning, and insights into both traditional and non-traditional career fields.
- **Employability & Certification:** Opportunities such as interviewing, resume writing, financial literacy, and certifications that help youth land their first job.

- **Work-Based Learning:** Hands-on opportunities to apply skills in real-life work experiences through local community business partnerships.

Also, the legislation re-establishes youth councils to work with local workforce boards, providing expertise in youth policy. These investments will help increase opportunities for youth to build knowledge and skills and connect to critical real-life work experiences and learning opportunities.

Why investments in youth workforce readiness are important:

- Communities across America face significant challenges in ensuring that youth are adequately prepared to enter the workforce.
- As we look for solutions to address the skills gap, we must examine how we prepare youth for the jobs of the future.
- 41% of youth express concerns about whether they have the skills necessary to secure a job. At the same time, employers increasingly cite challenges in finding well-prepared talent as their greatest obstacle to growth.
- Traditionally, workforce development programs have targeted adults and high school students. New research has identified middle school, a critical window of cognitive development, as an ideal time to develop the essential skills youth need for success in school, work, and life.
- National out-of-school time organizations have the reach, scale, and experience to prepare today's youth for success in tomorrow's workforce by teaching essential skills like judgment and decision-making, communication, and collaboration, all of which employers named as in-demand competencies in the labor market.

Public-Private Partnerships

AmeriCorps is the federal agency that helps millions of Americans improve the lives of their fellow citizens through service. Nonprofit and faith-based groups are supported through AmeriCorps, AmeriCorps VISTA, Senior Corps, the Volunteer Generation Fund, and more. AmeriCorps and AmeriCorps VISTA members are a key support for thousands of afterschool and summer learning programs nationwide, working through direct service and capacity-building to promote afterschool STEM, increase nutrition and physical activity in schools, support academic enrichment, and manage volunteer programs. Funding for AmeriCorps was targeted for elimination by the Administration last year; however, it was kept at last year's level for FY2026. Maintaining or increasing AmeriCorps funding allows the agency to leverage more than \$1 billion in outside funds and to continue supporting AmeriCorps volunteers in communities nationwide.

Afterschool ACCESS Act: On January 15, the bipartisan *Afterschool Access Through Charitable Contributions for Enrichment and Student Support (ACCESS) Act* (Afterschool ACCESS Act) was introduced by Reps. Sharice Davids (D-Kansas) and Ryan Mackenzie (R-Pa.) with a goal of increasing access to afterschool and summer programs by incentivizing public-private partnerships. In introducing the legislation (HR 7093), the bill sponsors emphasized the role of afterschool programs in providing safe, engaging spaces for young people to learn, grow, and build critical life skills for the future. The legislation leverages the 21st Century Community Learning Centers initiative, the only federal funding stream that exclusively supports afterschool and summer programs, by encouraging the use of public-

private partnerships. The *Afterschool ACCESS Act* seeks to alleviate the costs that prevent the operation and participation in afterschool programs through incentivizing public-private partnerships to fill in funding gaps and free up resources. Under the Internal Revenue Code, a charitable contribution of less than an entire interest in property (both real and personal) does not qualify as a charitable deduction. The *Afterschool ACCESS Act* would amend this section to allow charitable deductions for the part-time provision of real property and transportation for the purposes of operating an afterschool program. This incentive could create more program locations and safer transportation for youth at no cost.

Child Nutrition

The Early Childhood Nutrition Improvement Act of 2025 ([H.R. 2818](#) / [S. 1447](#)) is a bipartisan bill sponsored in the House by Reps. Suzanne Bonamici (D-Oregon) and Ryan Mackenzie (R-Pa.) and in the Senate by Sens. Richard Blumenthal (D-Conn.) and Tina Smith (D-Minn.). It includes multiple approaches to strengthen the Child and Adult Care Feeding Program (CACFP), including provisions that could improve afterschool meals. This would add another meal to be reimbursed in CACFP for providers who are open for more than eight hours (up to three meals and one snack); change the payment policy so that family child care programs and child care centers using CACFP are reimbursed using the same formula based on "food away from home"; and simplify for-profit child care centers' eligibility reporting. It calls on the Secretary of USDA to review the CACFP Serious Deficiency process to streamline and modernize the program, reduce paperwork, and improve the process of correcting incidents of noncompliance. It would also establish an Advisory Committee on CACFP paperwork reduction.