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## **GAO's Afterschool Report Highlights Broad Range of Benefits from Afterschool Programs, Points to Need to Revisit Evaluation and Data Collection**

### ***Statement of Jodi Grant, Executive Director, Afterschool Alliance***

“We are pleased to see that the GAO report on 21<sup>st</sup> Century Community Learning Centers (21<sup>st</sup> CCLC), released today, confirms that participation in afterschool programs improves student behavior and school attendance, which are key building blocks of long-term student success. It makes clear something afterschool providers have long known: that the full range of benefits from afterschool, including progress on test scores, is more evident among students who attend their afterschool programs for more than 60 days than those who do not. The report also confirms that 21<sup>st</sup> CCLC grants play an essential role in helping afterschool programs leverage much-needed support from a range of community partners.

Afterschool providers are dedicated to continuously improving their programs because they want to do even more to address the myriad needs of the low-income and at-risk students they serve. Their dedication is evidenced by their widespread adoption of quality standards and improvement tools, and [the array of program evaluations](#) they have supported. These evaluations clearly demonstrate the effectiveness of afterschool programs. In fact, had the GAO selected a larger body of research on which to base its conclusions, including a [wider array of state 21<sup>st</sup> CCLC evaluations](#) and other large studies of afterschool, its conclusions about program effectiveness would have been much stronger.

The afterschool community wholeheartedly agrees that the U.S. Department of Education (Ed) is long overdue for an update to its 21<sup>st</sup> CCLC objectives and for ensuring the performance measures and data collection system it uses reflect those objectives, including by evaluating classroom behavior, school day attendance and engagement among afterschool students. The GAO report suggests that the years-long delay in reauthorizing 21<sup>st</sup> CCLC played a role in delaying the effort to update those measures. It's clear that improving the alignment between 21<sup>st</sup> CCLC program objectives and performance measures will help afterschool programs more effectively demonstrate their role in supporting student success.

We agree, as well, that the technical assistance Ed provides to grantees should be updated and expanded. That is why, in the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), the afterschool community pressed hard – and successfully – to increase support for professional development and training provided to programs and to expand the performance measures included in 21<sup>st</sup> CCLC. With strong leadership from Ed, ESSA can bring improvements to professional development, data collection and program evaluation as early as the school year that begins this fall. We stand ready to work with the Department to make that happen.

This [new report](#) underscores the need to continue the federal investment in quality afterschool programs, which keep kids safe, inspire them to learn and help working families. The Trump administration should abandon its indefensible proposal to defund 21<sup>st</sup> CCLC – which would take afterschool and summer learning programs away from 1.6 million kids, devastating low-income families and communities – and instead implement the GAO’s recommendations.”

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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).*