



NEWS RELEASE
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Walla Walla High School Students Shared Views on Afterschool Programs with Officials in Washington, D.C.

Washington, D.C. – Walla Walla High School senior Ruben Balderas and sophomore Kyle Caver, who attend the FORWARD Afterschool Program, spent part of this week meeting with U.S. Senators and Representatives and their aides to discuss the importance of investing in afterschool and summer learning programs for youth. Ruben and Kyle came to Washington, D.C. for the annual Afterschool for All Challenge, organized by the [Afterschool Alliance](#).

On Thursday, Ruben and Kyle shared their experiences and perspectives on afterschool programs with Reps. Cathy McMorris-Rogers, Pramila Jayapal, Suzan DelBene and Jamie Herrera-Butler and Sens Patty Murray and Maria Cantwell, emphasizing the ways afterschool programs, specifically the FORWARD Program has broadened their horizons in the six years they've attended.

Ruben Balderas is one of five Youth Afterschool Ambassadors from four states: Missouri, Oklahoma, Washington, Wisconsin. He designed a virtual afterschool space which showcases the value of afterschool programs in an interactive environment; you can view his project at bit.ly/tourafterschool. Ruben shared it with Members of Congress and their staff at an Afterschool Expo on Capitol Hill on Wednesday. Both Ruben and Kyle were accompanied to D.C. and mentored during this school year by Brent Cummings, the 21st CCLC Program Director for Walla Walla Public Schools and an alumnus of the Afterschool Alliance's long-running Afterschool Ambassador program, geared toward afterschool providers.

“I was very nervous at first because we were talking to some of the most important decision makers in our country,” said Reuben. “Fortunately, I was able to calm down once I started telling them about my experience in afterschool programs. They seemed interested in what I was saying and presenting. Hopefully, they will listen to us students and support the programs that matter the most to us,” Ruben reflected after the Challenge

The Afterschool for All Challenge is an annual event that brings together afterschool program providers and experts, along with students, like Ruben and Kyle, to showcase some of the innovative and hands-on learning activities afterschool programs provide.

This year afterschool providers and educators from all 50 states visited Washington, D.C. to meet with their elected officials. President Trump is proposing to eliminate federal funding for afterschool programs in 2019, a decision that would eliminate afterschool programs for 1.7 million youth, including the 21st Century Community Learning Center funded program that Ruben and Kyle attend.

The [America After 3PM](#) household survey of more than 30,000 families, commissioned by the Afterschool Alliance, found that participation in afterschool programs has increased to 10.2 million students nationwide, up from 6.5 million in 2004. But the unmet demand for afterschool programs has increased as well. Today, for every child in an afterschool program, there are two more whose parents say they would participate if a program were available. Unmet demand is especially high in rural communities and communities of concentrated poverty. One in five students in the United States today is unsupervised after the school day ends.

A large and growing body of evidence demonstrates improvements in attendance, behavior, academic achievement and more among children in afterschool programs. Researchers have also found that afterschool programs encourage increased parental involvement – an important building block for student success.

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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.