



NEWS RELEASE
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**With American Children Lagging Badly in Math & Science,
Nation's Top Afterschool & Summer Learning Leaders
Pledge to Make 2011 'The Year of Science'**

*Afterschool Alliance, National AfterSchool Association,
National Summer Learning Association Join Forces to Promote STEM*

Washington, DC – The Afterschool Alliance, National AfterSchool Association and National Summer Learning Association today announced an unprecedented collaboration aimed at promoting science, technology, engineering and math (STEM) learning during out-of-school hours. The collaboration will include educating afterschool providers and summer practitioners about the importance of teaching STEM, showcasing ways that afterschool and summer learning programs can help excite students about STEM opportunities, advocating for greater public and private investment in STEM, and more. The goal is to make 2011 The Year of Science in Afterschool.

“Today’s students will work in an economy and live in a world in which science, technology, engineering and math learning is crucial,” said Afterschool Alliance Executive Director Jodi Grant. “It’s absolutely vital to their success that their primary and secondary education excites students about STEM and gives them a solid grounding for advanced learning and subsequent careers in STEM fields. Because they offer hands-on, experiential learning opportunities, mentoring and career development, afterschool and summer learning programs are uniquely positioned to help educate the next generation of scientists, mathematicians and engineers.”

“American students trail children of other nations in math and science,” said Dr. Paul Young, President & CEO of the National AfterSchool Association. “That’s both a disservice to them and a threat to our nation’s future as an economic power and even a viable, vibrant economy. The key to turning that around is to engage kids and get them excited about science, technology, engineering and math. That’s a task uniquely suited to afterschool and summer learning programs because they don’t have to teach to the test, but instead have the time and space for the kinds of hands-on learning that engages students.”

With generous support from the Noyce Foundation, the three organizations plan to rally their tens of thousands of partners at the national, state and local levels in a series of measures to improve and expand STEM education. They plan to:

- Build support for partnerships between schools and community-based organizations to bring more STEM opportunities to students in afterschool and summer learning programs;
- Showcase the ways afterschool and summer learning programs can help engage and excite children and youth about STEM topics and careers;
- Increase awareness within the afterschool and summer learning communities about opportunities for quality STEM learning in these spaces;
- Educate afterschool and summer practitioners and provide pathways to professional development to help deliver high-quality STEM programming;
- Increase national, state and local media coverage of STEM learning outside the traditional school day;
- Educate national, state and local policy makers about best practices in STEM learning outside the school day;
- Advocate for greater public and private investment in STEM; and
- Highlight the urgency of providing our children with a strong background in STEM.

Often working in concert with community partners, summer learning and afterschool programs introduce children and youth to everything from vegetable gardens to alternative energy sources to robotics, and they usually do it in a hands-on way that complements the school-year curriculum – their sleeves rolled up and digging right in,” said Ron Fairchild, chief executive officer of the National Summer Learning Association. “Not only do those experiences help children learn about STEM disciplines in an experiential way, they also introduce students to men and women who have made STEM their careers. That gives children the license to imagine themselves pursuing STEM, and that’s the spark we need to be competitive in the 21st century.”

In important ways, American students are underachieving in STEM subjects. In recent international research by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, U.S. students placed far down in an international ranking of student achievement, ranking 25th in math and 21st in science. According to the ACT’s 2007 College Readiness Report, 43 percent of graduating high school seniors are ready for college mathematics, and just 27 percent are ready for college science.

Afterschool and summer learning programs are already working to address these deficiencies. About 90 percent of afterschool programs report that they offer some sort of hands-on science programs, for example. And program evaluations show that participating students develop positive attitudes toward science, as well as greater awareness of STEM careers. Many go on to pursue STEM topics in high school and beyond. Research has also demonstrated that the development of an interest in science by the 8th grade is an excellent indicator of a student’s eventual pursuit of a college degree in science – an even better indicator, for example, than high math grades.

All three partner organizations in the new project are planning a strong focus on STEM learning at their respective national conferences. NSLA’s Summer Changes Everything™ conference

this month featured a STEM-focused general session with astronaut Leland Melvin, NASA's associate administrator for education, and six STEM-specific workshop sessions. NAA recently announced that Bill Nye, the Science Guy will headline its 2011 Annual Convention, and the Afterschool Alliance will feature STEM in afterschool as a major focus of its 2011 Afterschool for All Challenge in Washington, DC.

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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.

The National AfterSchool Association is the leading voice of the afterschool profession dedicated to development, education, and care of children and youth during their out of school hours. Information about this membership organization is available at www.naaweb.org

The mission of the National Summer Learning Association is to connect and equip schools and community organizations to deliver quality summer learning programs to our nation's youth to help close the achievement gap. The organization serves as a network hub for thousands of summer learning program providers and stakeholders across the country, providing tools, resources, and expertise to improve program quality, generate support, and increase youth access and participation. For more information, visit <http://www.summerlearning.org>.