



## **Afterschool Ambassador Program: Legacy of Leadership**

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### **Pryor's Willeto Selected as One of Just 15 'Afterschool Ambassadors' in Country This Year**

*Veronica Willeto Will Work in Montana, Nationally to Increase Students' Access to Afterschool*

Washington, DC – The Afterschool Alliance announced today that Veronica Willeto, Site Coordinator of the Pryor Public School 21<sup>st</sup> Century Program, has been selected to serve as a 2017-2018 Afterschool Ambassador. She is one of just 15 leaders from across the nation chosen for the honor this year. Each Afterschool Ambassador will continue directing or supporting a local afterschool program while also serving a one-year Afterschool Ambassador term, organizing public events, communicating with policy makers and in other ways increasing support for afterschool and summer learning programs.

“We’re delighted that Veronica will serve as an Afterschool Ambassador this year,” said Afterschool Alliance Executive Director Jodi Grant. “She is exactly the kind of powerful champion we need at this time when federal funding for quality afterschool and summer learning programs is at risk. I know she will mobilize business, community and faith leaders, parents, educators and others to convince lawmakers to secure resources for the afterschool programs that keep kids safe, inspire them to learn and help working families. These programs offer hands-on learning opportunities, homework help, mentors, science and technology, healthy snacks and meals, sports and fitness, arts programming, college and job prep, and much more. We’re facing very real challenges this year, and more than a million students across the country could lose their afterschool programs. We will work together to stave off that threat.”

“I am thrilled to join in the Afterschool Alliance’s work to build support for afterschool programs,” said Willeto. “In my four years working in the field, I’ve seen up close the many ways afterschool programs help students to explore their interests and discover their passions, while giving parents the peace of mind that comes with knowing their children are safe and supervised, with opportunities to learn and grow, after the school day ends. I look forward to raising awareness and support for the out-of-school-time opportunities all students need.”

The Pryor Public School 21<sup>st</sup> Century Program is housed on the Plenty Coups High School campus in the Crow community of Pryor. It served a total of 91 students in 4<sup>th</sup> to 12<sup>th</sup> grades during the last school year. Its primary source of funding is a federally funded 21<sup>st</sup> Century Community Learning Centers grant administered by the Montana Office of Public Instruction. Students in Pryor have the opportunity to participate in a variety of activities during the afterschool and summer hours through the program. There are academic options such as tutoring, credit recovery, and ACT prep, as well as recreational options such as rock climbing, archery,

and open gym. There are extracurricular options such as cooking classes, photography, beading, and filmmaking in addition to character/leadership development options such as community service projects and mentoring opportunities. The Pryor 21<sup>st</sup> Century Program has a six-member Student Advisory Board that decides what activities will be offered each year. Major partners that make all the programming possible include the Rock of Ages Prison Ministry, Planned Parenthood of Montana, the Crow Nation's Health Department, and Montana State University.

Each Ambassador will organize a major event for *Lights On Afterschool*, the Afterschool Alliance's annual rally for afterschool, to be held on October 26 this year. Last year, 1 million people participated in some 7,500 *Lights On Afterschool* events across the United States and at U.S. military bases worldwide.

The 2017-2018 Afterschool Ambassadors are:

- **Arkansas:** Ben Rediske, Program Director at Camp War Eagle in **Springdale**;
- **Florida (2):** Justin Pinn, Director of Auxiliary Programming at Breakthrough **Miami** and Sierra Newhouse-Ragoonanan, Project Coordinator at After-School All-Stars in **Orlando**;
- **Kansas:** Tony Yungeberg, Director of Valley Heights Community Education in **Waterville**;
- **Kentucky:** Tom Haggard, Program Director at Covington Independent Public Schools in **Covington**;
- **Louisiana:** Samuel Trevathan, Education Director at Kids Orchestra in **Baton Rouge**;
- **Maryland:** Terrell Sample, 21st Century Community Coordinator at Dorchester County Public Schools in **Cambridge**;
- **Michigan:** Rebecca Idzikowski, SPARKS Director at Clare-Gladwin RESD in **Clare**;
- **Montana:** Veronica Willeto, Site Coordinator at Pryor Public Schools 21st CCLC in **Pryor**;
- **Nevada:** Matt Sampson, Director of Operations at the Boys & Girls Clubs of Western Nevada in **Carson City**;
- **New Jersey:** David Haggerty, Director at the Morristown Neighborhood House in **Morristown**;
- **North Dakota:** Robin Nelson, Chief Executive Officer at the Boys & Girls Club of the Red River Valley in **Fargo**;
- **Oklahoma:** Danielle Hovenga, Director of the True Blue Neighbor's Initiative at The University of Tulsa in **Tulsa**;
- **Tennessee:** Jennifer Pettyjohn, Chief Executive Officer at the Boys & Girls Clubs of the Clinch Valley in **Knoxville**; and
- **Washington:** Dorinda Belcher, Project Director K-12 for the White Salmon Valley School District in **White Salmon**.

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](http://www.afterschoolalliance.org).*

*The Pryor 21<sup>st</sup> Century Program is a school-based afterschool and summer program for youth in 4<sup>th</sup> to 12<sup>th</sup> grades, providing informal learning and prevention activities during non-school hours in a safe, caring environment. Programming also includes educational opportunities for families in the Pryor community.*