



Afterschool Ambassador Program: Legacy of Leadership

News Release

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Indianapolis' Struben Selected as One of Just 16 Afterschool Ambassadors in Country This Year

Chrystal Struben Will Work in Indiana and Across the Nation to Make Afterschool and Summer Learning Programs Available to More Children and Youth

Washington, DC – Chrystal Struben, President & CEO with AYS (At Your School) has been selected to serve as a 2023 Afterschool Ambassador, the Afterschool Alliance announced today. She is one of just 16 leaders in the country chosen for the honor this year. Afterschool Ambassadors continue their work with local afterschool programs while serving a one-year Afterschool Ambassador term, organizing events, working with community leaders and policy makers, and in other ways increasing support for the afterschool and summer learning programs families rely on.

"We are absolutely delighted that Chrystal Struben will serve as a 2023 Afterschool Ambassador," Afterschool Alliance Executive Director Jodi Grant said. "While students and families need afterschool and summer learning programs more than ever, programs are facing significant challenges including staff shortages, funding shortfalls, and finding ways to meet the academic and social needs of students as they recover from the challenges the pandemic created. We need strong, creative champions to spread the word about the essential role afterschool programs play in keeping kids safe, inspiring them to learn, and giving parents peace of mind that their children are safe and supervised after the school day ends. Struben is poised to be just the kind of powerful advocate we need."

"Getting to be a part of the Afterschool Alliance's efforts to grow support for afterschool and summer learning programs this year is an absolute honor," said Struben. "I've seen up close the incredible ways these programs empower students and families with the critical supports and services they provide. Out-of-school time programming plays a critical role in positive outcomes for our youth as we continue to recover from the isolation and hardship the pandemic caused. Many of our kids have interpersonal and academic ground to make up, and afterschool programs can help them do that. I am incredibly proud to be part of the afterschool movement and to have a chance to serve as an Afterschool Ambassador for Indiana this year."

AYS is a community-based nonprofit organization committed to providing working families with accessible, reliable, and enriching programs where their children can learn and grow beyond the school day in a place where they feel comfortable and safe - at their school.

Through both long-standing and new school corporation partnerships, AYS currently serves nearly 2,000 families in 28 schools within 5 school districts throughout Central Indiana. The organization's four primary pillars for programming include:

- Health – nutritious snacks and physical activity
- Literacy – dedicated curriculum to math and reading
- STEM – regular experiments and building-focused activities
- Social-Emotional Learning – daily self and group check ins via journaling and share time

Each Ambassador will organize a major event for *Lights On Afterschool*, the Afterschool Alliance's annual rally for afterschool. Most of the thousands of local *Lights On Afterschool* events will be on or around Thursday, October 26, 2023.

The 2023 Afterschool Ambassadors are:

- **Stamford, Connecticut:** Tiffany Wilson, Mill River Park Collaborative
- **Shoshone, Idaho:** Karma Metzler Fitzgerald, Lincoln County Youth Commission
- **Indianapolis, Indiana:** Chrystal Struben, AYS – At Your School
- **Terre Haute, Indiana:** Eleanor Ramseier, Camp Navigate, Inc.
- **Skowhegan, Maine:** Dawn Fickett, RSU/MSAD 54's 21st CCLC The REACH Afterschool Program
- **Derwood, Maryland:** Zainab Abbas, SciTech2U
- **Battle Creek, Michigan:** Deondra Ramsey, Battle Creek Public Schools 21st Century Program
- **Medford, New Jersey:** Becca Gutwirth, YMCA of the Pines
- **Newark, New Jersey:** Dorine Francis, FOCUS Hispanic Center for Community Development, Inc.
- **Zuni, New Mexico:** Valarie Bellson, Pueblo of Zuni, Zuni Public Library
- **Brooklyn, New York:** Earl Whitfield, CAMBA East New York Beacon 166
- **Norman, Oklahoma:** Whitney Dunn, Boys & Girls Club of Norman, Center for Children and Families
- **San Antonio, Texas:** Shawn Petty, Texas ACE Program @ Westat
- **Newport, Vermont:** Elizabeth Chambers, North Country Supervisory Union Encore Afterschool and Summer Program
- **Hampton, Virginia:** Michelle Simpson, Alternatives World Changers
- **Pasco, Washington:** Margarita Alaman, Educational Service Districts 123 21st Century Programs

Some 24.7 million U.S. children not in an afterschool program would be enrolled, if a program were available to them, according to [a survey of nearly 1,500 parents](#) commissioned by the Afterschool Alliance and conducted by Edge Research in May and June of 2022. That is the highest number ever recorded. Unmet demand for afterschool programs is significantly higher among Latino and Black children (at 60% and 54% respectively) than among children overall (49%). Cost is the top barrier to enroll, cited by 57% of parents as a reason for not enrolling their child. Ninety percent of parents rate the quality of the program their child attends as excellent (51%) or very good (39%).

A large and powerful body of evidence demonstrates improvements in grades, school attendance, behavior and more among children who participate in afterschool programs. Researchers have also found that students in afterschool programs are more engaged in school and excited about learning and develop critical work and life skills such as problem solving, teamwork, and communications.

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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.

For over 40 years, At Your School (AYS) before and after school programs have empowered central Indiana families to achieve their full potential by allowing parents to focus on their goals while their children receive the support they need outside of school hours. Learn more at www.ayskids.org/.