



Afterschool Ambassador Program: Legacy of Leadership

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Detroit's Blackwell Selected as One of Just 15 Afterschool Ambassadors in United States This Year

Curtis Blackwell Will Work Locally and Across the Country to Make Quality Afterschool and Summer Learning Programs Available to More Students and Families

Washington, DC – The Afterschool Alliance today announced that it has selected Curtis Blackwell, President at the Sound Mind Sound Body Foundation, to serve as a 2025 Afterschool Ambassador – one of only 15 leaders in the country chosen for the honor this year. Afterschool Ambassadors continue working with local afterschool programs while serving a one-year Afterschool Ambassador term during which they engage with community leaders and policy makers to organize events and in other ways grow support for the afterschool and summer learning programs that students and families rely on.

“We are absolutely delighted that Curtis Blackwell will serve as a 2025 Afterschool Ambassador for the Afterschool Alliance,” said Jodi Grant, Afterschool Alliance executive director. “This is going to be a pivotal year when we must continue the progress in making afterschool and summer learning programs available to more students, even as federal education spending is under scrutiny. We intend to continue spreading the word that afterschool programs are a wise, essential investment because they keep kids safe, inspire them to learn, and give parents peace of mind that their children are safe and supervised after the school day ends. Blackwell is exactly the kind of champion we need.”

“It is an honor to represent Detroit and Southeast Michigan as a national Ambassador for afterschool programming,” said Blackwell. “It’s so important to do the work of youth development but we must also ensure that our voices and program success here in Detroit are heard on a national level. The best part of being an Ambassador ensures I can learn from national leaders on how to incorporate best practices here in the Metro Detroit community to keep our afterschool programs at the forefront of industry standards!”

The Sound Mind Sound Body (SMSB) Foundation is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization dedicated to enhancing the educational and personal development of students in Michigan. With a 20-year legacy, SMSB serves over 8,000 students annually, through various programs, including the SMSB Out-of-School Time Program in partnership with the Michigan Department of Education, MiLeap, and Michigan After School Partnership across 11 school districts and 27 sites, the SMSB Youth Association engaging 3,000 students in cheer and football, college readiness camps, and the Talent Search Program funded by the U.S. Department of Education for 500 students. These programs provide a range of activities such as mentoring, leadership development, robotics, STEM education, health and wellness initiatives, and

college readiness support. Through community partnerships and innovative programming, SMSB aims to increase college readiness and scholarship attainment among its students.

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 23, 2025.

The 2025 Afterschool Ambassadors are:

- **Alabama, Gadsden:** Janie Browning, Gadsden City Schools
- **Alaska, Palmer:** Tyler Healy, Youth 360
- **Louisiana, Shreveport:** Victoria Morris, Volunteers of America LightHouse Program
- **Michigan, Detroit:** Curtis Blackwell, Sound Mind Sound Body Foundation
- **Minnesota, Minneapolis:** Clayton "Clyde" Quarles, Minneapolis Youth Congress
- **Nebraska, Omaha:** Nicole Everingham, Collective for Youth
- **New Hampshire, Stratham:** Melissa Goerbig, Big Brothers Big Sisters of New Hampshire
- **Nevada, Las Vegas:** Linda Johnson-McClinton, Enriching Explorations in Engineering
- **New York, Brooklyn:** Ghiles Jackson, After-School All-Stars
- **New York, Buffalo:** Talisa King, YWCA Western New York
- **South Carolina, Charleston:** Lauren Herterich, Kids on Point
- **South Carolina, Irmo:** Julius Scott, School District Five of Lexington & Richland Counties
- **South Dakota, Rapid City:** Malachi Nelson, 21st Century CFS South Middle Club Hub
- **Virginia, Richmond:** Jeanine Turner, Boys & Girls Clubs of Metro Richmond
- **Wisconsin, Rhinelander:** Abbie Cline, YMCA of the Northwoods

A [public opinion survey](#) released in February found that 85% of voters say they want their newly elected leaders to provide more funds for afterschool programs, including 92% of Democrats, 81% of Independents, 77% of Republicans, and 77% of people who voted for President Trump. The unmet need is great. 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 in 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.

The Sound Mind Sound Body (SMSB) Foundation is a comprehensive year-round program that positively impacts the lives of 8,000 students annually. Since its inception in 2004, SMSB has integrated academics, athletics, and life skills development, offering a youth league, 7v7 traveling team, football camps, and Out-of-School Time programming. Partnering with the Michigan Department of Education and the United States Department of Education, SMSB provides quality educational and athletic opportunities. The program emphasizes a formula for SUCCESS, focusing on being a STUDENT + ATHLETE + SOCIALLY RESPONSIBLE + SOUND DECISION MAKER, and has led to significant educational achievements, including high school graduation and college scholarships for its participants.