



Youth Afterschool Ambassador Program
A Project of the Afterschool Alliance

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**Walla Walla High School Student One of Five in Nation
Named to Inaugural Class of Youth Afterschool Ambassadors**

Ruben Balderas Will Work to Raise Awareness About Afterschool Programs

Washington, D.C. – The [Afterschool Alliance](#) announced today that Walla Walla 12th-grader Ruben Balderas has been selected to serve in the inaugural class of Youth Afterschool Ambassadors. A student at Walla Walla High School, Balderas attends the WaHi FORWARD Afterschool Program. He is one of five students from across the nation to be selected for the honor.

As a Youth Afterschool Ambassador, Balderas will be mentored by Brent Cummings, the Program Director of Walla Walla Public Schools' 21st CCLC programs and an alumnus of the Afterschool Alliance's long-running Afterschool Ambassador program, geared toward afterschool providers. The new Youth Afterschool Ambassador program builds on the success of that program.

The five Youth Ambassadors will each design and carry out a project showcasing the value of afterschool programs – such as creating a video or photo book featuring stories from youth or parents, or some other project of the Youth Ambassador's design. In addition, they will write a blog post for [Afterschool Snack](#), the Afterschool Alliance blog, about the importance of afterschool; and travel to Washington, D.C., next April to participate in the annual Afterschool for All Challenge, where they will meet with members of Congress and their staff.

“We’re thrilled to launch this exciting new initiative, and eager to unleash the energy and creativity of Ruben and his fellow Youth Afterschool Ambassadors,” said Jodi Grant, Afterschool Alliance Executive Director. “Afterschool programs keep children safe, inspire them to learn, and give working parents peace of mind that their children are safe, supervised and learning after the school day ends. But too many children don’t have a program available to them, so we need to spread the word. We know that Ruben will do a terrific job helping get out the good news about afterschool programs.”

“I’m really looking forward to serving as a Youth Afterschool Ambassador,” said Balderas. “My afterschool program has made a really big difference in my life, and I can’t wait to share my story, because I know it’s the story of so many afterschool students here and across the nation.”

“Ruben will make a terrific Youth Afterschool Ambassador,” said Cummings. “I know from my work with the Afterschool Alliance and the Ambassador program, that there’s a huge need for thoughtful, energetic spokespeople for afterschool. I can’t think of a better way to demonstrate the value of afterschool than by empowering youth like Ruben to send a message to the community about what afterschool means to them and to their families.”

The launch of the Youth Afterschool Ambassador program is in conjunction with the kickoff of the 18th annual [Lights On Afterschool](#), the nationwide celebration of afterschool programs organized by the Afterschool Alliance to spotlight the vital role afterschool plays in the lives of children, families and communities. More than 8,000 events around the nation and at military bases worldwide are expected on or around October 26, with more than 1 million participants.

The five Youth Afterschool Ambassadors in this inaugural class come from four states. Two are from Washington State, and one each comes from Missouri, Wisconsin and Oklahoma. They are:

- **Ruben Balderas** from Walla Walla Washington’s WaHi FORWARD Afterschool Program;
- **Maya Irvine** from Camdenton, Missouri’s Camdenton *FIRST* LASER Robotics Team;
- **Harli Jo McKinney** from Stratford Oklahoma’s C3 Afterschool Program;
- **Kaleb Robertson** from Green Bay, Wisconsin’s Boys & Girls Club of Greater Green Bay; and
- **Marisol Romero** from Toppenish Washington’s 21st Century Community Afterschool and Summer Program at Safe Haven Community Center.

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.

The Walla Walla Public Schools’ 21st Century Community Learning Center grants operate in eight schools district-wide. Together, their grants serve 800+ children per year, providing homework assistance, mentoring, tutoring, and clubs in sports, digital technology, computer science, 3D printing & animation, healthy living, art, music, STEM and many other subjects/interest areas. More information is available at www.wgps.org.