

# Core Principles & Policy Priorities

Over the course of a year, young people spend only one in six of their waking hours in school, leaving 83% of their waking hours open to learning outside of the classroom, in their community, on their own, or with their friends and families. Recognizing the importance of these spaces for STEM engagement and learning, the [Afterschool STEM Hub](#) was formed as a collaboration of informal education leaders and stakeholders. The group works to define a common intersectional policy agenda to advance afterschool, summer, and other out-of-school time STEM learning and to empower advocates with the tools they need to effectively make the case for increased investment in afterschool STEM. The Afterschool STEM Hub is led by the [Afterschool Alliance](#) and is composed of leading Youth Development program providers, state and local intermediary organizations, researchers, funders, and other afterschool stakeholders.

## Members of the Afterschool STEM Hub are united in our beliefs that:

- All young people deserve access to high-quality afterschool STEM programs: Every child and family that would like a spot in a high-quality afterschool STEM program should have one.
- High-quality afterschool STEM programs are a good investment for young people, families, communities, and our nation: When well-designed and well-implemented, afterschool programs facilitate multiple positive outcomes for students and their communities. A 2011 study by Dabney, et al. showed participants had improved attitudes toward STEM fields and careers, increased STEM knowledge and skills, and a higher likelihood of graduating and pursuing a STEM major in college ([Out-of-School Time Science Activities and Their Association with Career Interest in STEM](#)). Resources must be made available for the planning, training, and ongoing professional development required to provide high-quality afterschool STEM experiences for all young people.
- High-quality afterschool STEM learning centers equity and the lived experiences of young people: The highest quality programs are equity-focused and designed for, with, and by young people with ongoing opportunities for feedback, reflection, and improvement. Afterschool STEM learning should be joyful, thoughtful, rigorous, and nurture agency and belonging for all youth. These programs respond to the desires and dreams of youth and their families.

## There is broad support for Afterschool STEM Education

The latest “America After 3PM” (2021) report shows that 87% of parents favor public funding of afterschool programs. Support for public funding of afterschool programs is strong even across political parties, with “91% of parents who identify as Democrat, 87% of parents who identify as Independent, and 85% of parents who identify as Republican, in favor of such support.” More than 70% of parents prioritize STEM and computer science learning when choosing an afterschool program and support for STEM learning in afterschool programs is higher for families in the lowest-income bracket. Forty-eight percent of parents in the lowest-income bracket report that STEM is extremely important in the selection of their child’s afterschool program compared to 42% of parents in the highest-income bracket.

Congress has also historically recognized the value of afterschool and early STEM education by enacting various pieces of legislation impacting numerous agencies and the programs designed to broaden the STEM workforce pipeline. These include continued increase in funding for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Community Learning Centers, the Head Start program, and the Student Support and Academic Enrichment grant programs. Recent legislation such as the Building Blocks of STEM Act, the Bipartisan Infrastructure Act, and the CHIPS + Science Act also reflect bipartisan support for afterschool STEM learning. Support for afterschool STEM learning is durable and bipartisan.

## What More Can Federal Policymakers Do?

While STEM learning is available in more afterschool programs today than ever (up to 73% from 69% in 2014), the opportunities are not evenly accessible to all families as programs focused on STEM learning are typically more expensive. Despite this disparity, afterschool programs expose STEM learning opportunities to those traditionally underrepresented in STEM fields. Growing investments and support for afterschool STEM programs has far reaching benefits for individual students, local communities, and the nation. Therefore, we respectfully ask policymakers to:

### Increase Access to High-Quality Afterschool STEM Programs for Every Student

1. Increase funding for the U.S. Department of Education's 21<sup>st</sup> Century Community Learning Centers (21<sup>st</sup> CCLC) grant program, encourage the consistent use of a STEM priority across all states' 21<sup>st</sup> CCLC competitions and provide weighted resources to historically marginalized populations.
2. Continue to grow investments in and work to create a sustainable funding strategy for programs and providers foundational to providing STEM education outside of the school day. These include the Child Care and Development Block Grant and Head Start programs at the US Department of Health and Human Services, as well as STEM education opportunities at mission-based agencies such as NSF, NASA, NIH, NOAA, and DOE among others.
3. Prioritize STEM-based training and workforce opportunities for older youth through programs such as Perkins CTE and Department of Labor funding streams such as WIOA.



### Facilitate High-Quality Programming through Partnerships and Professional Development

4. Ensure that afterschool, summer, and other out-of-school time learning programs are treated as equal partners in federal STEM education funding streams and policies that aim to improve STEM education, including career and technical education, internships, and apprenticeships that can address local workforce needs.
5. Incentivize collaborations and partnerships in grants for STEM-rich organizations to coordinate with afterschool STEM programs to both increase quality and provide opportunities for older youth who might benefit from STEM-based apprenticeship programs.
6. Integrate afterschool and other informal STEM educators into existing federally-funded professional development programs that support STEM teacher preparation and professional development to ensure high-quality content delivery.

### Acknowledge & Highlight the Role of Afterschool STEM Programs

7. Use statutory and regulatory language that is more inclusive of afterschool programs. For example, use educators instead of teachers, STEM learning in and out of school, and STEM learning contexts instead of STEM classrooms.
8. Convene briefings, hearings, and support other activities to show the crucial role afterschool programs and providers play in inspiring and nurturing interest and success in STEM fields.
9. Expand research investments in informal STEM education to build and share knowledge about what works effectively in afterschool and other informal STEM education programs.