

It's Academic

What Cool Kids Do After School Celebrating 20 Years ASAP

By Bonnie Eisenfeld

"What happens after graduation starts with what happens after school."

That's the driving philosophy behind After School Activities Partnership (ASAP), a Philadelphia nonprofit founded in 2002 by public-school educator Marciene Mattleman. On Thursday, September 22, After School Activities Partnership will host its 20th-anniversary celebration and fundraiser to honor all the partners, educators, and stakeholders who have helped the program provide afterschool activities to more than 90,000 students since its inception.

Each school year, ASAP engages more than 4,000 Philadelphia students from kindergarten through grade 12 in 86 chess clubs, 102 Scrabble clubs, 48 debating clubs, and 37 drama clubs. Clubs meet at ASAP partner locations, including more than 200 Philadelphia schools, libraries, and recreation centers. More than half of ASAP's activities take place at neighborhood public schools, and almost half are in the 14 zip codes with the highest rates of gun violence.

Participating students have fun and learn from these activities. Here are just a few comments from students: "Chess has given me the ability to think about and visualize things from different perspectives"; "Scrabble has helped me find friends who share a love of words"; "I'm more open-minded, because in debate you have to be able to argue both sides"; "performing lets people see who I really am without the shyness."

ASAP also organizes citywide events and competitions. A tournament will be held on National Chess Day, Saturday, October 8. In October three competitive scholastic leagues will be launched, including a chess league, a debate league, and a Scrabble league.

Two-thirds of the 300 club leaders are public-school teachers, and the rest are community educators and volunteers, recruited by ASAP, which provides them with training, equipment, instructional resources, and administrative support. Drama clubs have professional teaching artists to co-lead programs.

"At ASAP we have the great fortune of seeing every day what is possible when schools and educators can offer their students opportunities that really speak to their interests and their passions," says Executive Director Justin Ennis. "For many students, afterschool or extracurricular programs can be the spark that helps them realize their full potential, and provide the community that gives them a critically important sense of belonging.

"The pandemic further highlighted the vital role that afterschool programs play for caregivers who need safe, enriching opportunities for their kids while they work.

"There is an enormous gap in extracurricular programming for students in Philadelphia public schools, compared to what is offered to students in suburban or private schools. ASAP finds a great sense of purpose in trying to close this gap and giving children in Philadelphia the afterschool opportunities they deserve."

In a *Washington Post* article, Jodi Grant, executive director of Afterschool Alliance, wrote, "The research is clear: children in quality afterschool programs are more likely to come to school and stay in school, more likely to hand in their work and get better grades."

There is still a huge unmet demand among Philadelphia school students. The organization has recently added three new staffers to reach out to schools; they hope to grow the number of school partnerships by 50 percent and serve an additional 1000 to 2000 students over the next two to three years.

Additional funding would enable the organization to offer more support to partners, to hire more professional teaching artists, and to sponsor more chess, debate, and Scrabble teams to compete in state and national tournaments. The majority of funding for After School Activities Partnership comes from foundations, supplemented by individual, corporate, and government contributions.

To attend the 20th anniversary celebration, visit: <https://phillyasap.org/save-the-date-asap-celebrates-20-years/>

Out & About

Support Bethesda Project with a 5K "Home Run"

Join Bethesda Project during the weekend of October 7 – 9 for their Home Run 5K 2022. This Home Run 5K brings together Bethesda Project supporters from near and far to participate in a 5K (3.1 miles) on a course of their own choosing.

The event is virtual, however this year includes a Tour De Bethesda portion, where registrants can participate in a walking tour of the Bethesda Project site. As the folks at Bethesda Project say, "when we run together, it is a Home Run." Go to <https://runsignup.com/bethesda/project/home/run> for more details.