

## WELCOME

I recently had the opportunity to sit in on a youth debate tournament. The experience immediately brought me back to my own participation in the speech and debate club in high school. I owe enormous gratitude to that special English teacher who served as our coach. She made an investment in this sophomore who wandered into the club classroom, coerced by a friend to check out this speech and debate activity.

Fast forward 40 years. Thanks to social media, I am still in touch with many of my peers from that club. Like most people—including, I imagine, each and every reader of *Afterschool Matters*—I can trace much of where I am now, in my career and in my personal life, to interests developed during the afterschool hours.

The topics for our speech and debate competitions were based on issues in the news at the time. Many of those issues are still newsworthy today! Digging into trending stories and events from all perspectives was a significant growth opportunity for speech and debate club members. We expanded our knowledge and skills by listening to others, summarizing viewpoints, reading background materials, engaging in deep discussions, and valuing arguments that ran counter to our own.

Today, engaging with the news and current events may be more important than ever. The next few months in our country will offer many opportunities for youth and adults alike to engage in debate, think critically, and practice empathy. A vital part of the work of afterschool providers is engaging young people in experiences that help them develop into responsible and knowledgeable adults. We are building the citizens of the future—or, rather, we are empowering young people to build their own citizenship and their own future.

The articles in this issue of *Afterschool Matters* on creative youth development, STEM, and summer learning should inspire us to think deeply about how we can empower this generation of young people to find their roles in solving social challenges, building communities, and leading for change. Out-of-school time programs are uniquely equipped for this task because of program designs that foster social and emotional learning. Combining this learning with a specific program focus, such as arts or STEM, enables programs to spark young people's civic engagement today and guide their thinking toward creating the communities of tomorrow.



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# Afterschool

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