# State Network Communications Toolkit: Supporting Parents

This document provides templates of four different kinds of materials you can use you to share your messages about the importance of afterschool:

1. A letter to the editor that could be sent to a local newspaper
2. An op-ed that could be submitted for publication
3. A guide for gathering success stories from afterschool program providers
4. A sample success story guide.

These templates focus on emphasizing how afterschool programs can help parents. There are additional templates that focus on messages about helping students learn and grow and keeping kids safe.

## **Letter to the Editor**

### ***Guidance***

Submitting a letter to the editor is a good way to engage in the public debate in your area, and advocate for the importance of afterschool. There are two main steps for submitting these to your local newspaper.

1. Make sure the paper takes letters and review guidance it offers about length or how to submit them. You can check the paper’s website or call. Some newspapers will have strict word limits for submitted letters so be mindful of those. If no count is listed, it’s general practice to keep them short: 200 words or fewer.
2. Find an article or issue to which you want to respond. The most straightforward way to approach this would be to respond to any media coverage related to afterschool. But you could also comment on an article on a related topic and connect it to afterschool. For instance, there might be a discussion regarding parents struggling to make ends meet, dual-income families or employers struggling to meet workforce demands. Your letter will have a better chance of getting placed if you highlight something the article missed.

Below is a template letter you can adapt to your purposes.

### ***Template***

Dear Editor,

I’m writing in response to the article on [afterschool programs] published on [DATE], *(provide the headline of the article in parentheses)*.

The article highlights the value of afterschool programs here in [PLACE]. Unfortunately, too many students and families across [STATE] are not able to take advantage of those benefits.

Right now, [#] students in [STATE] participate in an afterschool program, but another [#] are waiting for an open spot.

When parents have afterschool choices, they don’t have to worry about what their children are doing after school—they know they’re with caring adults, they’re engaged and learning, they’re getting time for physical activity and help with their homework.

In [STATE], [##%] of parents say afterschool helps them keep their jobs and gives them peace of mind when they are at work. Afterschool also provides a safe haven and helps kids avoid risky behaviors, online and offline, from 3 to 6 p.m. This is the time juvenile crime peaks and in [STATE] more than [##] youth are alone and unsupervised.

Moms and dads across [STATE] can’t afford to lose afterschool—it’s a lifeline for our kids, parents and our businesses.

Sincerely,

Your name and credentials. *(It’s important to include your connection to afterschool to indicate your expertise.)*

## **Op-ed**

### **Guidance**

A well-placed op-ed can be a useful tool to inform the public debate on afterschool in your area. This document includes an op-ed template focused on the supporting parents message theme.

As you consider placing an op-ed, it’s important to research the possible outlets in your area, including newspapers or other online publications that accept outside writing. Then be sure to figure out how to submit your piece and whether the outlet has strict length requirements. If you can’t find a specific number, it’s best to aim for between 500 and 700 words.

Generally, newspapers will require that any piece they accept only be published in their paper. So you should pick your top choice, submit to them, and if they eventually say no or you don’t hear back, you can go to option two. It’s generally not a good idea to submit to multiple outlets at the same time.

Finally, you will be most successful if you are commenting on something already in the news, and offering a new or different opinion from those that have been covered already. You might also attempt to tie the topic of afterschool into other debates that are ongoing in your area. For instance, if there’s a discussion of work-life balance or how parents juggle busier family schedules.

### **Template**

Parents are busier than ever. Families are more likely to have two working parents than they were a generation ago. Commutes are longer. Many parents are working two or three jobs—or going back to school—to provide for their children.

Afterschool is a lifeline for these and many other families across [STATE].

Afterschool programs give parents peace of mind and keep them from worrying about what their kids are doing when school lets out. Parents don’t have coordinate rides or juggle daily schedule changes. They know their kids are with caring adults, they’re engaged, learning and having fun. They’re getting time for physical activity, help with their homework and inspiration about future career paths.

What happens when parents don’t have afterschool choices? Parental concerns about afterschool results in lost productivity at work, costing U.S. businesses up to $300 billion annually. And here in [STATE], XX percent of parents say afterschool programs help them keep their jobs.

In short, high-quality afterschool programs in [STATE] are a fundamental part of helping parents balance work and life. We, including our state policymakers in [CAPITAL] and our representation in Congress, must do all we can to make sure every child and family who wants afterschool is able to participate.

*[The next section should contain a story to help illustrate the value of afterschool and the need to improve access. The story should emphasize how afterschool programs support parents. It could be a profile of a parent or family who benefited from having their child participate in afterschool. Or it could highlight a local afterschool program that is doing something interesting to support the parents and families of the children who participate. If the writer is a parent and has a child or children in afterschool, their personal story would be best. The story should take up no more than two to three short paragraphs.]*

This is just one example of how afterschool is a lifeline for [STATE’s] parents.

[STATE] parents also know that afterschool is a safe haven for their kids. It helps young people avoid risky behaviors, online and offline, from 3:00 to 6:00 pm. This is the time of day when juvenile crime peaks and more than XX youth in [STATE] are alone and unsupervised.

Unfortunately, too many families are unable to take advantage of the benefits afterschool provides. Right now, more than XXXX students in [STATE] participate in an afterschool program. But over XXXX are waiting to get in. We’re leaving those kids behind.

We need leaders at all levels to step up. Afterschool is a critical support for our children, families, and employers. *[Please feel free to include a more state specific call to action in this section. Who do you want to take action, and what do you want them to do?]*

As parents and leaders, our most important job is ensuring that we give our children—all children—opportunity to achieve their full potential and build a successful future. Afterschool programs are one of the best ways to do that.

 *[If possible, refer back to the story here. For instance: Kids like XXX benefit from afterschool programs. Parents like YYY want them. If that doesn’t work, a general reference will do:]* Children benefit from these programs. Parents rely on them. And communities across [STATE] need more of them—we cannot let them down.

## **Success Story Gathering Template: Supporting Parents**

The [INSERT NAME OF STATE NETWORK] works to communicate the value and importance of afterschool and summer programs. The most powerful stories are those that come directly from program providers and focus on children and families who participate. This template serves as an easy guide for gathering stories that showcase how afterschool and summer programs support parents by giving them peace of mind during non-school hours, and helping them keep their jobs and provide for their families. We’re building a collection of compelling stories to share with policymakers and other stakeholders in [STATE], in our print or digital materials, and on our website or blog. We will let you know before publishing your piece. Please read the instructions carefully before submitting your story.

### ***How to Submit a Success Story***

**Step 1** – Save this template on your computer.

**Step 2** – Complete the template.

**Step 3** – Save the completed template and send it as an attachment with related photo(s) to INSERT NETWORK NAME at INSERT EMAIL ADDRESS. Guidance about photos is provided at the end of this document.

### ***Basic Information:***

Program Name:

Number of Youth Served:

Ages of Kids Served:

Grades of Kids Served:

Program Contact Person:

Program Contact Email Address:

Program Contact Phone Number:

Program Website (if applicable) and any social media platforms:

***Types of Activities Offered:*** (please be specific and avoid jargon, for example: use ‘step dancing’ or ‘mural design and painting’ or ‘junior robotics league’—not ‘art/music programs’ or ‘science activities’)

### ***Creating Your Success Story:***

**First:**
Think about the ways your program supports parents. Does it provide a safe space for kids that allows parents to have peace of mind during the after school and before school hours? Does it keep parents from worrying at work because they don’t have to coordinate rides for their kids or deal with scheduling issues? Do parents miss less days of work or are they better able to keep a consistent schedule? Does it help parents go back to school, advance in their careers to better provide for their families, or provide engaging opportunities for kids that they otherwise wouldn’t have access to?

**Then:**Answer two or three questions below. Include details that will help others visualize activities kids are engaged in and understand how those experiences impact kids and their families. It may be helpful to have a specific child or family in mind as you’re describing experiences and impact.

**Finally**:
If possible, include a compelling quote from a child, parent, or employer that supports your response (along with name and age of student quoted, name of parent, or name/title if quote is from local business).

Describe how your program provides a safe space for kids and worry-free zone for parents. Consider sharing items like how your program enables parents to keep the work schedule required for their jobs; provides a consistent source of social and creative time for kids, as well as homework help; and enables parents to focus less on arranging afterschool logistics and more on quality time with their kids.

Share a story of a parent or parents that have been able to use the time their kids are in your program to go back to school and how having that program allowed the parent to provide a better future for their family.

QUOTE:

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**Photos:** Please submit high resolution digital photos that feature kids working with other kids or an adult or kids actively participating in hands-on learning or physical activity. All children/adults featured in the photos must have a signed photo release on file with your program. The release should give approval for the photos to be used on non-commercial websites like [INSERT NAME OF STATE NETWORK] website. If needed, providers may request and use the Afterschool Alliance photo release.

Provide descriptions of the activity in the photo so captions can be created if necessary. Preferable file formats for photos are .jpg or .png.