

Media Contact:
Mallory Zapata
C: 773-791-3520
E: mallory.zapata@afterschoolmatters.org

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As Chicago Public Schools Lets Out for Summer; 10,000 Chicago Teens to Participate In Paid Summer Internships, Apprenticeships

New Survey Findings Demonstrate After School Matters Programs Provide Safe Spaces, A Sense of Belonging and Connection for Chicago Teens

CHICAGO – As thousands of Chicago Public Schools (CPS) students begin their annual summer break, approximately 10,000 CPS high school students will participate in programs through After School Matters. This summer’s robust programming approach is informed by new survey findings from thousands of Chicago teens, parents and program instructors highlighting how the program delivers in key areas of need: safe spaces, sense of belonging and connection, skill building, having fun, and more.

“Chicago teens need productive opportunities and safe spaces to connect with their peers and learn new skills that help set them up for success,” said After School Matters CEO Mary Ellen Caron. “As our city gears up for the summer season, it’s critical we engage teens from all of Chicago’s neighborhoods, especially those historically disinvested, with paid, high-quality programs where they can learn from mentor instructors, access much-needed resources, and meet new friends. After School Matters staff are actively using insights from these new survey findings to refine and innovate to continue to meet the needs of Chicago teens and our larger community – this summer and beyond.”

In Summer 2022, After School Matters transitioned back to nearly all in-person programming and engaged a diverse population of youth between ages 13-24 from across the city of Chicago. The organization partnered with **Praxis Institute** to evaluate its impact and gain insights from Chicago teens. Survey data was collected and analyzed from more than 4,000 youth, more than 1,000 parents/guardians, and hundreds of instructors.

Key Takeaways from Summer 2022 Teen Surveys:

To view the full report findings, [click here](#).

- Despite the myriad of stressors facing young people today – increased community violence, juggling responsibilities, higher rates of mental health challenges – After

School Matters provided a safe, welcoming, and engaging environment for teens to explore interests and discover passions during the summer break.

- 9 in 10 parents/guardians said ASM provided a safe space for teens to go
 - 8 in 10 teens said their program provided a safe space to be themselves
 - 9 in 10 teens said they had fun in their program.
- Teens reported building strong relationships with their peers and instructors and finding a place where they belong. Importantly, teens' feelings of connection were linked to a greater sense of well-being and hope for the future.
 - 4 in 5 teens felt connected to their peers and instructors
 - 4 in 5 teens felt like they belonged in their program
 - 87% of teens felt supported by their instructors.
 - Instructors and staff provided support, structure, and content knowledge needed for teens to experience personal growth and strengthen skills.
 - 92% of teens strengthened and gained confidence in their skills and abilities
 - Teens gained vital 21st century skills (e.g., collaboration, communication, problem-solving), with 83% reporting they have 21st century skills after participating, compared to 62% of teens before their program started.

With these findings in hand and in preparation for Summer 2023, After School Matters will:

- Continue to cultivate a sense of safety, connection, support, and community in the organization's teaching and learning spaces
- Develop new strategies to help instructors enroll and more deeply engage teens. This includes more targeted recruitment efforts and offering instructors professional development focused on creating inclusive spaces, cultivating joy, and learning about restorative practices
- Deepen our partnership with Chicago Public Schools to help support teens academically and expand program opportunities over the summer
- Continue to provide key resources to teens, including stipends, meals, and mental health services through partnership with Adler University
- Continue to survey teens, instructors and parents about their experiences, program quality, and their unique needs at this moment in time.

"We can't stress enough the vital role of programs that emphasize belonging and connectedness in after-school or out of school time offerings," said Fausto Lopez, co-founder of the Praxis Institute and co-author of the study. "When young people feel a sense of belonging, when they know they are valued and included, it transforms their experience. Teen voices hold immense wisdom and insights that can shape the programs into something truly meaningful and impactful."

Chicago teens participating in After School Matters programs this summer will earn a stipend for their participation in internships and apprenticeships in the arts, communications and leadership, sports and STEM. Programs begin June 26 and run for six weeks at locations

across the city, as well as select remote options. Some programs are still enrolling, and teens interested in applying can visit afterschoolmatters.org.

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### **About After School Matters**

After School Matters is a nonprofit organization that provides high quality after-school and summer opportunities to Chicago public high school teens to explore their passions and develop their talents while gaining critical skills for work, college, and beyond. After School Matters programs are project-based, led by industry experts, and provide a pathway to progress in skills development and independence. Teens earn a stipend while participating in programs in the arts, communications and leadership, sports, and STEM (science, technology, engineering, and mathematics). Over the span of three decades, After School Matters has engaged more than 400,000 teens throughout the city of Chicago. [www.afterschoolmatters.org](https://www.afterschoolmatters.org)