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## **Ignite Afterschool Launches New STEM Learning Community**

*16 Organizations Across Minnesota Work to Build STEM Processes Into Afterschool Programs  
Aim Is To Address STEM “Opportunity Gap” & Get More Youth In STEM  
Ignite Afterschool Makes “Believe It. Build It. STEM It.” Available for Free Download*

(ST. PAUL, MN — October 12, 2016) Today marks the first time 16 diverse afterschool programs from across Minnesota will come together as a new Afterschool STEM Learning Community.

The U.S. Department of Commerce reports that STEM (science, technology, engineering and mathematics) jobs are projected to grow 17 percent by 2018 while non-STEM occupations will grow only 9.8 percent<sup>1</sup>. At the same time, business leaders in Minnesota cannot find the STEM talent they need to stay competitive<sup>2</sup>. Thus, Ignite Afterschool decided it was time to take action and help equip Minnesota’s afterschool programs to be part of the solution.

The new Afterschool STEM Learning Community is a first-of-its kind collaborative that aims to help address the “opportunity gap” in STEM learning, particularly for underserved youth. Participating organizations will work together to imbed STEM skills — critical thinking, collaboration and willingness to try, test, fail and try — into their afterschool programs, and ultimately to increase excitement about STEM in more young Minnesotans.

“Every young person should have the opportunity to see themselves in STEM,” reflected Kari Denissen Cunnien, executive director, Ignite Afterschool. “Yet not every young person in Minnesota has access to the materials, places and opportunities that ignite a passion for STEM. Our new Afterschool STEM Learning Community creates a tremendous opportunity to open new doors for Minnesota’s youth. By building STEM into afterschool programs, we can bring those fun, exciting, hands-on opportunities directly to many youth who are currently left out. That’s good for young people, and it’s good for Minnesota’s future workforce.”

Sixteen organizations were selected from 25 applicants to be part of Minnesota’s inaugural Afterschool STEM Learning Community. Participants represent a broad range of communities across Minnesota as well as varying levels of current STEM programming. In addition, participants are required to evaluate the impact of their work, so programs must work with a set group of youth throughout the year in order to measure results.

The members of Minnesota’s new Afterschool STEM Learning Community include:

- ACES (Athletes Committed to Educating Students) Minneapolis
- Anoka-Hennepin Schools Adventures +
- The Bakken Museum
- Boys & Girls Club of Leech Lake Area

<sup>1</sup> <http://www.esa.doc.gov/reports/stem-good-jobs-now-and-future>

<sup>2</sup> <http://vitalsigns.changetheequation.org/state/minnesota/overview>

- Eden Valley Watkins L.E.A.D 21<sup>st</sup> CCLC
- Hopkins School Kids & Company OST Program
- Keystone Community Services West 7<sup>th</sup> Community Center
- KEY (Knowledge, Enrichment & Youth Development) Zone (Duluth)
- Merrick Community Services
- Minneapolis Public Schools Community Education
- Proctor and Hermantown Community Education
- Rochester Community Education
- Saint Paul Community Education – Discovery Club
- Twin Cities Housing Development Corporation Teens With Technology Program
- Waseca Public Library
- YWCA Midtown (Minneapolis)

The Afterschool STEM Learning Community will meet monthly from now until August 2017 for professional development, STEM-specific data collection and analysis and the opportunity to learn from one another. At the end of their 10 months together, they hope to identify new best practices that can be adapted by other afterschool programs across Minnesota.

Ignite Afterschool is bringing in the expertise of Deborah Moore, director of the University of Minnesota's Youth Work Learning Lab to facilitate the Afterschool STEM Learning Community. "STEM helps young people learn to think critically, ask questions, test and discover solutions to problems in the world around them," remarked Moore. "Afterschool programs are a critical part of expanding access to these ways of thinking and doing. Our new Afterschool Learning Community will be forging even deeper, more intentional connections between afterschool and STEM, and I can't wait to get started."

### **New Free STEM Resource for All Afterschool Programs**

Today Ignite Afterschool is also making the brand new *Believe It. Build It. STEM It.* guide available for free download from their web site. All afterschool programs in Minnesota are invited to use this hands-on resource for incorporating STEM, even programs that aren't specifically STEM-focused.

Written and developed exclusively by Ignite Afterschool, this new guide breaks down the most effective research-based STEM practices into practical, easy-to-follow steps. *Believe It. Build It. STEM It.* also helps program providers see the natural connections between STEM learning processes and the work already being done in afterschool.

Afterschool programs are encouraged to visit <http://igniteafterschool.org/bibi/stem> to download *Believe It. Build It. STEM It.* for free.

### **About Ignite Afterschool**

*Ignite Afterschool is Minnesota's statewide network of funders, program providers, researchers and others dedicated to young people's engagement in afterschool. Founded a decade ago as Youth Community Connections, today Ignite Afterschool is led by a collation of nearly 20 statewide partners that uses its combined resources and expertise to improve the funding, availability and quality of afterschool and summer programming for young people throughout Minnesota. To learn more about Ignite Afterschool, visit [www.igniteafterschool.org](http://www.igniteafterschool.org), "like" Ignite Afterschool on Facebook /igniteafterschool or follow @igniteMN on Twitter with the hashtag #WeAreAfterschool.*