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NATIONAL AFTERSCHOOL ASSOCIATION HONORS TWO NEW JERSEY RISING STARS AMONG ITS 2025 NEXT GENERATION OF AFTERSCHOOL LEADERS

WESTFIELD, NJ — The [National AfterSchool Association](https://naaweb.org) (NAA) has selected Ayana Bell (Trenton, NJ) & Alexis Mathieson (Newark, NJ) as one of NAA's 2025 Next Generation of Afterschool Leaders. This award recognizes young leaders in the out-of-school time field who have a proven passion for the development of themselves and others and who demonstrate persistence in their work to grow as leaders in afterschool. In addition, honorees are active in the broader afterschool community, demonstrate contributions that have started to influence beyond individual programs to entire organizations and communities, and are actively engaged in efforts to elevate the afterschool field.

“At the National AfterSchool Association, we understand the connection between program quality and positive youth outcomes — a connection that can only be facilitated by strong leadership and a thriving workforce,” said Gina Warner, Chief Executive Officer of NAA. “By supporting emerging leaders, we are supporting the workforce of the future, and we are

excited how these emerging leaders make their mark on their organizations and the broader afterschool profession."

Out of over 100 nominations, 28 emerging professionals 30 years of age and younger were selected for this year's honor, including Ayana Bell of Boys & Girls Clubs of Mercer County & Alexis Mathieson of After-School All-Stars New Jersey. The entire cohort will be recognized at NAA's national 2025 Convention in Nashville in March. Additionally, they will be profiled in a feature story in the National AfterSchool Associations biannual magazine, *AfterSchool Today*. View a digital edition of the magazine [here](#) this March.

"NJSACC: New Jersey's Afterschool and Out-of-School Time Professional Network is proud to have Ayana Bell and Alexis Mathieson as representatives of New Jersey's exemplary, young afterschool and out-of-school time (OST) professionals," said Ebony D. Grace, Chief Executive Officer of NJSACC. "Alexis and Ayana personify the dedication of the OST workforce who work daily to support the development of youth, foster trusting relationships and rapport and implement high quality programming."

An estimated 7.8 million young people participate in afterschool programs each year and the industry employs an estimated 850,000 professionals and leaders. The National AfterSchool Association is the leading professional membership for those who work in out-of-school time and afterschool programs. NJSACC: New Jersey's Afterschool & Out-of-School Time Professional Network is the New Jersey Affiliate of the National Afterschool Association. NAA and its State Affiliates share a mutual purpose and agreement to support, develop, and advocate for Out-of-School Time professionals and the profession. To learn more about NJSACC, please visit our website <https://www.njsacc.org/about-njsacc/>