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NATIONAL AFTERSCHOOL ASSOCIATION HONORS DEIDRE JOHNSON AMONG ITS 2026 NEXT GENERATION OF AFTERSCHOOL LEADERS

The [National AfterSchool Association](#) (NAA) has named Deidre Johnson of Ironbound Community Corporation, Newark, NJ as a 2026 Next Generation of Afterschool Leaders honoree. This recognition celebrates outstanding early-career professionals in the out-of-school time field who are deeply committed to their own growth and the growth of others, and who continue to build their leadership skills through dedication, curiosity, and perseverance. Honorees are also active contributors to the broader afterschool community, demonstrating impact that extends beyond individual program sites to strengthen organizations and communities while helping elevate the afterschool profession as a whole.

“Across the out-of-school time field, we’re facing a complex and demanding landscape, from workforce challenges to shifting needs and limited resources,” said Gina Warner, Chief Executive Officer of NAA. “What makes this year’s Next Generation honorees so remarkable is that they continue to lead with purpose and persistence through it all. By

investing in emerging leaders, we're strengthening program quality, supporting youth outcomes, and building the future of the afterschool workforce one courageous leader at a time."

Selected from more than **140 nominations, 30 professionals aged 30 and under** were chosen as part of the 2026 Next Generation of Afterschool Leaders cohort, including Deidre Johnson of Ironbound Community Corporation. The full group will be recognized at NAA's national 2026 Convention in the Washington, D.C. area in March. Honorees will also be featured in a dedicated story in *AfterSchool Today*, the National AfterSchool Association's biannual magazine. A digital edition of the magazine will be available in April.

Each year, an estimated 7.8 million young people participate in afterschool programs, and the field employs approximately 850,000 professionals and leaders. The National AfterSchool Association is the leading professional membership organization for those who work in out-of-school time and afterschool programs. NAA supports, develops, and advocates for afterschool professionals to help foster positive youth outcomes nationwide. Learn more at naaweb.org.