September 7, 2021

\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ School Board, \_\_\_\_, a member of the Tennessee Afterschool Network (TAN), would like to thank you for your response to COVID-19, which presented unprecedented obstacles to students’ learning, safety, health, and overall well-being. Thank you for keeping students, families, faculty and staff safe while offering the best possible learning opportunities available in tough circumstances.

As you well know, as a result of the pandemic, all students continue to face extended months of learning loss. Unfortunately, achievement gaps widened for disadvantaged students – those most at risk during school closures, remote learning and most likely to lack access to afterschool, summer, and expanded learning opportunities. As the pandemic continues, TAN recognizes that you are facing important decisions about how to best support learning recovery for the students of \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ Public Schools. Broad community support will be needed to safely meet the academic and socio-emotional needs of students, particularly the most disadvantaged. It will take strong commitments, resources, and coordinated efforts to ensure that ALL students can catch up and re-engage well in school and community life.

To do this we will all need to work together. Out-of-school time programming makes a positive difference in the development of students from age five to graduation and can be a valuable partner to you on the road to academic and social recovery by offering expanded learning opportunities before school, afterschool, on breaks and in the summer. During the pandemic, just like your school division, out-of-school time programs adapted to stay connected to students and families by providing food, learning and connection when school was not in session. For a while, out-of-school time became all of the time!

The latest ‘America After 3 PM’ report, conducted before the pandemic, showed that 99% of parents are satisfied with their child’s experience in out-of-school time programs. Unfortunately, for every one child in an afterschool program in Tennessee, three are waiting to get in. Out-of-school time is not just a childcare issue; it is a safety issue, a workforce issue, a health issue, an academic issue, and an economic issue. TAN has been advocating for accessible, affordable, quality out-of-school time experiences since its formation. Prior to the pandemic, the need was a great need and that need has only been magnified.

TAN thanks you for all you have done during the pandemic and beyond. We encourage you to join TAN (it’s free!), and to also join us, the Afterschool Alliance, and thousands of out-of-school time programs across the nation for the largest nationwide showcase of afterschool programs during the 22nd annual Lights On Afterschool celebration on October 28th! Despite the uncertainty and challenges of this year, afterschool programs rose to the moment - supporting students and families by providing needed meals, childcare for essential workers, and high-quality virtual learning experiences when schools were forced to close. On October 28, we’re helping to shine a light on the important role of afterschool programs in Tennessee and our community. Please sign up today to join in the celebration and recognize the heroes in out-of-school-time programming [Sign Up (afterschoolalliance.org)](http://loa.afterschoolalliance.org/accounts/signup/?utm_source=email&utm_term=partner) or reach out to your local programs and join their events.

Thank you for your service to children, youth and their families!