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## Wyoming to assess afterschool system with grant funding

LANDER —The Wyoming Afterschool Alliance (WYAA), an initiative of the Wyoming Community Foundation, has received a three-year grant to conduct a research project surveying the capacity of the public and private afterschool systems and to assess their effectiveness across Wyoming.

The grant is from the C.S. Mott Foundation with matching funds from the Wyoming Department of Education (through 21<sup>st</sup> Century Community Learning Centers), the Wyoming Department of Family Services, and the John P. Ellbogen Foundation. The project also involves setting up a system of Quality Advisors for afterschool programs in the state, and rolling out a program self-assessment tool that will be piloted with as many as 25 Wyoming afterschool sites.

The Wyoming Afterschool Alliance (WYAA) is partnering with the National Institute on Out-of-School Time (NIOST) at the Wellesley Centers for Women in Wellesley, Mass., and The Third Mile Group of Denver, Colo., to complete this initiative. Teams at the three organizations—each with a long history of cutting-edge work in the education and afterschool fields—will ensure a comprehensive assessment that benefits the state, afterschool programs, and children of all ages.

"Our work in Wyoming is the first of its kind in focusing attention on the unique needs of a rural state," Ellen Gannett, Director of NIOST said. "While many policy and quality studies have been undertaken in urban areas across the country, far too often rural communities are left out of the equation."

"I am thrilled to be a partner in this important research which will help to inform our understanding of the out-of-school environment in the mountain and western region of our country," she said

During Phase I which will be conducted over the next six weeks, WYAA will identify prospective Quality Advisors (QA)—a group of experienced afterschool professionals from across the state who will receive training on program evaluation and staff coaching.

Immediately following their March training, the QAs will travel across Wyoming observing afterschool programs and collecting data on their activities. Over the course of the spring, the Third Mile Group will survey and interview Wyoming policy makers, program directors, educators, parents, and funders about their observations and the afterschool system's capacity and effectiveness to serve the state's youth.

NIOST will conduct a survey of afterschool programs evaluating the quality of programming and leadership indicators. The three organizations will then work together to create an overview of the status of afterschool statewide. It is anticipated that the results will inform both policy and practice in Wyoming.

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Phase II and III of the project will involve piloting the NIOST Afterschool Program Assessment System in a group of Wyoming afterschool sites. Youth workers at sites will be trained by NIOST staff with additional coaching and support provided by local QAs over the course of a year. Each site will receive comprehensive reports based on their input to help guide their program improvement efforts.

“I am excited to be embarking on this project with NIOST and the Third Mile Group to assess Wyoming’s afterschool programming,” Linda Barton, director of WYAA, said. “Without question, we will learn things that will help improve the status of afterschool statewide, identify some key best practices and create Wyoming specific education and training opportunities for the afterschool workforce.”

The Wyoming Afterschool Alliance is one of 39 statewide afterschool networks with the C.S. Mott Foundation and is part of the National Network of Statewide Afterschool Networks. Established in 2007, WYAA supports and promotes high quality afterschool programs to improve positive outcomes for youth and their families and works to ensure that Wyoming youth will have equal access to high quality afterschool programs.

For more information on the Wyoming Afterschool Alliance, visit: <http://www.wyafterschoolalliance.org/>. For more information on the National Institute on Out-of-School Time, visit: <http://www.niost.org/>. For more information on the Third Mile Group, visit: <http://www.thirdmilegroup.com/>.

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