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**Pennsylvania Statewide Afterschool/Youth Development Network (PSAYDN)
Testifies at Joint House Policy Committee Hearing**

*Pennsylvania students in afterschool STEM programs gain critical
workforce skills and interest in science careers*

Harrisburg, Pa., November 20, 2017 – Laura Saccente, director of the Pennsylvania Statewide Afterschool/Youth Development Network (PSAYDN), testified today at a joint bipartisan House Policy Committee hearing on out-of-school time (OST) programs and their contributions to building a strong and vibrant workforce in the commonwealth. Led by House Majority Policy Committee Chairman Kerry Benninghoff (R-Centre/Mifflin) and House Minority Policy Committee Chairman Mike Sturla (D-Lancaster), republicans and democrats in the state legislature learned about several distinguished informal science, technology, engineering and math (STEM) learning environments, such as afterschool and summer learning programs and their partnerships with STEM Learning Ecosystems that are gaining national recognition and educating youth across Pennsylvania.

The hearing recognized the work being done in out-of-school time (OST) programs and STEM Learning Ecosystems in helping students discover potential career pathways, connecting them to real-world workplace experience, and guiding them to build the foundational 21st century skills. Among the business and educational communities involved in STEM, there is a growing recognition that focusing on K-12 education is not a complete solution and that other organizations must join the effort. As a result, afterschool and summer programs have emerged as key partners in informing young people about employment opportunities and supporting the development of the technical and workplace abilities required to qualify for the skilled workforce. Out-of-school time programs—historically perceived as serving the primary role of providing a safe place where kids can stay during those hours when school is not in session and parents are not home to provide care—can offer high-quality educational content that extends the learning day for students. Quality afterschool and summer programs offer a place where students can learn through hands-on activities that develop their self-learning responsibility and decision-making skills.

Saccente’s testimony highlighted research on how informal STEM environments within Pennsylvania’s STEM Learning Ecosystems are well positioned to be effective partners in developing tomorrow’s workforce by teaching skills and personal growth opportunities that are not typically part of the formal school day. She referenced the 2016 Afterschool & STEM System Building Evaluation, an eleven-state study, representing more than 2000 children and youth, which resulted in the following impacts:

- More than 78 percent of Pennsylvania students reported a positive change in their interest in science.
- Nearly 73 percent of Pennsylvania students reported their “science identity” increased – their own assessment of being a “science person.”
- More than 78 percent of Pennsylvania students reported a positive gain in their science career knowledge.

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- More than 75 percent of Pennsylvania students reported an increase in their perseverance and critical thinking skills following participation in an afterschool program.

“This research confirms that high-quality afterschool programs are inspiring young people, building their confidence and igniting a passion for learning that will help them achieve their full potential,” Saccente stated. “It adds to the growing body of evidence showing that kids achieve more with afterschool out-of-school time programs.”

Furthermore, these programs are a good investment. “Every \$1 invested in afterschool programs saves \$9 by reducing crime and welfare costs, improving kids’ performance at school and increasing kids’ earning potential,” Saccente added.

A full report of the study is available at <http://stemreadyamerica.org/>. The website also includes a research compendium of 40 authors, highlighting information from across the country of the latest in the growing body of research on the important role afterschool learning plays in providing the skills that are in high demand by employers in today’s workforce.

Saccente went on to recommend elevating informal STEM environments to a greater scale in Pennsylvania; and investment to provide opportunities for young people, including the more than 811,000 kids who would access an out-of-school time (OST) program if one were available to them. Her testimony encouraged the Pennsylvania General Assembly to pursue collective impact strategies that leverage public and private investments in order to increase the availability of and resources for informal STEM environments and STEM Ecosystems. Saccente recommended that the legislature also consider avenues for innovative professional development and curriculum initiatives to support both teachers and OST educators to provide complementary STEM content delivery.

Others testifying included Julie Stolzer, Teaching Institute for Excellence in STEM (TIES); Matthew Stem, Pennsylvania Department of Education; Rachel Miller Strucko, Schools and Homes in Education (SHINE); Todd Pride, Mid-Atlantic Youth Anglers and Outdoors Program; Robert M. Krasne, Steinman Communications; LaTrenda Leonard Sherrill, director of the STEM Learning Ecosystem in Pittsburgh; and Jesse Maine, Southern Tioga School District.

For more information about the hearing, go to www.pagoppolicy.com or www.pahouse.net.

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The Afterschool & STEM System Building Evaluation 2016 was conducted by The PEAR Institute: Partnerships in Education and Resilience at Harvard University and IMMAP: Institute for Measurement, Methodology, Analysis & Policy at Texas Tech University. Researchers analyzed retrospective self-reports completed by students and surveys completed by program instructors to assess the impact of state system-building strategies and support on quality, quantity, and youth outcomes in STEM-focused afterschool programs. The evaluation was conducted in 11 states and involved more than 2,000 students and 162 afterschool programs. More than half of the programs evaluated receive funding from the federal 21st Century Community Learning Centers program.

About PSAYDN

Pennsylvania Statewide Afterschool/Youth Development Network (PSAYDN) promotes sustainable, high-quality out-of-school time youth development programs through advocacy and capacity building to enhance the welfare of Pennsylvania’s children, youth and families. PSAYDN believes all children and youth deserve access to programs that encourage positive youth development and support the successful transition to adulthood. PSAYDN is managed by the Center for Schools and Communities. More information is available at www.psaydn.org.