As the nation’s leading voice for afterschool, the Afterschool Alliance is working to ensure that all children have access to affordable, quality afterschool programs.

We talked to Erik Peterson, Vice President of Policy, to find out more about what Afterschool Alliance is doing to achieve its goals.

**Can you explain the overall mission of the Afterschool Alliance?**

The mission of the Afterschool Alliance is to engage public will to increase public and private investment in quality afterschool, summer learning, and before school program initiatives at the national, state and local levels. We strive to fulfill that mission by advancing the following goals:

- To be an effective voice for afterschool and summer learning in efforts to expand quality programs;
- To serve as an information source on afterschool programs and resources;
- To encourage the development of local, state and national afterschool and summer learning constituencies and systems; and,
- To communicate the impact of afterschool and summer learning programs on children, families and communities.

**What milestones has Afterschool Alliance already reached or is currently moving towards?**

Key milestones include increasing the number of low-income children served annually through the federally funded 21st Century Community Learning Centers (21st CCLC) initiative from 40,000 in 1998 to more than 1.6 million today. The 21st CCLC initiative provides community organizations and schools with more than $1 billion per year that leverages other funds in order to provide quality afterschool, summer learning and before school programs at the local level.

**How do Afterschool Alliance’s principles tie into the Community School’s principles and philosophy?**

Afterschool programs are a critical part of the larger community school vision, providing aligned, meaningful learning opportunities for children during non-school hours including during the summer. In some cases afterschool programs serve as a stepping stone for launching community school initiatives by serving as an entry point for community-based organizations and family involvement in schools. I see the Coalition for Community Schools work complementing the work of the Afterschool Alliance, particularly around shared advocacy and awareness goals.
The interest in community schools is growing. Why do you think that is?
Community schools represent an acknowledgment that strong, true partnerships between community-based organizations, families and schools, are a cost-effective and proven strategy to address the many barriers students may confront in striving to succeed in both school and in life. Furthermore, the established community school successes in Ohio, Oregon, Maryland and elsewhere have demonstrated to policymakers and parents alike that community schools work.

What are some exciting things coming up for Afterschool Alliance?
Lights On Afterschool! is the national celebration supporting afterschool programs and will take place on October 22, 2015. Community schools are invited to join with more than 7,500 afterschool programs nationwide in calling attention to the important role afterschool programs play in the lives of children, families and communities.

The Afterschool Alliance will also be releasing new data from the America After 3PM report, a comprehensive look at afterschool program participation, demand, and support. This year new special reports on summer learning program participation and STEM in afterschool will be released.

Finally, what do you like about your job?

I like everything about my job. I am fortunate enough to work for a great organization that is making real advances toward the goal of ensuring all children have access to quality afterschool programs. As a parent with two sons who thrive in their afterschool program, I understand the impact that quality programs can have on an entire family. And I get to work with a great internal team at the Afterschool Alliance, and also with amazing staff at allied organizations in the education, youth development, nutrition, STEM, child care and juvenile justice arenas – including the Coalition for Community Schools.