Dear Illinois State Board of Education Board Members:

We are writing in response to the new Illinois State Board of Education’s FY20 Budget Recommendations and the Governor’s proposed budget. **On behalf of our over 1,800 members, we ask that the Illinois State Board of Education (ISBE) include in its FY20 budget $20 million for afterschool program funding**, which ISBE can use to serve approximately 200 new program sites at $100,000 per site in the lowest performing districts in Illinois. We also ask that ISBE continue to recommend **$15 million for the Healthy Communities Investment Grants program** (listed as After School Programs), as it have done the past two years. Additionally, we ask that you include a **$15 million dollar line item to support community schools** in Illinois. These items were all in the previous FY20 budget recommendations. We recognize that the previous board proposal was incredibly ambitious; however, these are cost effective programs that are a small portion of the budget and have a large impact.

The ACT Now Coalition is a statewide organization that works to ensure that young people in Illinois have access to quality and affordable afterschool and youth development programs. We believe that an increased commitment to young people beyond the traditional school day is a crucial part of their growth into healthy and productive individuals. ACT Now is a diverse coalition supported by Illinois families, educators, business leaders, community advocates, youth organizations, and policymakers from across the state. The ACT Now Coalition has recently taken on the advocacy of the former Federation of Community Schools because our organization acknowledges that this work is essential to the success of youth, schools, and communities in Illinois.

Students across Illinois are learning and growing in afterschool programs. Studies show that programs are sparking students’ interest in school leading to better school attendance, grades, standardized test scores, and behavior.¹ Outside of the data produced by the stellar afterschool programs in Illinois, these programs are providing fun and engaging opportunities for learning that there are not always time for during the school day. Afterschool programs also provide a safe haven and help dissuade youth from engaging in risky behaviors on and offline. Moreover, afterschool programs are fostering the workforce of today and tomorrow in Illinois, by providing childcare for working parents and preparing the future workforce by teaching employability skills and exposing youth to careers.

Community schools are both places and a set of partnerships between the school and other community resources. These relationships focus on not just academics, but also health and social services, youth and community development, and community engagement, which leads to improved student learning, stronger families and healthier communities.² Using public schools as a hub, community schools bring together many partners to offer a range of supports and opportunities to children, youth, families and communities. Teachers and principals in

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Illinois have attributed the community schools model to students’ improvement in grades, homework, and behavior.³

Additional funding is necessary for afterschool programming for Illinois’ children and youth because families across Illinois want their students in an afterschool program, but a lack of space in existing programs prevents parents from enrolling their children. America After 3PM reported that 741,400 children in Illinois, or 41 percent of children in Illinois, would participate in an afterschool program if one were available.⁴ As of 2014, only 18 percent of Illinois children were lucky enough to have a placement in an afterschool program.⁵ 433,390 children in Illinois are left alone and unsupervised between 3:00 p.m. and 6:00 p.m.⁶

The current funding streams for afterschool in Illinois are not enough to fill this need. In 2014, the Illinois State Board of Education received 142 21st Century applications requesting a total of $53 million but were only able to award grants to 87 applicants for a total of $33 million.⁷ Not only will these programs move the needle in areas of need in our state, but they will also save money in the long-term. By increasing kids’ earning potential, improving academic achievement, and reducing juvenile crime and delinquency, afterschool saves up to $9 for every $1 invested.⁸ Moreover, creating partnerships that enable families to access supports and services through community schools can yield a $1 to $3 return on investments on each public dollar.

The evidence demonstrates that afterschool programming and community schools are winning models that achieve real results for our students. We ask that ISBE make these investments to move the needle for the children, families, and communities that need them most.

Sincerely,

Susan Stanton
ACT Now Network Lead

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⁵ Ibid.
⁶ Ibid.