

Nonprofit Member Spotlight: American Scholastic Climbing League

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in [CWA Blog](#)



Credit: Liz Donaldson

Born and raised on the Colorado Front Range, Theresa Morris started climbing by doing family laps on the iconic Flatirons in Boulder. After becoming an educator, she recognized the important lessons climbing can teach youth and made it her mission to get climbing programs into as many schools as possible.

She, along with a group of dedicated educators, [founded the Colorado Scholastic Climbing League](#), which later became the American Scholastic Climbing League (ASCL). In this non-profit member spotlight, learn about the ASCL and how the indoor climbing industry can support the growth of indoor climbing to serve the needs of student-athletes across the country.

Quinn Gordon, Membership Coordinator, CWA (He/Him)

Great to chat with you today, Theresa! To kick things off, could you walk me through the foundation of the ASCL?

Theresa Morris, Executive Director, American Scholastic Climbing League (She/Her)

Absolutely – When I was teaching in Colorado, there was a climbing league here from a gym that was called Paradise Rock Gym. They were hosting a youth climbing series that was 18 years and younger. My program competed and it was fantastic, but we were competing against kids that were six or seven years old, who were frankly crushing us. Even though we were having a great time, it was like, “This doesn't make sense.” Instead, we decided to get a high school-only league. So, the Colorado Scholastic Climbing League (CSCL) was born out of that.

Just through word of mouth and seeing each other at different crags, the CSCL was established in 2008. In the beginning, it was just a group of teachers, like Dave Meyer out on the Western Slopes, plus Lara Grosjean at CityROCK in Colorado Springs. I started off with three kids and me. That was it. About ten years later, in 2018, when we were at about 500 kids competing, we decided to transform into the ASCL.

Now, we are right around 600 student-athletes coming out of the pandemic in Colorado.

Quinn

That's quite inspiring – I always appreciate how the climbing community is scrappy in the best of ways. Folks have a vision and then work together as a community to pull it off. In terms of the competitions, are athletes sponsored by their individual schools?

Theresa

Right now, an athlete signs up and puts down the school in which they are enrolled, whether they have an organized climbing program or not. That's how it starts, because, having been a teacher for 30 years, I can tell you that kids really drive the clubs that happen at a school. It's how these programs get started. The ultimate goal is to bring climbing into schools and to have kids be part of a school-sanctioned athletic team.

Become a Coach with the ASCL

We also have kids that go to a school that doesn't support climbing, and we have homeschooled kids, and kids that are doing online school.

They will come in and **they'll still represent their own school or group, whether the school recognizes them or not. In those cases, it can actually spur the school to start a program** because we have kids climbing and supporting a specific school that doesn't yet have a climbing program.

Quinn

Very cool! I was hoping you could describe how commercial climbing gyms help support you folks?

Theresa

This is a big one, right? Because we need to pair up with local indoor climbing gyms. When you think about a traditional high school sport, you're just going to go to that school and compete at that host school. Well, schools don't have climbing gyms and if they do, another district may or may not be able to climb on their climbing wall because of the restrictions of the insurance policy for the school district. So, we really need the local gyms.

We try to make it as gym friendly as possible. All we ask is for you to give us about a four-hour timeframe in the deadest hour of your operations, whether that's a Friday night or Saturday morning. **We take care of all the setting and the logistics.** We host the climbers, we pick the routes out, we do all the scoring, the coaches manage all the safety aspects.

We still pay for access to the gyms, too. By keeping the price of the competitions low, it allows more athletes to participate. The ASCL works hard to keep our registration fee as low as possible and, if the gyms hosting the competitions do the same, it allows for more athletes of varying socioeconomic status to participate in the league.

Quinn

Makes sense! As a lifelong educator, how do you view the intersection of climbing and youth development?

Theresa

I personally believe that there's an athlete in all of us, and you just have to find the right sport. Growing up as an athlete and competing in traditional sports, for me, it was my mental health, right? It was my sanity. Through sports, you start to realize those things about sportsmanship, honor, perseverance, and grit. You learn all those things through sports that then can be applied in school in your future job, whatever you're doing.

I've also found that climbing attracts the alternative kid who would not normally do a sport at their high school or middle school, but they will do climbing, so then you get all the great things that a school sport should do. You get that community and people that have a like mind and interest. You find support, which kids really need overall, but especially coming out of COVID.

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I also think it's really important that we introduce climbing to youth because these are the future

lawmakers, these are the future environmental activists, these are the future environmental scientists. We have this indoor climbing community. How can we now go back to being an outdoor climbing community, but do it with environmental ethics? These kids are hopefully going to climb outside in the future, and we want to make sure we prepare them both in terms of safety, but also in terms of environmental protection.

Quinn

Let's say that there is a middle school or high school teacher out there that wants to get involved with the ASCL, how can they go about doing so?

Theresa

Honestly, the best thing they can do is go to our website and reach out to us. We're working on step-by-step guides exactly on how you get can started at your school with commonly asked questions like how to approach your administrator, how to get the parent community involved. Parents are a huge factor, and they can help drive your school's program.

Quinn

Where do you see the ASCL headed next?

Theresa

Growth was the vision all along, which is why we call it the American Scholastic Climbing League instead of the Colorado Scholastic Climbing League. We're going to start in Texas in the fall and I've got meetings with people from Ohio, as well. It is going and we're going to just see where it takes us!

Donate to the ASCL

As a 501c3, the American Scholastic Climbing League is rapidly expanding to other states in the U.S. Your donations help the future indoor climbers of America get their start, and find their passion.

About the Author



Quinn Gordon is the membership coordinator at the CWA. Quinn is an active member of the climbing community and continues to hone his skills inside and outside the gym. When not on the clock, he can be found climbing in the Flatirons, hiking in the Rockies, or reading above the tree line.



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