
Beyond School Bells Newsletter – June 2025

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Date Mon 6/9/2025 9:05 AM

Beyond School Bells
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June 2025

News and Events

**Proposed Elimination of 21st Century Community Learning Centers
Puts Afterschool Programs at Risk**



Nebraska kids and families

can't afford to lose afterschool!

Act now to keep
afterschool open!

President Trump's full education budget proposal, released on Friday, May 30, contains deeply concerning news for Nebraska's children, families, and communities.

The proposal calls for the complete elimination of the 21st Century Community Learning Centers (21st CCLC) program - the only dedicated federal funding stream for afterschool and summer learning. This move is part of a broader \$12 billion cut to the U.S. Department of Education, dramatically reducing resources for programs that support youth development and family well-being.

The President's budget is the first step in the federal funding process; now, Congress must decide whether to accept or reject this proposal. That means the time to act is now.

What's at stake for Nebraska?

21st CCLC has a 20-year history of supporting locally driven afterschool programs that serve 1.4 million young people nationwide. In Nebraska alone, more than 17,000 youth in over 130 programs benefit from 21st CCLC grants, administered by the Nebraska Department of Education. With more Nebraska youth and families wanting access to these programs, and more interested communities than there is funding, Nebraska needs **more** 21st CCLC programs – NOT their elimination.

Under the President's proposal, 21st CCLC would be collapsed into a single \$2 billion block grant alongside 17 other programs - a pool of funding for all 18 programs that is nearly 70% smaller than what is currently allocated for these combined efforts. This would force 21st CCLC to compete for significantly fewer resources, effectively ending federal support for afterschool and summer learning programs.

Federal 21st CCLC funds are a critical part of Nebraska's afterschool ecosystem, heavily leveraged by local and philanthropic dollars to ensure safe, enriching spaces for kids during out-of-school hours. Losing these funds would mean fewer opportunities, greater risk, and more strain on working families across our state.

What can we do?

Congress has the final say in the federal budget, and our Nebraska representatives need to hear from you. Your voice can help protect the future of afterschool and summer learning in Nebraska. Use this link to **contact your members of Congress** and urge them to protect 21st CCLC funding.

[Contact Congress today to protect 21st CCLC funding.](#)

You can also **learn more** about the proposed cuts and their impact on families by visiting the Afterschool Alliance blog and budget statement. While on this website, you can keep up to date on breaking news around this proposal by registering for the Alliance's next **Policy Pulse** broadcast on Friday, June 13 at 12 PM ET.

Let's raise our voices to ensure that the vital 21st Century Community Learning Center program, which has served tens of thousands of Nebraska students for over two decades, continues to help meet the needs of Nebraska's children, families and communities for many more years to come.

Resources and Opportunities

Catalyst Funding Opportunity from Beyond School Bells

We are excited to announce a new round of **competitive, 2025-26 funding** to support Nebraska's K-12 afterschool and summer Expanded Learning Opportunity (ELO) programs.

Our **Catalyst Funding** is designed for established K-12 ELO programs working to provide high-quality, locally sustainable learning experiences that inspire young people and build the skills they need to become Nebraska's future leaders.

Building on the legacy of our Partner and Leverage Grants, Catalyst Funding is designed to reflect the evolving needs of the field. In addition to core operational support and funding for community-driven innovation, grantees will be part of a statewide ELO learning community supported by BSB. This community will offer:

- Regular opportunities to share best practices
- Coaching and technical assistance
- Virtual and in-person gatherings
- Resources to support long-term sustainability and alignment with statewide goals, including workforce development, literacy, and attendance.

The **RFP will be released on June 20**, with **applications due by August 15**. Funding will run from **October 1, 2025, to August 31, 2026**.

Beyond School Bells will host a virtual webinar **Monday, June 16 at noon (CST)** to provide more details about this new funding opportunity..

Webinar Registration

Young Professionals Leadership Camp



Beyond School Bells is excited to host the **Young Professionals Leadership Camp**—a dynamic and immersive experience designed to inspire the next generation of leaders.

August 6-8, 2025

[Camp Comeca](#), near Cozad, Nebraska

This unique event offers a true camp experience, complete with **bunk-style lodging, lake swimming, and marshmallow roasting around the campfire.**

As a **team-building** opportunity, attendees (high school and college-age staff) should be accompanied by an adult in a leadership role, such as a Site Coordinator or Program Director. This ensures that program leaders and their teams grow together through this hands-on, impactful training.

For details on **lodging, cost, transportation, and registration**, check out our website at <https://beyondschoolbells.org/resources/young-professionals-leadership-camp.html>

Questions? **[Contact Alana Pearson for more information!](#)**

Michelle Arehart Afterschool Program Leader Community Champion Award

Beyond School Bells (BSB) is proud to announce the launch of the Michelle Arehart Afterschool Program Leader Community Champion Award. This award honors the legacy of Michelle Arehart, the longtime director of the Kearney CLC program, whose life was tragically lost in a car accident in fall 2024. Michelle was known for her outstanding leadership, her dedication to youth and families, and her exceptional ability to build strong community partnerships to strengthen her program. The award will recognize one outstanding program leader who exemplifies exceptional leadership, steadfast dedication, and an inspiring commitment to strengthening and connecting their community. Michelle possessed many strengths, but one that truly distinguished her was her exceptional talent for building strong partnerships and engaging the community to enhance her program and drive meaningful outcomes for children, youth, and families.



We invite you to submit a nomination for a deserving afterschool program leader by Friday, June 27! The award will be presented during the 2025 GetConnected: Nebraska's Afterschool Conference on Friday, September 26 in Kearney.

Nomination Form

Nebraska's Summer of Discovery – Full Speed Ahead!



Beyond School Bells' 2024 Summer of Exploration is in full swing across 22 communities. With an additional five community-specific grants supporting summer programs, we're investing more than \$360,000 in youth and community-led projects this season.

From literacy programs (a major focus this year) to outdoor education, field trips, gardening, and family engagement, our grants are sparking hands-on learning across the state. Add in our newest team of five Conservation Management Summer Interns—now fanning out across Nebraska - and it's clear: Summer 2024 is shaping up to be a true Summer of Discovery.

Stay tuned! In future editions, we'll be highlighting some of the inspiring stories and innovative programs unfolding in communities throughout Nebraska.

**2025 GetConnected Afterschool Conference
Call for Workshop & Walk and Talk Proposals - Due June 16**



The 2025 Nebraska GetConnected Afterschool Conference is now accepting proposals for workshops and Walk and Talk tables! This year's conference will be held on Friday, September 26, 2025, at the Younes Conference Center in Kearney, Nebraska, bringing together afterschool professionals, educators, and community partners to share best practices and innovative ideas.

Submit Your Proposal Today!

Freight Farm Internships

Over the last semester, we engaged high school and college student interns to work at our Freight Farm at The Career Academy at SCC Lincoln. The Freight Farm is a shipping container turned hydroponic farm that utilizes vertical grow walls, a high-output seedling station, and water-efficient tanks to sustainably grow large yields of greens for the community. We currently donate produce to the Food Bank of Lincoln and to SCC's and TCA's culinary arts programs.

Within the farm, interns had the opportunity to learn about and practice hydroponic growing and maintenance, while touching on topics related to plant science, chemistry, and local food systems. In addition to helping with hydroponic tasks, they also engaged in service-learning projects where they chose a need in their community, did research on their topic, and then planned an action project utilizing what they've learned at the farm, their research, and their strengths. We plan to utilize their projects for future programming and anticipate more internships to come!



Wallace Foundation Summer Learning Toolkit



Looking for help with summer planning? Check out the Wallace Foundation Summer Learning Toolkit! The Toolkit includes four kinds of resources:

Resources include:

- **Tool:** Customizable resources, e.g., program observations;
- **Sample:** Documents used by five urban districts and their partners, e.g., staff handbooks, position descriptions and enrollment forms;
- **Tip Sheet:** Additional advice from field experts on how to use materials on each topic;
- **Guidance:** For each tool, sample, and tip sheet, an explanation of what it is, why it's important (with connections to research), who can benefit from it and tips for effective use.

In addition, the [Summer Planning Calendar](#) and [Sustainability Tools](#) include detailed companion and facilitation guides with tips to help you develop your planning process.

[Click here](#) to learn more about the National Summer Learning Project and how the Toolkit's materials were developed.

The Results are in! Power of Us Survey



The American Institutes for Research just released results from the *Power of Us Workforce Survey*! The Power of Us Workforce Survey is a national, cross-sector survey aimed at building a baseline understanding of the youth fields workforce—who they are, where they work, what they do, and what they experience on the job and in their careers. Adults in the youth fields work with children and youth in a range of sectors outside the school day, including out-of-school time, before- and afterschool care, summer learning, summer camps, sports, arts-based programming, experiential learning, mentoring, juvenile justice, housing and homelessness services, libraries, museums, and many more.

[Read the Report Now!](#)

Partner Spotlight

Meet Nebraska's 2025 STEM Next Flight Crew Representative



The 2025 Flight Crew of STEM Next is ready for takeoff!

Britney is recent graduate from Crete, Nebraska interested in health and medicine. Her experience in afterschool includes leading Engineering Pathways programming for Crete CLCs and participating in the 2024-25 BSB Youth Leadership Council. As a member of this annual youth ambassador program, Britney will represent Nebraska throughout the year to share her story on regional, state and national stages and inspire greater access to STEM opportunities in afterschool and summer programs.



As part of STEM Next's mission to connect young people to career opportunities, Flight Crew members receive training in leadership development, public speaking, social media, resume-building, and interview preparation, plus connections to mentors and career role models who provide guidance as they pursue their STEM goals. In addition to building their own skills, they serve as ambassadors— sharing their stories to inspire their peers and draw more young people into STEM learning beyond the classroom.

“The Flight Crew proves what's possible when young people are given the tools and a platform to lead,” said Ron Ottinger, Executive Director of STEM Next Opportunity Fund. “These youth are passionate, insightful, and ready to show the country how STEM experiences outside the classroom can change lives.”

[Learn More about Flight Crew](#)

[Learn More about Britney's Story](#)



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