

# Beyond School Bells

2024-2025 Annual Report



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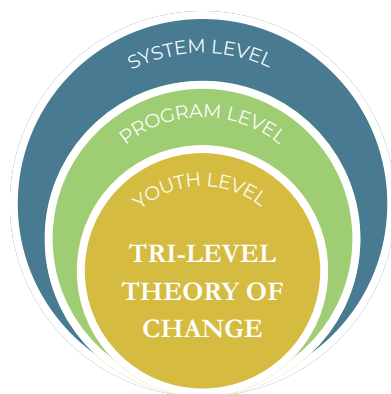
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# Introduction

Beyond School Bells (BSB), Nebraska's Statewide Afterschool Network, is an initiative of the Nebraska Children and Families Foundation (NCFF), whose mission is to create positive change for Nebraska's children through partnerships that support quality, sustainable learning opportunities for youth. The focus of Beyond School Bells is to increase access to expanded learning opportunities (ELOs) for youth in grades K-12 across Nebraska. ELOs occur outside of the regular school day and include hands-on, engaged learning that builds the skills students need for their future.

Beyond School Bells has aligned its impact with the Every Hour Counts Framework, which was developed by a national coalition of expanded learning intermediaries to highlight common outcomes and methods for measuring progress (Every Hour Counts, 2021). This report explores outcomes across all three levels of the framework: system, program, and youth.



- At the **system level**, positive outcomes are achieved through bringing together key stakeholders, supporting continuous improvement, leveraging resources, and advocating for ELOs to ensure sustainability. BSB invests in strengthening the system level largely through its goals of sustainability and policy (described in the figure on page 5). This report outlines the system-level outcomes

accomplished by BSB, including national and statewide partnerships, professional development offerings for out-of-school time (OST) stakeholders, avenues for youth leaders to improve the system, and advocacy efforts.

- At the **program level**, program quality becomes the focus. Characteristics of high-quality programming advanced by BSB include supporting innovative programs that respond to targeted community needs, incorporating youth input in program design, engaging families, and supporting continuous learning efforts. These efforts are encompassed by BSB's goals of quality and strategic programming. This report outlines BSB's strategic investments designed to respond to targeted community needs as well as program-level outcomes achieved through BSB grantees.
- At the **youth level**, positive outcomes for youth are achieved through opportunities for novel and enriching experiences. Such experiences support youth to develop the skills necessary for future success in school and work. BSB's goals of quality and strategic programming directly contribute to positive outcomes at the youth level. This report identifies the number of youth reached through BSB's efforts and describes the skills and learning that youth achieved through participating in OST programs.

Focusing on outcomes across the three levels allows ELO networks to build the foundation for a strong and effective afterschool system. BSB developed a logic model that links program activities to desired outcomes. The logic model anchors BSB's evaluation efforts, guiding targeted data collection and ensuring alignment with overarching goals.

# Beyond School Bells Goals and Logic Model

## MISSION

BSB's mission is to build partnerships that lead to policies and actions at both the state and local levels resulting in more high-quality, locally sustainable afterschool and summer programs serving more Nebraska youth, especially youth living in some of Nebraska's highest need communities.

## ASSUMPTIONS

1

### Responsive and Inclusive Leadership

- Youth Centered
- Community-Led
- Family Engagement
- Partnership Development

2

### Access for All

BSB activities promote access to high-quality ELO programming for all youth and families.

3

### Afterschool as a Profession

To promote the creation and refinement of local and state policies that support and sustain NE's ELO programs.

4

### Active Learning

- Fun
- Hands-On
- Experiential
- Movement Based

5

### Innovation

Innovation is essential to shaping the ELO field's ability to create and implement solutions.

## GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

### Goal 1: Quality

To support continued improvement of ELOs via an ecosystem of partnerships to enable high-quality ELO programs across the state of Nebraska

#### Objectives:

- 1.1 Network – Convene Cross Sector Partnerships
- 1.2 Knowledge Cultivation
- 1.3 Relationships with Local ELO Programs
- 1.4 Youth Voice
- 1.5 Family and Community Engagement
- 1.6 Frameworks
- 1.7 Coaching
- 1.8 Strategic Grants
- 1.9 Curriculum



### Goal 2: Sustainability

To leverage and align partnerships, people, and funding to promote local sustainability of ELOs.

#### Objectives:

- 2.1 Strategic Partnerships
- 2.2 Awareness Building
- 2.3 Tailored Support to ELO Programs
- 2.4 Innovative Solutions
- 2.5 Resources



### Goal 3: Policy

To promote the creation and refinement of local and state policies that support and sustain NE's ELO programs.

#### Objectives:

- 3.1 Policy Oriented Partnerships
- 3.2 Capacity Development
- 3.3 National Policy Trends
- 3.4 Advocacy
- 3.5 Policy Environment



### Goal 4: Strategic Programming

To develop, pilot, refine, disseminate and fund innovative active learning-based ELO programming.

#### Objectives:

- 4.1 Workforce Development and Career Exploration
- 4.2 Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM)
- 4.3 Service Learning and Youth Leadership
- 4.4 Literacy
- 4.5 Collaborative Programming Leadership That Aligns Efforts for Youth Success



## OUTCOMES

### Youth Outcomes

- Engagement & Belonging
- Academic Success & Readiness
- Well-Being
- Safety & Reduced Risk
- Youth Leadership & Civic Engagement

### ELO Outcomes

- Staff Empowerment & Professional Support
- Program Quality & Design
- Relationships & Communication
- Professional Learning & Network Growth

### Statewide Outcomes

- Financial Investment & Expansion
- Public Awareness & Support
- Innovation & ELO Resilience
- Statewide Consistency & Framework Adoption

# Fostering National and Statewide Partnerships

Beyond School Bells  
Goal Alignment



Quality



Sustain



Policy



Programming

## Key National Partnerships

As Nebraska's afterschool network, BSB serves as a connector—like a river channeling national research, cutting-edge resources, best practices, and learning communities across its youth development landscape to enrich and strengthen local programming.

### CHARLES STEWART MOTT FOUNDATION

The foundation's 50-State Afterschool Network is the nation's leading initiative dedicated to supporting and uniting statewide afterschool networks that are committed to establishing high-quality out-of-school time programs for youth in every state. BSB has proudly partnered with the C.S. Mott Foundation for over 20 years, reaping numerous benefits from this relationship, including:

- Access to Mott-supported advocacy materials and research summaries detailing the effectiveness of afterschool programs
- Opportunities to adapt promising practices to fit the needs of Nebraska's youth and families
- Networking with other statewide afterschool networks to learn from their successes and challenges

### AFTERSCHOOL ALLIANCE

This D.C.-based non-profit works with a broad range of organizations and supporters to engage public will and increase public and private investment in after-school program initiatives at the national, state, and local levels. In 2024-2025, this partnership provided:

- Data-driven analysis, including research reports, briefs, and policy updates

- Toolkits aligned with best practices in afterschool programming
- Support on policy activities, including BSB's efforts to engage Nebraska partners in projects that provide students with education credit for OST learning opportunities

### STEM NEXT OPPORTUNITY FUND

BSB's work to expand STEM programming in ELOs has been strengthened by its multi-year partnership with this national STEM-focused foundation. The longstanding partnership has brought national best practices in afterschool STEM programming to Nebraska, supporting local efforts to improve STEM literacy. Additionally, BSB has been part of a national learning community focused on high-quality parent engagement in STEM and has worked with STEM Next on the intersection of STEM and workforce development, an area set for significant growth.

### NATIONAL AFTERSCHOOL ASSOCIATION

In 2025, BSB became a State Affiliate of the National Afterschool Association (NAA), a professional membership organization that focuses on strengthening the ELO field. NAA's mission is to support, develop, and advocate for professionals so that young people can have access to high-quality ELO experiences in OST settings. As a state affiliate, BSB provided free NAA membership to 87 providers as part of registration for the Innovation Invitational. Membership allows access to a resource library, webinars and conferences, discounts and event access, updates from the field, and national initiatives impacting ELO.

*"Simply put, this grant doesn't just support an afterschool program—it supports students' growth, families' stability, and the health of our whole community."*

~ BSB Partners Grantee

## Key State-Level Partnerships

These partnerships strengthen alignment across Nebraska's education, workforce, and youth-serving systems, ensuring that expanded learning opportunities are integrated into broader state priorities and accessible to communities across urban and rural Nebraska.

### NEBRASKA DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION (NDE)

BSB collaborates closely with NDE to support high-quality expanded learning opportunities aligned with statewide education priorities. As the state agency responsible for administering the 21st Century Community Learning Centers (21st CCLC) program and other federal and state education initiatives, NDE is a critical partner in advancing access, quality, and sustainability across Nebraska. This partnership provided:

- Alignment with statewide 21st CCLC implementation, monitoring, and continuous improvement efforts and outcomes
- Joint exploration of innovative approaches, such as career exploration, Farm to School, literacy acceleration, and credit-bearing OST learning
- Data-sharing and evaluation coordination to strengthen program quality and outcomes
- Collaboration on professional development and statewide convenings for ELO leaders

### NEBRASKA DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES (DHHS)

BSB partners with DHHS to support the healthy development of children and youth during out-of-school hours. Through alignment with child well-being, behavioral health, and prevention initiatives, this partnership recognizes expanded learning programs as essential community-based supports for families. This collaboration provided:

- Connection to child well-being and prevention-focused initiatives



- Opportunities to align ELO programs with behavioral health and youth support strategies
- Cross-agency dialogue around strengthening local ELO programs for children and families
- Coordination to ensure programs understand and navigate state health and safety requirements

### NEBRASKA EXTENSION 4-H

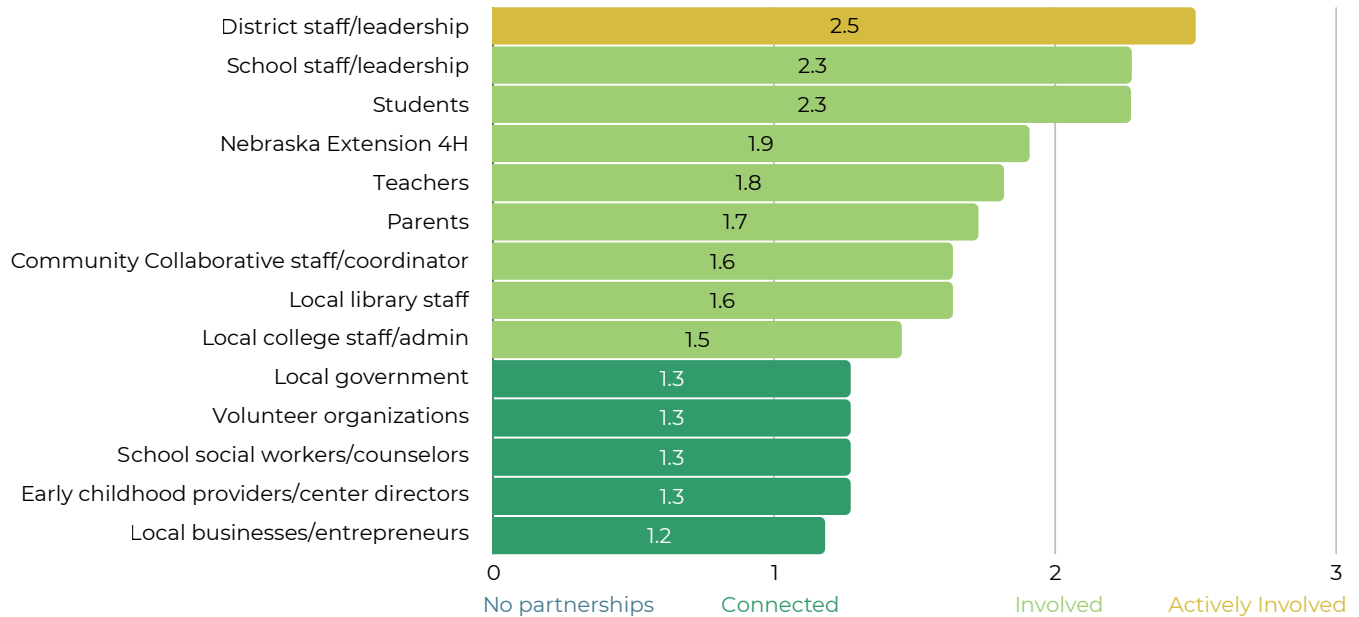
Through its partnership with Nebraska Extension 4-H, BSB has strengthened hands-on learning opportunities for youth across the state, particularly in rural communities. Rooted in positive youth development and experiential learning, 4-H brings deep expertise in STEM, agriculture, leadership, and civic engagement that complements afterschool and summer programming. This collaboration provided:

- Access to research-based STEM and experiential learning curricula
- Professional development and training opportunities for local program staff
- Collaboration on workforce-connected learning experiences, including near-peer youth leadership models and trainings such as Click2Science
- Expanded reach into rural communities through Extension's statewide network

## Program Partnerships

### STRONG PARTNERSHIPS WITH DISTRICTS, SCHOOLS, AND STUDENTS

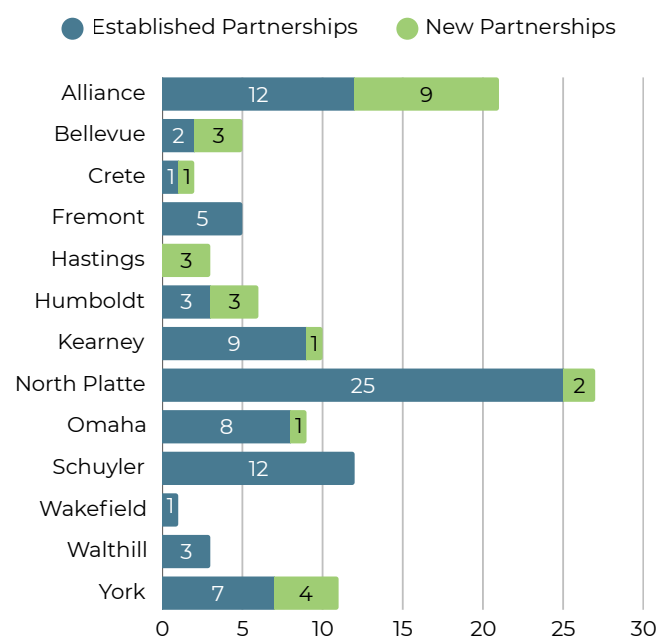
Programs supported by the BSB Partners Grant (n=11) reported on the strength of their partnerships with multiple stakeholder types using a four-point scale (0=No Partnerships, 3=Actively Involved). Given that many programs are embedded in a school district, the presence of strong district and school partnerships is not surprising. Programs also reported strong connections to students, UNL Extension, teachers, and parents. The chart below shows grantees' average strength rating for a range of partner types. Partners with an average strength rating of at least 1.0 are shown in the graph and grouped by color according to strength level.



Other rated partnership types included local law enforcement [Mean=0.9], local churches/faith communities [0.8], school custodial staff [0.8], local media [0.7], local organizations/501(c)(3) [0.7], recreation/fitness centers [0.7], social service providers [0.7], ESU staff [0.6], health care providers [0.6], retired educators [0.5], and Chamber of Commerce members [0.4].

### SECURING RESOURCES FOR SUMMER PROGRAMS IN NEBRASKA

Summer of Exploration grantees leveraged their partnerships with local organizations to secure supplies, materials, and field trips that provide hands-on learning to participating students. BSB collected information on grantees' continued involvement with established community partners and their efforts to increase program sustainability by developing new partnerships. Grantees reported engaging with a total of **88 established community partners** and **27 new partners** for their 2025 summer programs. Grantees strengthened existing partnerships by intentionally communicating with and requesting feedback from partners, as well as highlighting partner contributions on social media, at events, and in publicity materials.



Partnership data was unavailable for Cozad and Norfolk

# Bringing Together OST Program Stakeholders

Beyond School Bells  
Goal Alignment



Quality



Sustain



Policy



Programming

## INNOVATION INVITATIONAL

In March 2025, BSB hosted its third annual Innovation Invitational conference. The two-day event offered a mix of ELO-focused presentations, discussion sessions, and hands-on activities to **284 attendees**, including afterschool and summer program staff, school district administrators, community partners, and informal educators from across the state.

The conference theme was **Innovating Amidst Uncertainty**. Attendees had opportunities to connect and learn from one another through hands-on workshops and informal networking time. Conference highlights included:

- 33 workshops and breakout sessions
- 3 Keynote Addresses:
  - *Exploring and Promoting Purpose via Afterschool* by Dr. Patrick Hill, Washington University St. Louis
  - *Whole Child, Whole Life* by author Stephanie Malia Krauss
  - *Putting the Pieces Together* by Jeff Cole, Beyond School Bells

*"The time between sessions was great for networking and I made some new connections. The sessions were relevant for anyone and I see where I can make improvements in my team and events."*

~ Innovation Invitational Participant

*"I always come home feeling inspired! It is so refreshing to see so many good things happening across the state! My favorite thing overall was the student panels, they were tremendous kids! I had several amazing breakout session experiences. "*

~ Innovation Invitational Participant

- Featured panels exploring the youth experience at programs across the state, as well as the challenges faced by and strategies for supporting Nebraska youth.
- A *Whole Child, Whole Life* coaching session with Stephanie Malia Krauss

## GETCONNECTED CONFERENCE

BSB continues to partner with the Nebraska Department of Education's 21st Century Community Learning Centers and Nebraska Extension on the GetConnected Conference, which takes place annually in September. The 2024 conference, held in Kearney, supported 217 registered participants. In line with the year's theme, "Whole Child," the event engaged attendees with keynote addresses and workshops focused on topics such as leadership skills, building relationships, integrating literacy into STEM learning activities, managing challenging behaviors, and engaging middle and high school youth.

GetConnected participants (n=43) provided feedback about their experiences.

- **95%** of survey respondents agreed that the conference provided them with **ideas and resources they can use**.
- **86%** of respondents reported **effective opportunities for making connections**.

# Youth Leadership in the System

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Goal Alignment



Quality



Sustain



Policy



Programming

## YOUTH LEADERSHIP COUNCIL

Youth Leadership Council (YLC) was created to amplify the voice of students in Nebraska's afterschool and summer programs by engaging them to identify and propose solutions to challenges faced in their programs. The 2024-2025 council, which met in the fall and spring semesters, was made up of high school students who had been significantly impacted by afterschool programming.

## YLC PANEL AT THE 2025 INNOVATION INVITATIONAL

During Youth Night at the Innovation Invitational, YLC hosted a panel consisting of four high school students from the cohort, who volunteered to share their perspectives of afterschool programming as high school staff. Students shared what they enjoyed most about their work, what they learned from working with kids, and what they wished adults knew about growing up today. Several program staff who attended the panel reflected that hearing



from the students made them realize how they had underestimated what high school staff could accomplish in their programs. Some attendees reported eagerness to bring new ideas back to their programs.

## 2024-2025 YLC COHORT

- 8 students participated for the whole year
- 7 afterschool programs were represented

## PROJECT TOPICS

- Staff training to support special education students
- Movie night voting
- Developing training and an onboarding video for new high school staff
- Creating plans for staff response to student behaviors
- Bringing back field trips in the summers

## DESIGN STUDIOS

Design Studios, also called Design Sprints, are iterative design processes led by BSB, afterschool program staff, and industry professionals. These sessions bring together high school and college students around a common topic to create an engaging, fun, and hands-on curriculum, hosted on the BSB website, for use in OST programs throughout Nebraska. Topics include ACT test preparation, aviation, and entrepreneurship. Participants gained valuable academic and workforce skills during the planning process.

## JANUARY 2025 DESIGN SPRINT

- 9 college students participated
- 5 students participated in the Engineering design studio
- 4 students participated in the Energy/Environmental design studio

# Policy Work

Beyond School Bells  
Goal Alignment



Quality



Sustain



Policy



Programming

BSB works at both the state and community levels to educate people about the importance of afterschool and summer learning and to advocate for local and state policies that support and sustain this critical work. Examples of BSB's policy efforts during the reporting period included:

- Cosponsoring special events for elected officials at the Capitol, such as STEM luncheons that highlight specific examples of the impact of afterschool and summer learning programs to address priority needs in Nebraska
- Facilitating meetings between State Senators, their staff, and rural afterschool program staff to educate policymakers about the impact of ELO programs
- Providing an advocacy toolkit with national, state, and local messaging resources that afterschool program staff can use to educate local officials and other stakeholders
- Hosting annual ELO awareness weeks in the State Capitol's Rotunda, where information about afterschool and summer programs is displayed for policymakers and visitors. BSB also sponsored special proclamations for ELO-related events, such as Lights On Afterschool and Summer Learning Week.
- Through continued engagement with the C.S. Mott-funded 50 State Afterschool Network and the Afterschool Alliance, BSB accessed timely federal updates, shared field-informed insights with national partners, and supported coordinated messaging that elevated the importance of OST programs.



- Hosting the Advocacy Action Room at the 2025 GetConnected Conference, which provided resources for connecting with elected officials, advocacy materials, and one-pagers communicating the value of afterschool
- Funding an oversample of Nebraska families connected to the America After 3 p.m. national survey, with the oversample focusing on rural families. Parents from 428 households participated. Responses showed high demand for afterschool programs, yet access remains limited.

Nebraska families responding to the America After 3 p.m. survey reported the following benefits of afterschool programs for parents:



Boosts productivity  
(97%)



Leads to less stress  
(95%)



Positively impacts  
overall well-being  
(95%)



Helps keep their job  
or work more hours  
(89%)

Afterschool Alliance, Edge Research, & New York Life Foundation. (2025). Afterschool in Nebraska. In America After 3PM. <https://afterschoolalliance.org/documents/AA3PM-2025/NE-AA3PM-2025-Fact-Sheet.pdf>

# BSB Grants Providing Programmatic Support

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Goal Alignment



Quality



Sustain



Policy

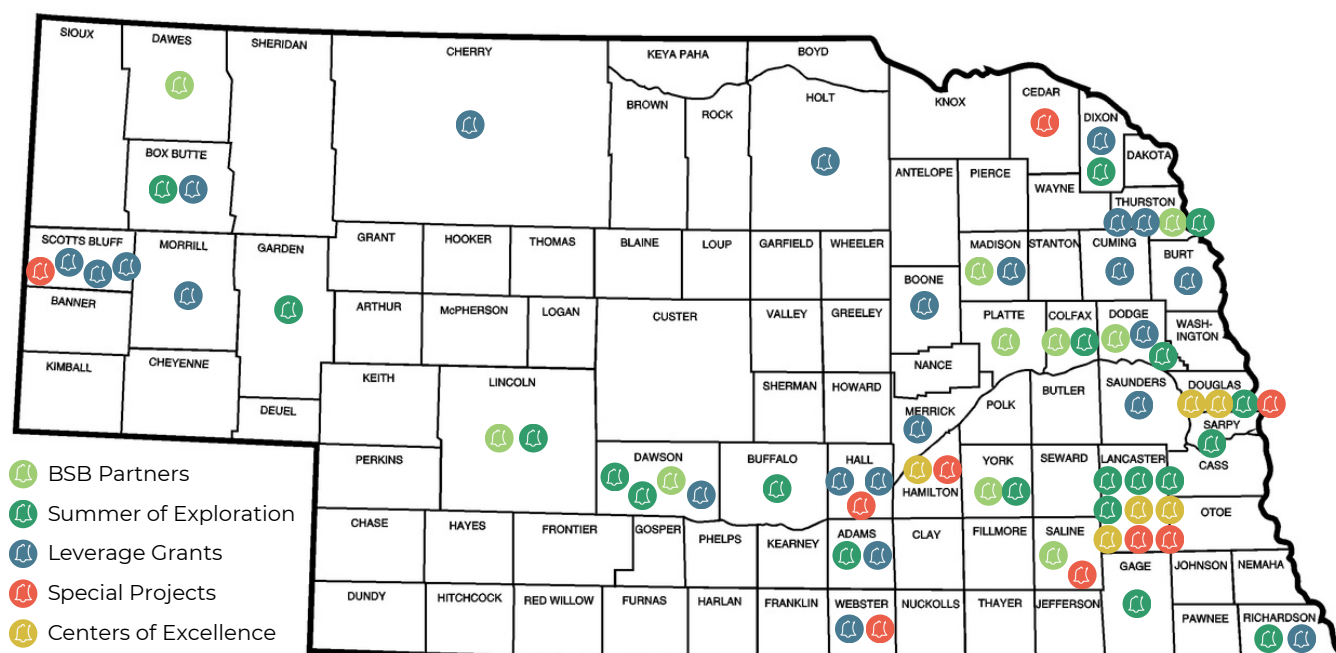


Programming

Beyond Schools Bells makes strategic investments to ensure that Nebraska's ELO system is addressing targeted community needs through high-quality programming. These investments are designed to

encourage quality practices such as incorporating youth input, engaging families, training staff, and supporting continuous improvement efforts. Funds are distributed to ELO programs throughout the state. In addition to providing technical assistance, BSB works collaboratively with local ELO staff to align funding expectations to the local context.

## BSB SUPPORTED GRANTEES FROM 33 COUNTIES IN 2024-2025



## Overview of Grants

**BSB awarded \$1,748,048 to ELO programs in 2024-2025**

| Grant /<br>Program Strand                                | \$<br>Invested | Description                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           | Outcome Level |         |       |
|----------------------------------------------------------|----------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------|---------|-------|
|                                                          |                |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       | System        | Program | Youth |
| BSB Partners Grant                                       | \$559,012      | The grant supports schools and districts in creating engaging, inspiring ELO programs. Introductory grants serve as an entry point for new programs.                                                                                                                                                                  | ✓             | ✓       |       |
| Centers of Excellence                                    | \$127,800      | The grant supports established organizations with expertise in their fields in developing high-quality resources to share statewide.                                                                                                                                                                                  | ✓             |         |       |
| Design Studios                                           | \$5,400        | Design Studios brings together high school and college students to create fun, engaging, and hands-on curriculum for use in Nebraska's afterschool or summer programs.                                                                                                                                                | ✓             |         | ✓     |
| Engineering Pathways                                     | \$64,688       | Students in grantee programs explore engineering design thinking, near-peer mentorship, and postsecondary pathways and careers.                                                                                                                                                                                       |               | ✓       | ✓     |
| Environmental Conservation Action Program (E-CAP)        | \$18,283       | E-CAP is a programming hub from which BSB coordinates, supports, and expands environment and conservation-oriented learning experiences. GROW NE, Freight Farms, and City Build are three key program strands.                                                                                                        |               | ✓       | ✓     |
| Full-Service Community Schools (FSCS)                    | \$9,932        | FSCS supports community-based programs in engaging youth and parents to shape services, strengthen protective factors, and improve program quality. It funds family engagement events, local partnerships, and limited on-site supports, such as health screenings.                                                   |               | ✓       |       |
| Leverage Grants                                          | \$671,000      | Leverage grants provide funding and technical assistance that strengthen ELO in rural Nebraska. Priority was given to newer programs and those in high-need communities.                                                                                                                                              | ✓             | ✓       | ✓     |
| STEM Ambassadors and Think, Make, Create Labs (TMC Labs) | \$11,549       | STEM Ambassadors broadens access to high-quality STEM learning experiences by supporting near-peer mentorship models and equipping programs with the training, materials, and support they need to deliver impactful activities. TMC labs are mobile labs that encourage youth to tinker, explore, and problem-solve. |               | ✓       | ✓     |
| STEM Family Engagement                                   | \$37,585       | This grant provides funding that supports programs in developing intentional family engagement plans.                                                                                                                                                                                                                 |               | ✓       |       |
| Summer of Exploration Grant Packages (SoE)               | \$237,674      | SoE supports summer programs in providing student-centered, hands-on learning experiences. It funds implementation of experiential learning, career exploration, STEM engagement, and family involvement.                                                                                                             |               | ✓       | ✓     |
| Youth Leadership Camp                                    | \$2,625        | The camp is a facilitated youth leadership experience focused on building trust, communication, and teamwork through interactive workshops and hands-on challenges.                                                                                                                                                   |               |         | ✓     |
| Youth Videography                                        | \$2,500        | The program provides students with videography and storytelling skills that they hone by creating mini-documentaries.                                                                                                                                                                                                 |               |         | ✓     |

## Responding to Targeted Community Needs

### WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT AND CAREER EXPLORATION PROJECTS

ELOs play a vital role in preparing young people for the workforce. BSB invests in programming and experiences designed to spark curiosity about future careers and build critical employability skills, opening doors to postsecondary and workforce success.

The **Engineering Pathways Project** concluded in Spring 2025 after engaging nearly 300 rural youth in high-quality, career-connected engineering experiences. Using a near-peer learning model, high school and college-aged leaders guided elementary and middle school youth through hands-on STEM activities designed to spark curiosity, build confidence, and connect students to future career pathways.

The **Environmental Conservation Action Program** (E-CAP), launched in 2021, is a programming hub from which BSB coordinates, supports, and expands environment and conservation-oriented learning experiences for NE youth. Based on research showing that young people care about the environment and want to act



on their environmental concerns, E-CAP creates intentional connections that inspire, excite, and engage students through gardening and food systems experiences, local resource management, and educational and career opportunities.

In 2025, BSB launched a new initiative in partnership with NDE to boost career development for boys in the **Health, Education, and Literacy** fields (**HEAL**). This initiative responds to the lack of access that many boys experience when it comes to high-quality, engaging opportunities that introduce them to these career paths and help them imagine a future in these vital sectors.

### FOCUS ON IMPROVING LITERACY

Aligning with statewide goals to improve literacy proficiency by 3rd grade, the **BSB Summer of Reading Exploration (SoRE) pilot** was designed to address summer reading loss, foster a love of reading, and strengthen literacy ecosystems through innovative summer programming and family engagement. Bookstands were key fixtures at many programs. These grab-and-go stands allowed participants to freely choose books that matched their reading levels and interests. Programs encouraged students to take home books for extended reading time, and staff offered encouragement to browse and guidance in selecting books that provided level-appropriate challenge.

*“[The E-CAP trip] also solidified the fact that wildlife conservation is what I want to do in my adult life. I’m really grateful for the opportunity to do this with you all!”*

*“There’s a lot of conservation opportunities in Nebraska and I think we don’t expose kids who are fascinated with their wildlife to opportunities or careers like this in school.”*

~ E-CAP Conservation Interns

# Youth Input

Beyond School Bells  
Goal Alignment



Quality



Sustain



Policy



Programming

Beyond School Bells recognizes that Nebraska's youth are essential partners in shaping high-quality ELO programs. By actively seeking feedback through surveys, brainstorming activities, advisory councils, and other channels, BSB ensures programs consistently incorporate student voices into program development and improvement.

## Methods

BSB provides tools and processes for programs to collect feedback from youth. Survey administration is one of the primary tools for understanding students' experience in BSB-supported activities. By collecting demographic information, open-ended responses, and agreement ratings for statements targeting project objectives, BSB captures information about participating students' programmatic experiences and skill development. Beyond surveys, Youth Brainstorming sheets encourage students to analyze and communicate their interests and learning goals. ELO programs' student advisory teams provide ongoing forums where youth can influence OST practices. Together,



these approaches ensure that Nebraska youth have meaningful opportunities to shape their programs. The following examples demonstrate BSB's focus on youth voice as a tool for student engagement.

- Eight high school students employed by OST programs worked throughout the year to impact their programs as part of the Youth Leadership Council. In addition to proposing projects to improve their programs, students reflected on their projects, rated their leadership skills, and shared what they enjoyed most about the council. All students rated their experience as positive.
- In spring and summer 2025, 24 afterschool programs in 14 Nebraska communities collected feedback from 228 youth regarding their interests in OST activities. Using **Youth Brainstorming Sheets**, students identified their top three activities, rated their interest in them using a thermometer graphic, and suggested new experiences. An anonymous collection method was used to ensure honest input, helping to align future programming with student preferences.

### Top Three Past Experiences

- Experiential
- Sports
- STEM

### Top Three Thermometer Ratings

- Time with friends (9.1)\*
- Field Trips (8.6)
- Cooking (7.6)

### Sampling of Student Suggestions for Clubs/Opportunities

- *Experiential*: field trips to the zoo, attending football camps, horseback riding, etc.
- *Sports*: swimming, football, volleyball, riding bikes, rock walls, etc.
- *STEM*: learning about space, robotics, math clubs, etc.

\* Out of 10 points

- College and high school students participating in the **STEM Ambassadors** project gained exposure to STEM fields and future STEM careers in their hometowns by teaching afterschool clubs and interning with STEM-focused businesses or organizations. Pre- and post-surveys completed by five college and high school participants measured changes in their understanding of STEM and associated careers, as well as their confidence in leading youth activities. Students reported increases in all areas in the post-survey.

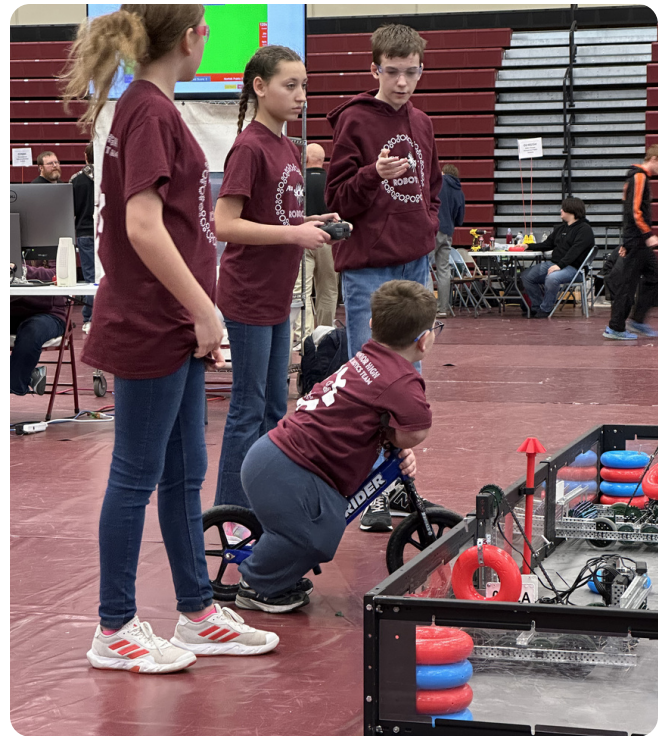
*“Being able to try different fields of STEM with youth and see their interest in the subjects has also sparked my interest on some occasions.”*

~ STEM Ambassadors Participant

- The **Engineering Pathway** project immerses students in engineering through hands-on projects and near-mentorship. Younger students engage in fun STEM activities, while high school and college students, guided by STEM majors at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, lead clubs. A total of 144 students in grades 1-8 completed surveys assessing their views on engineering projects, their attitudes toward engineering careers, and their self-perceptions. BSB provided each participating grantee with survey results so they could adjust activities to increase student engagement and skill attainment.

*“I always knew I wanted to help people...The Engineering Pathway Project has made me more confident in pursuing what I want to do.”*

~ Engineering Pathways Older Youth Participant



- College and high school students participating in **Freight Farms**—an experiential internship focused on sustainable farming and local food systems—shared their favorite aspects of the program and suggestions for future improvements through a post-survey (n=5).
- BSB supported **student advisory teams** at OST programs through its core grant packages. Grantees could use BSB funds to provide shared meals or other incentives to encourage youth participation. Over the 2024-25 school year, 73 K-12th-grade students across six programs participated in five meetings.

## Program Impacts

Collecting youth input ensures that the ELOs BSB supports remain responsive, engaging, and relevant to the needs of Nebraska’s young people. By consistently incorporating student perspectives through surveys, brainstorming, and advisory teams, BSB empowers youth to shape their own experiences—leading to stronger programs and more meaningful opportunities for all participants.

# Family Engagement

Beyond School Bells  
Goal Alignment



Quality



Sustain



Policy



Programming

BSB encourages programs to develop family engagement (FE) plans and host events that involve families. Nebraska 21st CCLC grantees are required to hold at least four family engagement events per year. When working with these programs, BSB layers funds for items not purchasable with federal dollars, such as food at events. BSB FE coaching includes moving events toward active parent/child/staff co-learning structures, often around STEM.

## BSB PARTNERS GRANT

A primary goal of the Partners Grant is to promote greater ELO awareness and build support for high-quality, sustainable, community-based ELO programs by supporting programs' increased use of outreach strategies and events. Grantees held 42 family engagement events during the 2024-2025 reporting period, 28 of which involved STEM activities. Programs reported that BSB funds directly supported 25 of their family engagement events. When asked about the grant's impact on family engagement, 100% of responding programs either agreed or strongly agreed that they could engage more families because of BSB funding.



## GRANTEES USED IN-PERSON AND VIRTUAL OUTREACH STRATEGIES

Programs reported using a number of strategies to engage and improve communication with families. The most frequently reported strategies were:

- Conversations with caregivers at pick-up and drop-off times
- Family engagement events
- School communication apps
- Sending notes about programming

## STEM FAMILY ENGAGEMENT

BSB provided STEM Family Engagement support and funding to six programs. Five programs engaged in the strand as an optional part of the Partners grant, and one Nebraska school district was awarded a standalone STEM FE grant. In addition to targeted support from BSB, grantees had access to tools and resources, such as the STEM Family Engagement Planning Tool\*, for use at professional development or planning meetings. The five Partners programs receiving STEM FE support reported on their activities in 2024-2025. **BSB funds supported 12 STEM Family Engagement events** by enabling programs to market the events and to purchase food and materials. Of the four grantees who rated their satisfaction with the STEM FE portion of the Partners Grant, three were very satisfied, and one was satisfied.

In partnership with Nebraska Extension 4-H, BSB helps families connect through fun, engaging STEM learning by providing take-home STEM backpacks containing books and materials needed to complete STEM learning activities as a family. Backpacks were available in 29 Nebraska counties and were checked out 1,160 times in 2024-2025. This marks an increase of 806% from 128 checkouts in 2023-2024 and 2,662% from 42 checkouts in 2022-2023.

\*<https://stemnext.org/stem-family-engagement-planning-tool/>

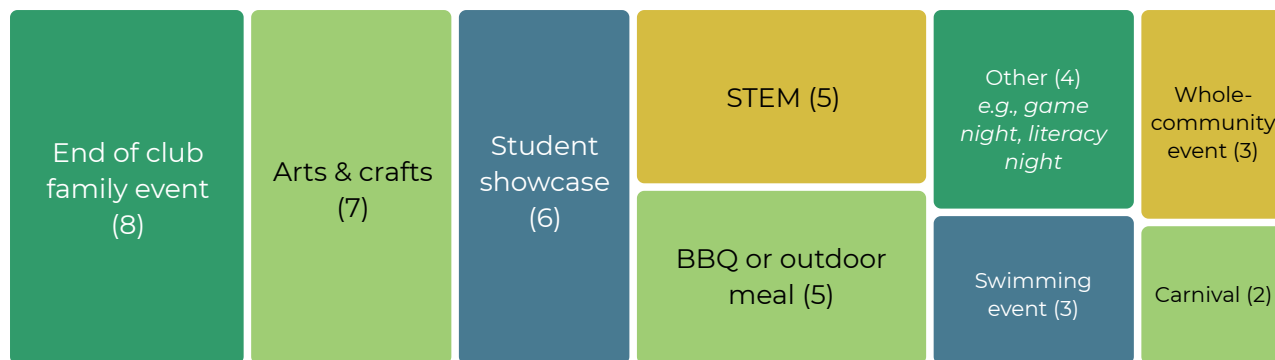
## LEVERAGE GRANTS

**Most Leverage grantees reported hosting at least one family engagement event (72%).** Event themes and activities included STEM, games, holidays, and student performances or showcases. Most grantees reported that the funds they received through the Leverage grant helped them to increase their levels of parent engagement. Programs' indicators of improved engagement included more caregiver visits during or after programming hours,

and former students returning to volunteer. Many programs noted that the **Leverage grant funds allowed them to host more consistent family engagement events.** One grantee shared that funding from BSB enabled them to hire additional high school staff, thereby strengthening near-peer connections and boosting student enthusiasm. As a result, more parents visited the program, learned about the programming, and connected with program staff.

### SUMMER OF EXPLORATION FEATURED A VARIETY OF FAMILY EVENTS

With warmer weather and reduced competition with school activities, summer is a prime time for OST programs to offer events for families and the larger community. Summer of Exploration grantees (n=19) reported hosting **56 family engagement events**, with BSB funds supporting 23 events. Family engagement event themes included:



*"We probably would not have even thought about planning and hosting a family engagement event without the encouragement and availability of BSB funds. Our budget would not have allowed us to purchase the books for the families to read or the food we offered, so BSB funds made this event possible."*

*"We got so much positive feedback on being able to offer the reading room to our families this summer. We were able to reach so many people with so many opportunities to read. Our students loved the comfy seating!"*

~ Summer of Exploration Grantees

# Developing and Retaining Quality Staff

Beyond School Bells  
Goal Alignment



Quality



Sustain



Policy



Programming

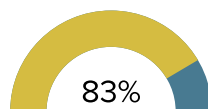
To provide older youth with early work experience and create entry points into the field, BSB invests in numerous opportunities for high school and college-aged youth to gain professional experiences leading and supporting OST programming.

## Older Youth Staff

BSB recognizes the impact of near-peer relationships on younger students attending OST programs and on older youth staff. Through these relationships, younger youth learn from slightly older students who may have had similar experiences in their schools or programs. Older youth gain valuable experience in leadership, classroom management, curriculum design, and public speaking.

Older youth employed at programs supported by the Leverage, Partners, and Summer of Exploration grants often held roles that provided frequent opportunities to build relationships and interact with participants. Typical responsibilities for high school and college-aged staff across grant-supported programs included facilitating activities or lessons, co-creating clubs, facilitating check-in and check-out, engaging with families, and providing support to other staff members as needed. Multiple grantees reported that BSB funding enabled them to begin employing and training older youth or to increase the number of older youth on staff.

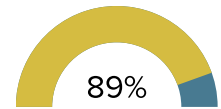
**83%** of reporting Leverage programs employed high school or college students. Grantees employed a combined total of **104 high school students and 26 college students**.



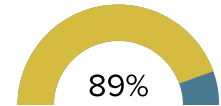
89% of BSB Partners grantees employed older youth staff.

Programs employed **94 high**

**school students and 168 college students** during the 2024-2025 reporting period.



**89%** of the reporting Summer of Exploration grantees employed older youth staff.



## OLDER YOUTH MENTORSHIP

Some BSB grant programs specifically focused on mentorship opportunities for older youth staff. Summer of Exploration grantees facilitated mentorship by pairing new and older youth staff with older, experienced staff members to facilitate clubs and activities. Programs often matched students with mentors based on interests and strengths, structured opportunities for check-ins and goal-setting, and shared successes with the staff.

The Engineering Pathways program engaged 14 high school students and one college student as program leaders. These leaders guided elementary and middle school youth through hands-on STEM activities designed to spark curiosity, build confidence, and connect students to future career pathways. In addition to mastering new content knowledge provided by program facilitators, the older youth leading engineering activities received targeted guidance and feedback in teaching strategies, leadership, and curriculum design.

## YOUTH STAFF SUPPORT CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT

Through Centers of Excellence, BSB supported the development of pilot resources, toolkits, and curricula specifically designed for youth staff to implement in ELO programs. Through this process, high school and college-aged staff gained confidence in their ability to lead afterschool programming while also contributing to the continuous improvement process. The curriculum

and training resources piloted covered topics such as trade skills (electrical and welding), food systems, agriculture, and science discovery.

## Building Strong Relationships

One of BSB's primary goals is to provide Nebraska students with supportive OST environments where they feel respected, welcomed, and safe taking risks with new or unfamiliar ELO activities. Developing staff competency in areas such as behavior management and engagement strategies contributes to improvements in overall program climate. BSB carried themes from Stephanie Malia Krauss's book,

*Whole Child, Whole Life*, into the 2024-2025 surveys administered to students from Leverage Group B\* programs. Surveys (N=995) revealed that **students had positive relationships with staff, felt safe at their programs, and took pride in their experiences**. Most surveyed K-2 students (83%) felt that program staff liked them. Students in grades 3-5, on average, agreed that teachers at their programs listen to what kids have to say (M=3.40, 1=Not at All True, 4=Completely True), and students in grades 6-12 agreed that adults liked them (M=3.12) and that they felt proud to be part of their programs (M=3.26).

### PROGRAMS USED GRANT FUNDS TO DEVELOP STAFF CAPACITY

Grantees often used BSB funds to enhance their professional development (PD) activities. Partners and Leverage grantees reported on their PD efforts for 2024-2025, as depicted in the charts below. Partners programs reported that staff participated in a total of **1,598 professional development hours** during the 2024-2025 reporting period. Multiple programs highlighted improvements related to grant-supported PD opportunities, including better-prepared staff, safer and more welcoming program environments, and staff reporting greater feelings of support.

Leverage Group B\* grantee programs were required to participate in individualized coaching and group PD offered by BSB, which included one-on-one coaching sessions and virtual webinars.

| Partners Grantees (n=11)                                                                                                                                                                                                                               |    |      | Leverage grantees (n=18)                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                |    |     |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----|------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----|-----|
| Staff travel and/or attendance at in-state conferences                                                                                                                                                                                                 | 11 | 100% | School district or ESU-supported trainings                                                                                                                                                                                                                              | 13 | 72% |
| Meals during staff PD meetings                                                                                                                                                                                                                         | 10 | 91%  | Safety trainings                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        | 12 | 67% |
| Staff team-building activities                                                                                                                                                                                                                         | 10 | 91%  | Attendance at GetConnected                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              | 9  | 50% |
| Celebration and recognition for staff                                                                                                                                                                                                                  | 9  | 82%  | Staff team-building activities                                                                                                                                                                                                                                          | 9  | 50% |
| Regular staff PD meetings                                                                                                                                                                                                                              | 9  | 82%  | Specific skill trainings                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                | 9  | 50% |
| Other professional development activities reported by Partners grantees included safety trainings (45%), specific skill trainings, such as CPR (18%), staff travel and/or attendance at out-of-state conferences (9%), and kick-off celebrations (9%). |    |      | Other activities reported by Leverage programs included attendance at Quarterly Regional Connections (39%) and monthly virtual webinars (33%), required DHHS trainings (22%), attendance at other in-state conferences (17%), and Better Kid Care online modules (17%). |    |     |

\*Leverage Group B programs received Leverage Grants of \$25,000 or more, plus individualized coaching and technical assistance from BSB. They were distinguished from Group A, which consisted of Leverage grantees also receiving funds and technical assistance from the Nebraska 21<sup>st</sup> Century Community Learning Centers program.

## Students Served in 2024-2025

**8,949** students directly served by BSB grants and initiatives

Beyond School Bell's funding, programming initiatives, and targeted technical assistance directly served a total of **8,949 unique Nebraska students at 53 afterschool and summer programs** during the 2024-2025 reporting period. Within the direct service grants, 6,231 students were in grades K-5 (71%) and 2,572 were in grades 6-12 (29%).\* Across these OST programs, students were exposed to novel experiences and hands-on learning. Activities included STEM, literacy, and leadership opportunities. Beyond School Bells' funding and programming initiatives sometimes provide multiple opportunities for the same youth at a site. The chart below reports the number of students served by reporting grantees within each grant type. The counts represent unique students, except where noted.



| Grant                  | Students Served | Service Period                      |
|------------------------|-----------------|-------------------------------------|
| BSB Partners Grant     | <b>5401</b>     | 2024-2025 School Year & Summer 2025 |
| Summer of Exploration  | <b>1562**</b>   | Summer 2025                         |
| Leverage Grants        | <b>2210</b>     | 2024-2025 School Year & Summer 2025 |
| Engineering Pathways   | <b>195</b>      | 2024-2025 School Year               |
| STEM Family Engagement | <b>2910</b>     | 2024-2025 School Year & Summer 2025 |
| Centers of Excellence  | <b>1048**</b>   | 2024-2025 School Year & Summer 2025 |

**17,518** students indirectly served through support provided to CLCs

**Beyond School Bells and Nebraska 21st Century Learning Centers (21st CCLCs):** Through its partnership with the Nebraska Department of Education, BSB provides coaching, technical assistance, and a suite of programming and professional development resources available to all Nebraska 21st CCLC sites. Supporting 21st CCLC indirectly served 17,518 students at 136 sites during the 2024-2025 school year and 6,156 students in Summer 2025.

\*Demographic information, including grade levels, was not available for some participants.

\*\*Due to the data collection methods for these projects, there is the potential for some duplicate reporting of students who transferred between sites or attended multiple camps or activities facilitated by the Centers of Excellence.

# Youth Outcomes in Skill Building and Learning

Beyond School Bells  
Goal Alignment



Quality



Sustain



Policy



Programming

Central to Beyond School Bells' youth outcomes are opportunities for academic growth and career readiness, provided in a safe environment where students feel a sense of belonging. These experiences help students develop essential skills and knowledge for the future.

## ENGINEERING PATHWAYS HIGHLIGHTS LEADERSHIP AND ENGINEERING

The Engineering Pathways (EP) project showed that OST workforce development programs foster leadership, spark curiosity, and build engineering awareness among both older youth leaders and younger youth participants. Surveys showed that the program positively impacted students' confidence and interest in engineering.

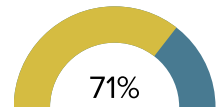
Participants reported learning about engineering careers and forming social connections. They also indicated that the EP leaders helped them to see themselves as future engineers. Students in grades 1-4 reported confidence in their abilities to tackle hard tasks, found engineering fun, and saw it as a possible career. Students in Grades 5-8 reported that they believed they could succeed when they tried and didn't give up easily.

## SUMMER OF EXPLORATION ENCOURAGES GROWTH IN LITERACY

The Summer of Exploration grant package offered programs the opportunity to apply for funds specifically related to literacy improvement in summer programming. This funding strand, Summer of Reading Exploration (SoRE), supported a total of 14 grantees. Eleven grantees reported on their student attendance for SoRE 2025. These

grantees served 863 students, with six sites reporting that they served more than 70 students each. Of the 11 reporting programs, 10 logged a total of 95,357 reading minutes, which was an average of 3 hours and 1 minute for each of their 528 students. The programs featured different activities designed to encourage students to see themselves as readers and foster shared reading environments, including designated reading times, shared reading sessions, and the use of book stands.

Of the 97 families who provided feedback about SoRE, 71% reported that



**the program encouraged their students to read more than usual during the summer.**

Along with promoting reading literacy, Arnold Community Learning Center developed a literacy program that included staff reading excerpts from various texts, movement challenges, and guiding students in transforming these experiences into adventure stories, which were then showcased to caregivers.

## LEVERAGE GRANTEE STUDENTS USE LEARNING LATER

Programs in the Leverage Grant Group B received tailored coaching and technical support from Beyond School Bells during the grant period. BSB surveyed students in these programs to assess the impact of grants on the 10 Whole Life Practices outlined in *Whole Child, Whole Life* by Stephanie Malia Krauss. Their responses highlight students' growth in academics, social skills, and overall development.

- Among the 182 students in grades K-2 surveyed, the majority (84%) expressed enjoyment of engaging and fun activities, highlighting the program's emphasis on skill-building and positive learning experiences.

- Students in grades 3-5 (n=115) expressed confidence that they will apply what they learn when they are older.
- Students in grades 6-12 (n=50) felt proud to be part of their programs, noting that the activities and experiences challenged them in positive ways, introduced new ideas, and that they expect to use the knowledge gained from these experiences in the future.

Overall, the survey responses demonstrated that the programs foster enjoyment, skill development, and confidence among students of all ages, highlighting their positive impact on participants' futures.

### FREIGHT FARMS EXPANDS UNDERSTANDING OF AGRICULTURE

Freight Farms internships exposed students to farming practices, food production, and local food systems. Participants shared how the program grew their understanding of the agricultural processes and exposed them to future career interests.

*"I was looking for more ways to expand my views of the environmentalist career field. I had no prior interest in hydroponics, but thought the internship [in this program] would be a good way to broaden my perspectives."*



### YOUTH LEADERSHIP COUNCIL DEVELOPS LEADERSHIP SKILLS

Youth Leadership Council provides skill-building opportunities by guiding students through the development and presentation of projects that impact their local programs. Participants shared skills they felt they developed because of their work in the program, such as leadership, writing professional emails, and knowing how to pick a college and major.

### TMC LABS STAFF HIGHLIGHT STUDENT GAINS FROM PROGRAM PARTICIPATION

Think, Make, Create (TMC) Labs helped youth explore and problem-solve. Staff shared that structuring opportunities for students to encounter struggle or failure helps them to build resilience and improve their designs, while exposing students to engineering practices helps them develop useful skills for the future.

*"I love teaching STEM using the engineering design process of Ask-Imagine-Plan-Create-Improve! Any time we are trying to create a solution to a problem such as building a robot that draws or a paper airplane that rolls, we need use these steps. The best part is that students learn to experience failure as a good thing! They have to test and find faults in their projects to know how to make it better and better."*

### YOUTH IMPACT

These highlights offer a glimpse into the comprehensive development students experience through their participation in OST programs. The initiatives supported by BSB funds and technical assistance foster leadership skills, deepen students' engagement in learning activities, and promote growth in key areas such as STEM and literacy.

# Key Findings

Beyond School Bells' investments at the system, program, and youth levels demonstrate their impact on program development and sustainability, youth and family engagement, and on enriching and supporting youth skill development.

## SYSTEMS LEVEL

- BSB worked with national and state partners to provide research-based practices and strategies, develop innovative programming, and strengthen ELO support for rural communities.
- At the local level, Partners grantee programs reported strong partnerships with district staff, school staff, and students. Summer of Exploration 2025 grantees reported collaborating with 88 established community partners and added 27 new partners.
- The third annual Innovation Invitational was held in March 2025, offering 33 workshops and breakout sessions and three keynote addresses to 284 registered attendees.
- The Youth Leadership Council engaged eight students to propose improvements to their OST programs. YLC hosted a panel at Innovation Invitational to share youth perspective of afterschool programming in Nebraska. Additionally, nine college students took part in Design Sprints to develop hands-on engineering and energy/environment-focused curriculum.
- BSB advocated for policies supportive of afterschool and summer programming in Nebraska by organizing annual ELO Awareness weeks and hosting STEM lunches at the Capitol, among many other efforts.

## PROGRAM

- BSB supported grantees from 33 counties in 2024-2025, providing funding, resources, and technical assistance.
- BSB invested in workforce development initiatives, like the Environmental Conservation Action Program (E-CAP), that inspired career exploration and developed employability skills. The initiatives engaged students with hands-on activities, internships, and peer teaching.
- BSB actively incorporated youth voice with surveys, brainstorming, and advisory teams, ensuring activities were aligned with students' interests and needs.
- Family Engagement was a key focus in 2024-2025. Partners Grant recipients held 42 family engagement events, with 25 supported by BSB funds. Summer of Exploration grantees hosted 56 family engagement events, with BSB funds supporting 23 events. STEM Family Engagement grants supported 12 STEM events.

## YOUTH

- BSB directly served 8,949 unique students at 53 ELO program sites during the reporting period.
- Summer of Exploration grantees encouraged reading and literacy growth with book stands and designated reading times and spaces.
- Engineering Pathways, Freight Farms, TMC Lab, and other programs exposed students to STEM career fields and associated skills.
- Students in grades 3-12 at Leverage grantee programs reported that they will use their learning from their programs in the future.

# Innovation and Continuous Quality Improvement

For the coming year, Beyond School Bells intends to deepen its focus on continuous improvement as it continues to lead the charge for a high-quality OST network in Nebraska. BSB prioritizes quality improvements in the following areas:

## EFFECTIVE DATA USE

BSB has built a strong foundation for effective data use by routinely reviewing and reflecting on data generated from each grant project. With stronger evaluation investments and a learning-focused team culture, BSB is well-positioned to drive data-informed innovation and continuous improvement in practice. The team also developed a system map outlining data collection tools for each program strand, enabling them to assess whether current data practices met their intended purposes.

## ELEVATING YOUTH PERSPECTIVES

Embedded in BSB's commitment to supporting a high-quality, statewide OST network is the promotion of incorporating youth as thought partners in BSB efforts and ELO programs through activities that lift youth perspectives and amplify youth voices to drive innovation, collaboration, and shared practices. BSB also plans to enhance its data collection practices to ensure youth participants are more regularly included in evaluation efforts.

## Meeting Community Needs: Tailored Support

In response to ongoing statewide partner feedback about local needs, BSB has identified priority projects aimed at expanding career exploration, improving career pathway development, and supporting literacy through curriculum and resource selection, coaching, and family engagement. These initiatives align with

statewide goals, enjoy strong support from partners, and build on existing BSB efforts.

## STRENGTHENING THE OST WORKFORCE

BSB intends to build on its ongoing investment in OST providers' professional development by formalizing coaching processes, refining Community of Practice supports, and offering an ELO fellowship that supports emerging and experienced practitioners in strengthening their skills, advancing reflective practice, and contributing to positive organizational and programmatic change.

## SUPPORTING LITERACY DEVELOPMENT

Building on learning from the Summer of Reading Exploration project, BSB intends to embed literacy elements across its portfolio for the 2025-2026 year. BSB has developed partnerships with researchers and national experts who will lend their expertise to support these efforts.

## CAREER EXPLORATION AND WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT

BSB has enhanced youth and young adult career pathways through innovative staffing models that embed students in afterschool programs, promote leadership, and expand access to internships, apprenticeships, and career exploration. In 2025-2026, BSB will expand this work through two initiatives:

- Exploring Career Connections, funded by the United States Department of Labor, is designed to increase workforce readiness, align workforce partners with schools, and provide youth with work experiences and skills.
- The Boys in HEAL initiative, in partnership with NDE, fosters career development for boys in health, education, and literacy fields.

BSB has developed research partnerships to learn more about effective youth career development practices in Nebraska.