

Subject: Beyond School Bells Newsletter-October 2022
Date: Thursday, October 6, 2022 at 8:36:03 AM Central Daylight Time
From: Beyond School Bells



October 2022

News & Policy

Commissioner Blomstedt Goes to Washington



During the last days of September, Nebraska Department of Education Commissioner Matt Blomstedt highlighted the Beyond School Bells six-person team as a Nebraska representative attending the C.S. Mott Foundation's 50 state Statewide Afterschool Networks meeting. This was Commissioner Blomstedt's second appearance at this gathering of afterschool leaders and educational innovators from all fifty states. It also turns out it will be his last, as Commissioner, as earlier this month he announced he would be stepping down from his state leadership role in January 2023.

Dr. Blomstedt participated in an opening keynote conversation with other national and state

education leaders about the enormous opportunity that afterschool and summer programs have to work closely with their schools and other key community organizations to help support post-COVID recovery efforts. Dr. Blomstedt noted the important role afterschool partnerships played in Nebraska during the worst periods of the pandemic to help develop action plans and support relief efforts for high need families and youth.

With things returning to normal, Blomstedt continued, afterschool and summer programs continue to have vital roles in helping students and families make up in disrupted learning. Citing examples from a recent tour of Walthill Community Schools, he noted how successful afterschool programs make a smooth transition between school day learning by providing students with hands on opportunities to engage with exciting topics like high tech agriculture that enrich classroom discussions. Fortunately, through Federal recovery efforts more funding than ever is available to support afterschool and summer programs. Dr. Blomstedt reported that Nebraska is using its state allocation of Recovery Act funds to support new and expand existing AS and Summer programs, supporting new full service community schools and new efforts around family engagement in hard hit and historically underserved areas across our state. Beyond School Bells is proud to be a partner to the Department in this important work.



With this new funding, however, comes new accountability, and Commissioner Blomstedt challenged the conference attendees to be creative in forming community partnerships and trying new approaches so educators don't have to carry the burden of reengagement on their own. The pandemic exposed the vast and multifaceted needs of Nebraska children and families and in what may be his last remarks on this topic, Blomstedt urged school administrators and afterschool program leaders to step up to the

challenge and work in partnership to provide more hands on deck to build expanded learning opportunities to reignite a passion for learning and community engagement for Nebraska's children, families and communities.

We will miss Commissioner Blomstedt at future Mott meetings, but know that he will remain deeply involved in this important work at the local, state and national levels as he transitions to a new national level education position in January. Thank you Commissioner Matt Blomstedt for all you have done over the past nine years to support local efforts that engage every child in high quality learning environments, both formal and informal, in communities across Nebraska.



GetConnected 2022 Recap!

What a super turn out and amazing professional development day, Friday, September 16, 2022 was for over 300 attendees. We have made many important resources shared at the conference available on line. Be sure to check out the [webpage](#) to download these resources and a certificate of participation, should you need that. Also is site has links to the evaluation, which really helps inform the Planning Team in making program changes. One example of that was the request to add a Walk-N-Talk Table Host/Hostess to allow table hosts to share what they can provide for after school programs. Great Suggestion!! Also, on this same site, you can find a link to the program and handouts from the session presenters.



Nebraska ELO Highlights



Best Summer Ever - Red Cloud, NE

Students and programs across NE put together the Best Summer Ever this year. As the leaves begin to change, when better to reflect on the successes of the past 4 months? BSB is happy to share that we helped support eighteen unique summer projects with eleven focused on environmental and outdoor education, six on youth-identified subjects, and one on service learning.

This month, we'd like to recognize an outstanding summer program that used Youth Voice to identify weekly summer themes and engaged various local community partners to connect to each theme. The Valley Child Development Center in Red Cloud continued the second year of their Business Partnership Program, adding 13 new partners to support programming with experiences, funding, and local connections. Summer learning and connections continue to develop and strengthen programming long after the summer months end.

Making local connections is one of the best ways to sustain and enrich afterschool and summer programs. If you are new to partnership building or need some refreshing tips, check out [BSB's Toolkit](#) and the "[Sustaining Our Program](#)" page.

MISSION TO MARS 2.0



Mission to Mars 2.0 – Plattsmouth

While NASA's Artemis mission is gearing up for Launch next month, Nebraska students are already on their way to Mars. BSB's [Mission to Mars 2.0](#) continues to engage students across the state in each component of STEM while giving them the tools to engage their creativity. This summer, students in the Blue Devil Academy in Plattsmouth, NE took on the challenges of gravity, sustainability, and life away from Earth. The club's success was measured with the excitement and engagement AS in NE is known for, "When first faced with that week's mission, students' creativity went wild". The club created space for students to pursue their interests and use their STEM skills to reach Mission goals. As Artemis closes in on sending the first woman and first person of color to the Moon, BSB won't be far behind with Nebraska students on the way to Mars.

Email dstaggs@nebraskachildren.org if you'd like to implement Mission to Mars in your afterschool program.

Resources & Curriculum

Million Girls Moonshot (MGM)



Speaking of Mars, this month the MGM celebrates International World Space Week “Space and Sustainability,” a celebration of science and technology and their contribution to the betterment of humanity. Each year, Space Week is held October 4-10th to commemorate two important events:

October 4, 1957: Launch of the first human-made Earth satellite, Sputnik 1, thus opening the way for space exploration

October 10, 1967: The signing of the Treaty on Principles Governing the Activities of States in the Exploration and Peaceful Uses of Outer Space

Join thousands of participants in over 90 countries celebrating sustainability in space, and sustainability from space. Find activities, events, host an event and learn more at [World Space Week Association \(WSWA\)](#).

Space Week Resources

[NASA's STEM Resources for K-12 Educators](#) - NASA lesson plans, resources, and opportunities for K-12 educators.

[NASA: A Day in the Life Aboard the International Space Station](#) - Follow astronauts on the International Space Station in a series of videos as they explain their daily routines. Educators can use this series of videos and resources to enhance K-12 STEM curricula.

Assets from the IF/THEN Collection - These assets feature IF/THEN Ambassador Burçin Mutlu-Pakdil, Postdoctoral Researcher, Steward Observatory, and can be used in marketing, presentations, social media, and conference presentations/ Check out Burçin's [STEM Journey](#), [Long Profile](#), and [Ambassador Profile](#).

MGM-Supported Professional Development for Afterschool Staff

Quality STEM Webinar

Attend the [Dimensions of Success Program Planning Tool](#) Webinar January 23rd and 25th 10:30 - 12:-00 PM PT 1:30 - 3:00 PM ET (register by January 5, 2023). The DoS-PPT is a free resource for facilitators of out-of-school and in-school STEM learning programs. The planning tool provides a brief introduction to each dimension of the DoS framework, sample videos, and examples to guide the use of DoS when preparing activity plans for youth.

Youth Engineering Solutions (YES) Out of School Field Testing Opportunity

Wondering how you might infuse engineering into your afterschool program, and are you especially interested in materials that are designed with **English learners in mind**? Access the [educator recruitment letter](#) from Dr. Cunningham and apply by October 15, 2022 through [this link](#).

TMC Spotlight

Chamberlain PAWS



Beyond School Bells partnered with the South Dakota Afterschool Network to provide three TMC Labs which travel across the state providing hands-on, minds-on activities for young people in a variety of non-traditional venues. We are thrilled to share one of their success stories.

During the SDAN summer visit to the Chamberlain PAWS program in central South Dakota we were met with incredible energy from the kids and staff. Program Director Lindsay Chilson, has built a wonderful program and you can feel it as you interact with everyone involved. Though it was a muggy July morning, you wouldn't have known it from the smile on the kids' faces and the curiosity they brought to our STEM explorations. Using electric motors and basic circuitry, we were able to create mini robots that could use markers to create unique "robo art". This upper elementary group was particularly impressive as their grit and perseverance was needed to troubleshoot issues as they moved along. That grit fits into the growth mindset we try to foster with each STEM project we tackle. Our younger crew worked with Squishy Circuits as they used conductive dough to light up their Play Doh creations. This group had such imagination and ingenuity as they chose and built their original designs. The teamwork on display was equally impressive as the kids were inclusive and respectful of others' ideas.

On site for this visit was our SDAN videographer, and the interviews conducted with students

afterwards was one of the most rewarding experiences for our team. As the kids explained the challenges they faced as they completed their projects, we could see the way that the activities in our TMC trailers impact their thinking. STEM projects are often difficult, and for many educators that can be a barrier for implementation. However, the kids in Chamberlain proved to us that it's not important that their teachers are experts, but instead that they are willing to try and fail with their students. The value of working through challenges alongside your students is what truly fosters a growth mindset, and that growth mindset empowers students to tackle challenges in all areas of their lives. We are grateful to the Chamberlain community and the PAWS program for sharing their space for the morning and hope that all STEM facilitators can glean something from this experience.

– Jeff Sebern, Director of Programs, South Dakota Afterschool Network



Our Contact Information

Nebraska Children & Families Foundation
215 Centennial Mall South
Suite 200
Lincoln, NE 68508
402-476-9401

<http://www.NebraskaChildren.org>

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