



Beyond School Bells
nebraskachildren



April 2026

**AFTERSCHOOL
PROFESSIONALS**
APPRECIATION WEEK 
RECOGNIZE • APPRECIATE • ADVOCATE

Afterschool Professionals Week in April

We invite you to join Beyond School Bells in celebrating and uplifting afterschool professionals during Afterschool Professionals Appreciation Week (April 20–24). This dedicated week provides an opportunity to recognize, appreciate, and advocate for those who make a meaningful difference in students' lives through afterschool programming.

Led nationally by the National Afterschool Association, this effort highlights the critical impact afterschool professionals have on young people, families, and communities. Throughout the week, programs across the country participate in celebrations, awareness campaigns, and advocacy efforts that highlight the essential role these professionals play.

Afterschool Professionals Appreciation Week is more than a celebration. It is a collective moment to elevate the voices of afterschool staff, acknowledge their contributions, and reinforce the importance of their work in supporting youth during out-of-school time.

Looking for ways to celebrate? Here are a few ideas to get you started at the link below.

Ideas for Afterschool Professionals Week

Events

NAA26: Dream. Dare. Do.

The National Afterschool Association gathered afterschool professionals from across the nation in Washington, D.C. last month. The convention challenged attendees to pursue the best for youth in our communities by Dreaming, Daring, and Doing. Based on the foundation of [NAA's Core Knowledge Skills and Competencies](#), NAA unveiled their "[Building a Thriving OST Workforce](#)" initiative, modeling their own challenge to Dream of the impact of a thriving workforce, Dare to call out the challenges of recruitment and retention, and Do their part to provide a roadmap and resources that pave the way for the future of the field. One of the most powerful messages of the convention was the call to recognize and lift up young leaders in the field as NAA celebrated 30 NextGen Leaders, including Nebraska's own **Chelsea Sidel** from Cardinal Community Learning Centers. *Congratulations Chelsea!*



Program leaders were also encouraged to advocate for the impacts and importance of afterschool programs across the nation. As [America After 3pm](#) highlighted last fall, the demand for afterschool remains high, with 3 in 4 nationally, and 4 in 5 Nebraska youth who are missing out on the opportunities of afterschool programs. This powerful message was brought to the capitol by six Nebraska leaders, two from each of Nebraska's congressional districts. These leaders carried the message of the importance of Nebraska's afterschool programs for youth, families, and the communities around them.

Staff Resources

Making STEM Fun!

Beyond School Bells has partnered with Nebraska 4-H to bring hands-on STEM training across the state. Making STEM Fun is the final of a three-part series of Click2Science professional development opportunities. Any and all are welcome, regardless of participation in the first two training sessions. Trainings will occur at:

- Crete Public Schools on 4/30 at 6:15pm
- Scottsbluff Public Schools on 5/6 at 6:15pm (MST)
- North Platte ESU 16 on 5/14 at 6 pm
- Schuyler Community Schools on 5/18 at 4:30pm
- Bancroft-Rosalie Community Schools on 5/28 at 6:15pm

This 2-hour hands-on workshop equips new and experienced out-of-school time professionals — from part-time staff to site directors — with strategies to increase engagement and make STEM more fun for everyone. Participants will explore hands-on STEM activities, strategies for sparking curiosity, and proactive approaches to managing STEM activities in afterschool settings. Walk away with tools you can use right away!

Please register at least two weeks prior to the training you plan to attend. Meals will be provided for registered attendees starting 30 minutes before each training session.

[Register Here](#)

STEM Learning Journeys for Afterschool Programs

Free educator resources + a stipend opportunity

Looking for an easy way to bring engaging, hands-on STEM learning to your afterschool program? Afterschool educators can now access free STEM Learning Journeys designed specifically for out-of-school-time settings—plus an opportunity to earn a stipend of up to \$1,500.

Developed by STEM Next in partnership with Verizon™, these bundles of lessons and activities help afterschool educators engage youth in hands-on STEM learning with topics including AI, sustainability, space, and engineering.

Programs that complete the Nature & Sustainability Learning Journey can qualify for a stipend based on youth participation.

Learn more and get started: <https://bit.ly/STEMLearningJourneys>

Need support? [Register here](#) for a walk-through session with STEM Next.

STEM Next is also hosting “Office Hours” sessions to support programs in accessing and implementing the Learning Journeys as well as completing the stipend requirements.

Programs [can register here](#) to sign up for any of these sessions:

- Wednesday, April 8 at 12pm ET/9am PT
- Wednesday, April 15 at 12pm ET/9am PT
- Wednesday, April 22 at 12pm ET/9am PT
- Wednesday, April 29 at 12pm ET/9am PT

[Register Here](#)

Virtual Spring Connections: Join Us for April Sessions!

Spring is just around the corner, and so is a great opportunity to connect with fellow afterschool professionals! Beyond School Bells is hosting Virtual Spring Connections: free professional development and networking sessions open to any afterschool professional in Nebraska.

This spring's sessions will focus on **Staffing Strategies & Staff Well-being**, a topic we know is close to the heart of many in the field. Come ready to learn, share what's working in your program, swap ideas, and ask your peers questions. These sessions offer a great way to connect with and learn from others doing this important work.

Two session times are available, so choose whichever works best for you:

- **Wednesday, April 15 | 12:30–2:00 pm Central / 11:30 am–1:00 pm Mountain.**
On Zoom: <https://us06web.zoom.us/j/84109230847?from=addon>
- **Thursday, April 16 | 10:00–11:30 am Central / 9:00–10:30 am Mountain**
On Zoom: <https://us06web.zoom.us/j/88102908369?from=addon>

Both sessions are free and cover the same content, so just pick one. No registration required, click the link and join! If you would prefer to receive a calendar invitation or if you have questions, reach out to Stephanie Vadnais (svadnais@nebraskachildren.org) or Patricia Sanchez-Stewart (psanchezstewart@nebraskachildren.org).

Check our website for information about these opportunities!

Professional Development Opportunities

Beyond School Bells Announces Statewide “Power on Afterschool” Events Across Nebraska

Beyond School Bells is pleased to announce that ten afterschool programs across Nebraska have been awarded funding to host “Power on Afterschool” events throughout the month of April. These celebrations will bring together students, families, staff, and

community partners to highlight the vital role afterschool programs play in supporting youth and strengthening communities.

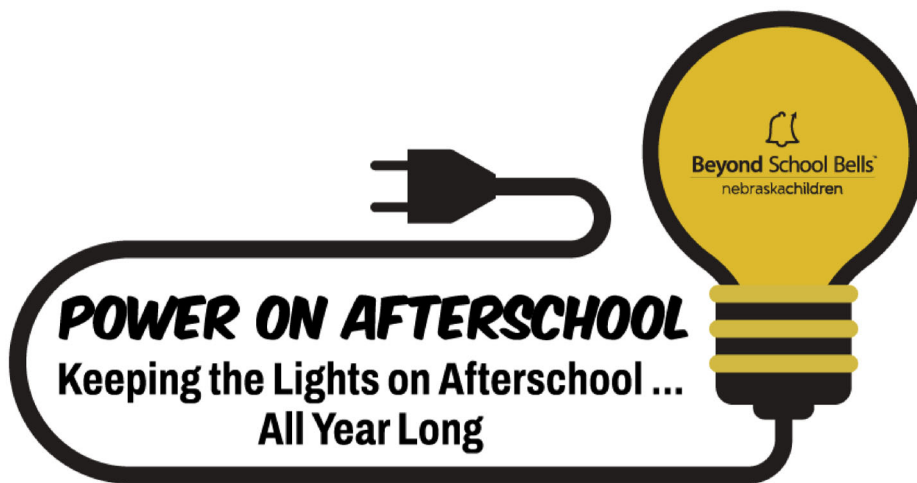
Throughout April, participating programs will celebrate family partnerships that help build strong, supportive learning environments for youth; amplify youth voice by showcasing student leadership, presentations, and testimonials; honor afterschool professionals whose dedication is essential to student success, especially during Afterschool Professionals Appreciation efforts and engage community partners and stakeholders by demonstrating program impact and expressing gratitude for their ongoing support

April serves as a strategic “mid-year power boost,” sustaining advocacy and visibility for afterschool programs as communities build momentum toward October’s nationwide “Lights on Afterschool” celebration. By maintaining engagement throughout the year, “Power on Afterschool” ensures that the importance of afterschool remains front and center for policymakers, partners, and families alike.

The following programs will be hosting “Power on Afterschool” events this month:

- Alliance: ARC AfterSchool
- Auburn: Calvert Elementary, D.O.G.S. Academy
- Bayard: Bayard Public Schools-Pathfinder
- Bellevue: Bellevue Public Schools Foundation: Kids’ Time
- Chadron: Chadron Public Schools: Afterschool Program
- Grand Island: West Lawn Elementary
- Humboldt: HTRS Afterchool STEAM Program
- Kearney: Kearney Community Learning Center
- North Platte: North Platte Public Schools, Kids Klub
- Red Cloud: The Valley Child Development Center

For more information about specific events or to learn how to support their local program, please contact each program directly. To learn how you can incorporate “Power on Afterschool” strategies into your program, join our monthly virtual 30-minute learning community. Email Patricia at psanchezstewart@nebraskachildren.org for the Zoom link.



April is National Garden Month! Nebraska Farm to School

There’s no better time to dig in and grow something new! Whether you’re planting your first seeds or expanding an established garden, gardening offers endless opportunities for hands-on learning, exploration, and connection to where our food comes from.

From classrooms to cafeterias to community spaces, school gardens bring learning to life - encouraging curiosity, supporting healthy habits, and creating meaningful experiences for students of all ages. This month, we're excited to share a variety of gardening resources to help you get growing, no matter where you are in your garden journey.

- [School Gardens: Using Gardens To Grow Healthy Habits in Cafeterias, Classrooms, and Communities](#)
- [Farm to Early Care and Education Garden Guide](#)
- [Garden Planning Presentation](#) by Community Crops
- [Quick and Easy Raised Bed Design](#)
- [Vegetable Garden Insects](#)
- [Kids Garden Month Bingo](#)

Here are some upcoming opportunities to take kids & families outdoors! Calendar runs through the end of the year!

Outdoor Nebraska Opportunities

Here are some upcoming opportunities to take kids & families outdoors! Calendar runs through the end of the year.

Outdoor Calendar



Benefits of Nature & Outdoor Learning on Our Students Webinar

Tuesday, April 28th 5pm - 7pm (CST)

[Click Here to Register](#)

Environmental and outdoor learning, with its focus on hands-on learning and authentic problem solving, can transform education and create safe and healthy schools. Today, we continue to see more and more stories of individual classes, schools and even entire school districts benefiting from outdoor learning for all or part of the school day. These learning strategies are a way to grow and strengthen our education system to nurture a

range of skills and interests, help realize every student's unique potential, and prepare for whatever the future brings.

During this webinar we will:

- Dive into what the research says about the benefits of nature and outdoor learning on our students' physical and mental health, social-emotional development, and learning outcomes.
- Hear from a small panel of Nebraska teachers who have successfully integrated outdoor learning in their classrooms and schools.
- Hear from you as teachers while holding a Q&A discussion about your experiences with success and challenges around outdoor learning.
- Explore evidence-based strategies that help to increase opportunities for students to learn outdoors.

Who should attend?

This professional development webinar is designed for current formal early child educators, and educators teaching K-12th grades across Nebraska. Environmental educators in nonformal educational partner organizations are also welcome to attend.

Participant Takeaways:

- Broad understanding of the biological roots that connect human health to the natural world
- Summary of research findings around ways nature supports overall healthy child development, including supporting their physical and mental health, social-emotional development, and learning outcomes.
- Introduced to several evidence based strategies educators can use to increase outdoor learning opportunities in their classrooms and schools
- Share in discussions with fellow educators wanting to learn more about ways they can increase outdoor learning opportunities
- Provided with additional resources for further learning, including outdoor learning tools, and contacts of organizations and partners in environmental education here in Nebraska

How do I register?

This webinar is FREE, however registration is required. All registered participants will receive the recorded webinar video after the webinar, so please feel free to register even if you won't be able to attend webinar live.

Register Here

Our Contact Information

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