

Beyond School Bells

nebraskachildren



August 2026

Professional Development and Networking

Nebraska's Afterschool Conference 2026!

GETCONNECTED
NEBRASKA'S
AFTERSCHOOL CONFERENCE

STRONGER TOGETHER:

Connecting People, Programs, and Possibilities!

September 25, 2026

Younes Conference Center South - Kearney, NE



The GetConnected 2026 Nebraska Afterschool Conference offers an opportunity to learn more about planning and implementing high-quality afterschool or summer programs. Sessions offered throughout the day target a variety of audiences including program

leaders, program staff, teachers, school administrators, community partners, and others interested in afterschool and summer learning opportunities for children and youth.

Register at the link below for the 2026 NE Afterschool Conference, *let's GetConnected!*

Register Now

Pre-Conference Networking Event

Join Beyond School Bells for an evening of networking, fun, and celebration on Thursday, September 24 at this year's Meet, Greet, and GetConnected Networking Event. This special event is included with conference registration at no additional cost and is open to all conference attendees. Whether you're new to the field or a seasoned afterschool professional, this is a great opportunity to connect with colleagues from across Nebraska and build new partnerships. Come and enjoy delicious food, entertainment, networking opportunities, door prizes, giveaways, and a cash bar.

Don't miss one of the conference's favorite opportunities to connect with fellow afterschool professionals and partners in a relaxed and welcoming atmosphere.

Be sure to indicate that you'll be attending the Networking Event when you register for the conference!

Join Our



Meet, Greet, & **GetConnected** Event

Connect, unwind, and explore possibilities at the 2nd annual NE Afterschool Conference networking event!

Event highlights include:

- Free Raffle & Giveaways
- Free Finger Foods & Desserts
- Cash Bar
- Networking Activities
- Games & Prizes

RSVP on your conference registration.



Thursday, Sep. 24



7:00 PM - 9:00 PM



Location:

Younes Conference Center South

Nebraska Afterschool Conference Awards

Nominations are open! Celebrate the programs making a difference in Nebraska afterschool programs. Nominate for the **Glow Up Award** or **Stronger Together Award** by **September 10**. Self and peer nominations welcome!



Nominations

Become a ConnectNow Moderator!



Are you an experienced and passionate afterschool professional looking to make a greater impact across Nebraska? We're seeking dedicated leaders to serve as ConnectNow Moderators and help foster meaningful conversations within our online community of afterschool professionals.

As a moderator, you'll have the opportunity to mentor new and emerging program leaders, share your expertise, build relationships with colleagues from across the state, and facilitate the exchange of innovative ideas, practical resources, and promising practices that strengthen afterschool programs.

Moderators who successfully complete the Fall 2026 semester will receive a \$500 stipend in recognition of their leadership and commitment.

An onboarding webinar for all selected moderators will be held on Friday, September 11, at 12:00 p.m. CT.

If you're ready to support Nebraska's afterschool community while growing your own leadership network, we encourage you to apply today! **Apply by August 29.**

Lights On Afterschool Capacity-Building Learning Series



October will be here before you know it, and now is the perfect time to begin planning your Lights On Afterschool celebration! We encourage every Nebraska afterschool program to participate in this nationwide movement that shines a spotlight on the incredible impact afterschool programs have on youth, families, and communities.

National Lights On Afterschool Day is Thursday, October 22, but your celebration can take place any time throughout October. Whether you host a family engagement event, student showcase, STEM night, community open house, or advocacy event, this is your opportunity to celebrate your program, highlight student success, strengthen community partnerships, and increase awareness of the vital role afterschool programs play across Nebraska.

To help you plan a successful and meaningful event, Beyond School Bells is offering a **free three-part Lights On Afterschool Planning Series**. During these interactive one-hour Zoom sessions, we'll share practical planning tools, creative event ideas, timelines, promotional strategies, advocacy messaging, invitation templates, partnership ideas, and proven practices from successful Nebraska programs. You'll leave each session with actionable ideas and resources you can immediately use to create an engaging and impactful celebration.

Planning Session Dates (12:30–1:30 p.m. CT):

- **Tuesday, August 18** – Getting Started: Planning, Timelines & Event Ideas
- **Tuesday, September 15** – Promotion, Outreach & Community Engagement
- **Tuesday, October 6** – Final Preparations, Advocacy & Event Success Tips

Whether this is your first Lights On Afterschool event or your twentieth, these sessions will provide inspiration, practical resources, and support to help make your celebration a success.

Register at the link below to receive the Zoom link and join us as we celebrate and advocate for Nebraska's afterschool programs!

[Register Here](#)

Discover Mobile STEM in Action!

Join us on Thursday, September 24, from 10:30 a.m.–4:00 p.m. at the Younes Conference Center South in Kearney for the Mobile STEM: Think. Make. Create. (TMC) Trailer & STEM Cart Training.

Experience hands-on learning as you explore the Think. Make. Create. (TMC) Trailer and Mobile STEM Cart, and discover practical, ready-to-use STEM activities and strategies you can immediately implement in your afterschool program.

This free professional development opportunity is designed for afterschool directors, site coordinators, frontline staff, library professionals, STEM partners, new directors, high school student staff, and anyone interested in bringing engaging, mobile STEM experiences to youth.

Participants will leave with new ideas, resources, and inspiration to transform STEM learning in their programs. **The first 10 programs to register will receive \$500 to go towards their STEM programming.** Lunch is included at no cost.

Registration closes September 9.

Held the day before the Nebraska Afterschool Conference: GetConnected, this training offers a great opportunity to enjoy two full days of professional learning in Kearney.

Register Here

Mobile STEM: **Think. Make. Create.** (TMC) and STEM Cart

A Pre-Conference
Professional
Learning Experience

*Ignite Curiosity.
Inspire Innovation.
Build Future-Ready Learners.*



**\$500 STEM Programming Stipend
for the First 10 Programs!**

Limit one stipend per program.
Participants must attend the entire training.



Kick off the Nebraska Afterschool Conference: **GetConnected** with an immersive hands-on STEM experience designed specifically for Nebraska afterschool programs. Learn more about the **Think Make Create (TMC) Trailer** and **Mobile STEM Cart**, discover engaging makerspace activities, and leave with practical strategies you can implement immediately in your program.



Thursday, September 24



10:30 a.m. – 4:00 p.m.



**Younes Conference Center
Kearney, Nebraska**



**FREE Professional Development
Sponsored by Beyond School Bells**



**Registration Required
by September 9**



Why Attend?

- ✓ Explore exciting, hands-on STEM activities.
- ✓ Spark creativity and innovation in your program.
- ✓ Strengthen collaboration and problem-solving skills.
- ✓ Experience inquiry-based learning in action.
- ✓ Engage in engineering and makerspace challenges.
- ✓ Plan for mobile makerspace success.
- ✓ Adapt activities for elementary, middle, and high school students.

FREE PD SPONSORED BY



Beyond School Bells™
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Inspiring Learning, Expanding Opportunities.

Perfect For

Afterschool
Program Directors
Site Coordinators
Frontline Staff
Library Professionals

STEM Partners
New Directors
High School
Student Staff

**Bring your team and discover how
mobile STEM learning can transform
your afterschool program!**

**Register by
September 9!**



Think. Make. Create. – Hands-On Learning. Endless Possibilities.



For more information, contact Ann O'Connor: annoconnor@nebraskachildren.org

Student Opportunities

Grow NE 2026-2027



Beyond School Bells is excited to announce Grow NE club funding for the 2026-27 school year! Grow NE supports Expanded Learning Opportunity programs to cultivate youth leadership in Food Systems – gardening, agriculture, local foods, and so much more. Grow NE contracts and technical assistance are offered to support high school student leadership and afterschool club activities that empower youth to understand and lead local food systems. There are four club tracks to support programming: **Innovative Agriculture, Local Food Systems, Sustainable Growing, and Afterschool to Table.** [More information can be found on BSB's website.](#)

Afterschool programs with interest in gardening and food systems are encouraged to apply! Programs may have experienced gardeners or be brand new to food systems lessons. All will be supported to introduce youth to local food systems. Beyond School Bells will host monthly learning communities for club staff and support high school student leaders to participate in Service-Learning through Conservation where they will pursue food systems solutions like local farmers markets, supporting pollinators, and reducing food waste. High school student leaders will also learn to lead food systems activities with their peers.

Student leader [registration](#) is due by **August 28** and [club applications](#) are due by **September 1**. Please reach out to Alexis Hansen (ahansen@nebraskachildren.org) or Dakota Staggs (dstaggs@nebraskachildren.org) if you have any questions.

Club Application

Service-Learning through Conservation: Applications OPEN!

Do you know high school students interested in conservation and serving their community? Have them apply today for our Service-Learning through Conservation (SLC) opportunity! Applications due **August 28th!** [Click here to learn more.](#)

Apply Here

FOR HIGH SCHOOL LEADERS

Service-Learning through Conservation


Beyond School Bells
nebraskachildren

We're looking for student leaders who care about conservation – and about showing up for their communities.

WHO WE'RE LOOKING FOR

- High schoolers into **conservation, nature, sustainability, gardening, or teaching** — including students working in afterschool programs
- Must be **at least 15 years old**
- **Parent approval** required

No experience required — just a genuine interest in the outdoors and in helping others learn to care for it.

HOW THE PROGRAM RUNS



IN FEB. 2027, STUDENTS MUST COMPLETE
National Geographic Slingshot Challenge

COHORT BEGINS	WEEKLY COMMITMENT
Week of Aug. 31	2 hrs / week

MEETINGS	TOTAL STIPEND
Biweekly with BSB	\$480 (both cycles)

APPLICATIONS DUE:

August 28

<https://bit.ly/BSB2026Conservation>

APPLY NOW
→



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Youth Leadership Council: Applications OPEN!

Do you have high school leaders working in your afterschool program who are interested in having their voice heard, building leadership skills, and driving change? Have them apply for BSB's Youth Leadership Council! Applications are due **September 15!** BSB will facilitate this experience for your high school leaders.

[Apply Here](#)

YOUTH LEADERSHIP COUNCIL (YLC) '26-27



WHO WE ARE:

The BSB YLC will be composed of approximately **ten high school students** who **are currently staff members or volunteers in a Nebraska afterschool or summer program**. Our goal is to **raise up your voice** and give you the time and resources to **reach your leadership potential** in your local afterschool and summer programs.

WHAT YOU WILL DO:

1. **Plan and initiate a project** within your afterschool program to improve the experience for staff and/or youth,
2. **Strengthen your leadership skills** by participating in professional development (during meeting times), and
3. Meet and learn from **other high school staff** across the state.

MEETINGS & PAYMENT:



You will attend **8** fun and engaging **VIRTUAL, 1 HOUR** meetings throughout the fall semester and **4** throughout the spring semester.

By meeting all YLC expectations, you will earn a **\$400 STIPEND** and your program could receive up to **\$500**.



APPLY NOW!

applications due
SEP 15, 2026!

STATS FROM PAST MEMBERS:



88%

past YLC members

now feel more **confident taking a leadership role** in their program after this experience.



94%

past YLC members

learned one or more tactics to **better engage with students** through this experience.



100%

past YLC members

would **recommend membership on Youth Leadership Council** to a friend!



Are you ready to turn youth vision into real-world action?

The national youth leadership council (@nylcorg) is seeking passionate middle and high school students, along with dedicated adult mentors for the 2026–2027 [Youth as Solutions™ \(YaS\) program!](#)

Through YaS, identify local challenges and build community-rooted solutions across five key focus areas:

- Civics & Democracy
- Community Health
- Transportation Safety
- Education
- Environment

Special Transportation Safety Focus: With support from General Motors, we're placing a special focus on teams tackling transportation safety! Whether it's safer routes to school, bike/pedestrian infrastructure, or transit accessibility, your team can design a solution that saves lives.

Bonus Opportunity: Thanks to our partners at Mad Courses, transportation safety teams will receive expert guidance to create a documentary and earn a **Global Perspectives Leader Credential** from RMIT University!

How It Works:

- **Leadership Core:** 2 Adult Mentors + 4 Youth Leaders receive training from NYLC.
- **Site Team:** engage a larger team in a project from Fall 2026-Spring 2027.
- **Community Engagement:** Build solutions *with* your community, not just for it.
- Ready to lead in 2026–2027? Gather your core team and apply today!

[Learn More and Apply](#)

Afterschool Preparation



National Afterschool Association Back-to-School Checklist

As the start of the school year gets closer, afterschool teams are preparing for one of their busiest times of the year. To help, NAA created a practical back-to-school checklist you can use over the next few weeks to prepare your staff, sites, and families for a successful start. The checklist breaks down what can feel like an overwhelming amount of work into doable action items covering: Staffing & coverage, Training & student

support, Family & program readiness, Site operations & first-week success, and Fee collection. There's no better feeling than checking off something on your list. This curated resource should help you spot gaps and stay organized!

Giveaway: *Download the checklist and be entered to win a \$20 Amazon gift card to help with that back-to-school shopping!*

Download the Checklist

Our Contact Information

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