



May 2026



Welcome Ann O'Connor to Beyond School Bells!

Ann is the new Project Management and Contract Specialist for Beyond School Bells. Previously, she was a project manager with Nebraska 4-H. She has managed multiple projects and led professional development workshops for out-of-school time staff over the last 11 years in a variety of STEM areas and has written STEM curriculum. Before that, she was a middle school science teacher. In her free time, Ann enjoys gardening and reading.

Events

Read with Us This June:

A Book Club for the Afterschool Field



This summer, Beyond School Bells is inviting afterschool and summer program staff to slow down, reflect, and reconnect one chapter at a time.

We're hosting a virtual book club in June centered on *How We Thrive* by Stephanie Malia Krauss. This book is a timely, deeply human exploration of what it takes to thrive in a world that constantly pulls us in too many directions. For those of us working in afterschool and summer programs, this book feels like it was written with us in mind.

This book club is first and foremost for *you*. We'll be focusing on your personal wellbeing: what it means to feel whole, cared for, and energized in your own life. Because we know when the adults in a program are thriving, the kids in that program feel it. Investing in yourself this summer is one of the most powerful things you can do for the young people you serve.

What to expect: We'll meet virtually once a week throughout June for guided discussion, reflection, and community. And the best part: the author herself, Stephanie Malia Krauss, will join us for our first and last sessions.

How to get your book:

- **BSB grantees:** We encourage you to use your BSB funding to purchase copies for yourself and any staff members who want to participate. This is exactly the kind of investment we hope you'll make in your team. Purchase wherever books are sold. Books are available at a discounted rate for a limited time [here](#).
- **Everyone else:** The first 10 people to sign up will receive a free copy of the book.

The Zoom Schedule (You'll receive calendar invitations when you sign up!):

- Wednesday June 3, 12:30-2:00 pm C/11:30-1:00 pm M
- Wednesday June 10, 12:30-1:30 pm C/11:30-12:30 pm M
- Wednesday June 17, 12:30-1:30 pm C/11:30-12:30 pm M
- Wednesday June 24, 12:30-2:00 pm C/11:30-1:00 pm M

Whether you're an administrator, program director, a frontline staff member, or someone else who cares for and about kids... if you're ready to invest in yourself and show up even more fully for the young people in your community, this book club is for you.

Questions? Reach out to Stephanie Vadnais at svadnais@nebraskachildren.org.

Sign Up Now

Advocacy Corner: Youth Development Coalition

Big things are happening for Nebraska's young people.

On April 20 and 21, Beyond School Bells joined forces with Collective for Youth and MENTOR Nebraska to host the first-ever Statewide Youth Development Coalition Action Planning Summit in Lincoln.

For two powerful days, 34 leaders from 26 afterschool and mentoring programs across Nebraska came together to build connections, align priorities, and create a bold action plan for the future of youth development programs.

We're creating a stronger, more connected future for youth and making sure policymakers, funders, and decision-makers invest in the programs and opportunities young people need to thrive.

The next legislative session begins January 2027, but the work starts now. Ready to be part of the movement? Contact Stephanie Vadnais at svadnais@nebraskachildren.org to learn more and join the coalition.





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 whether they participated in the first two training sessions. Trainings will occur at:

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

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 begins.

[Register Here](#)

Nebraska's Afterschool Conference Call for Presentations!

Interested in sharing your story and experience with others in the afterschool community? Apply to present at Nebraska's Afterschool Conference today!

STRONGER TOGETHER:

Connecting People, Programs, and Possibilities!

September 25, 2026 | Younes Conference Center South - Kearney, NE



2026 Nebraska Afterschool Conference Request for Proposals

The Nebraska Department of Education and its partners are pleased to announce the 2026 Nebraska Afterschool Conference Request for Proposals. Proposals are sought for workshops and Walk and Talk (vendor) tables. Key details of each proposal type are listed below.

Workshop Proposals

- **Session Length:** 50 minutes
- Should include **interactive elements** for attendees
- Consider the **Workshop Pathways:**
 - **Frontline Staff:** Professionals working directly with students in afterschool programs
 - **Program Coordinators:** Those who manage or train frontline staff and oversee a single afterschool site
 - **Program Directors & Administrators:** Leaders overseeing multiple sites and/or setting program strategy.
 - **Partners & Funders:** Organizations that support or collaborate with afterschool and summer programs.
- **Deadline to Submit:** May 29th, 2026 @ 3:00 PM CT
- **Selection Notification:** Mid-July
- **Registration Fees:**
 - \$100
 - Includes breakfast and lunch for one person. Additional meals may be purchased separately.

Walk and Talk Proposals

- **Dedicated exhibit time** during conference breaks to maximize **attendee engagement**
- Opportunity to **showcase your resources, programs, or services**
- **6-ft table with 2 chairs** provided. Space available for **interactive displays** upon request.
- **Deadline to Submit:** July 1st, 2026 @ 11:59 PM CT
- **Selection Notification:** Early August
- **Registration Fees:**
 - For-Profit: \$225
 - Non-Profit: \$150
 - Includes breakfast and lunch for one person. Additional meals may be purchased separately.

Registration and payment is required to confirm participation. Those who submit for both Walk and Talk and a Workshop will only pay one registration fee. Workshop-only participants who do not plan to eat lunch or otherwise participate in the conference beyond their accepted session need not pay a registration fee.



Scan the QR code to access the RFP document. The RFP document is the same for both proposal types.




Move, Unlock, & Reap the Harvest

Bring learning to life through movement, agriculture, and hands-on exploration! The Nebraska Department of Education is excited to invite elementary and middle schools to apply for a **new pilot opportunity for the 2026–27 school year, combining Walk to Unlock virtual trails with Farm to School Harvest of the Month resources.** This initiative blends physical activity with lessons on Nebraska's agriculture, history, and nutrition through interactive "checkpoints" and classroom activities. Participating schools will pilot at least one trail and complete brief surveys - while **receiving \$250 mini-grant funding.** With a **flexible timeline and options to participate as a classroom, club, or**

after-school program, this is a great way to engage students in active, experiential learning. Check out the flyer for all the details!


Apply today to be part of this exciting pilot!

Apply Here



MOVE, UNLOCK, & REAP THE HARVEST

Bring history, nature, and agriculture to life with Walk to Unlock's virtual trails featuring Harvest of the Month local food checkpoints.



FARM TO SCHOOL & WALK TO UNLOCK

Together, the Walk to Unlock and Farm to School Harvest of the Month (HOM) programs will offer four unique trails designed to explore Nebraska's rich agricultural heritage while promoting physical activity and local foods. **During the 2026-27 school year, we are looking for 20 interested schools that would like to help us pilot this new agriculture element to the trails!** Selected schools would be **provided a \$250 mini-grant for their participation** in the pilot upon completion of required deliverables.

PROJECT DETAILS

- Pilot a minimum of 1 of the 4 trails and use the HOM resources on the trail(s).
- Administer pre and post surveys.
- "Move" your way through the trail and complete the HOM activities.
- Max stipend is \$500/school district.
- Flexible timeline - Start when you're ready during the 2026-27 school year and finish by the end of year.

FARM TO SCHOOL 101

- Procurement:** Local foods are purchased, promoted, and served in the cafeteria, as a snack or in classroom taste tests.
- Education:** Students participate in education activities related to agriculture, food, health and nutrition.
- School Gardens:** Students engage in hands-on experiential learning.

WHO CAN APPLY?


Interested Elementary/Middle Schools can apply:

- As a classroom
- As a school club
- As an After School club (associated with a school district)

Note: The staff member/teacher must be the one to apply on behalf of the school.

NEXT STEPS

Applicants can expect to hear the award notice by early-mid August 2026.



Fill out our form to indicate your interest in participating in this mini-grant opportunity!

See the next page for how to implement Walk to Unlock!

QUESTIONS?

Contact: nde.f2s@nebraska.gov

All Paths Lead to Education with...



HISTORY • AGRICULTURE • NATURE

WALK 2 UNLOCK

NEBRASKA

Utilize Walk 2 Unlock as individuals or teams to move (not limited to walking) through each virtual trail, where all participants will gain foundational checkpoint knowledge about Nebraska's history, agriculture, and nature. Checkpoint learning resources are designed for K-8th grade which include supplemental Harvest of the Month lessons that will provide additional resources to enhance the experience. Be Active, and then log in to walk2unlock.ne.gov. Enter steps or minutes of activity into the activity calculator, watch them convert into miles on your trail, choose checkpoint resources to complete, and repeat the process!

HOW TO IMPLEMENT WALK 2 UNLOCK:

Set Up:

Create teams (recommended 10 or fewer per team).



Optional: Invite other teams to join your league and compete.

Move and Log:

Track any activity - our calculator converts minutes into miles.



Teach:

Each trail checkpoint includes several 10-40 minute activities & resources.



Repeat!



Connect to Leadership and Engagement Opportunities Across Nebraska

The [Bring Up Nebraska Leadership & Engagement Opportunities Dashboard](#) is your hub for connecting with leadership, advocacy, and engagement opportunities across the Bring Up Nebraska Network—from local community efforts to statewide initiatives. In the first six months since launching in June 2025, the dashboard highlighted more than **80 opportunities** and welcomed **800+ visits**, helping young people, parents, caregivers, and agency partners find meaningful ways to get involved. Bookmark and explore the

dashboard for yourself, then share it with young people to discover current opportunities, share new ones, and strengthen connections across Nebraska.

[Visit the Dashboard](#)

Power on Afterschool: Powering up for Lights on Afterschool 2026 in Nebraska

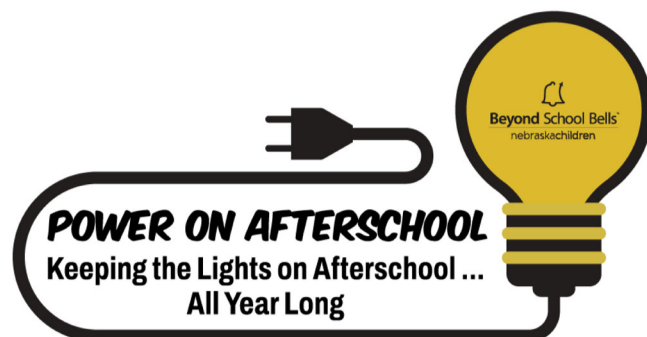
Power on Afterschool events were recently held across Nebraska, with ten afterschool sites hosting local celebrations that brought together students, families, staff, community partners, and policymakers, including school administrators, school board members and state senators. Programs offered interactive activities for students and families, shared messages about the importance of afterschool programs, highlighted the impact of their programs, and recognized the dedication of staff and community partners who help make their work possible.

The purpose of Power on Afterschool is to provide a mid-year boost that keeps energy, awareness, and advocacy strong for afterschool programs. These celebrations help ensure afterschool remains a priority for families, community partners, policymakers, and other stakeholders while building momentum toward the nationwide Lights on Afterschool celebration in October.

Are you interested in learning how to plan a successful Lights on Afterschool event this October? Beyond School Bells will host a series of monthly virtual sessions beginning in July to help programs prepare for one of the largest nationwide awareness and advocacy events of the year. These planning sessions will provide ideas and strategies for designing a mission-driven event, creating planning timelines, managing logistics, marketing and community outreach, developing engaging activities, increasing attendance, and strengthening community partnerships, sponsorships, and long-term support. Participants will also learn advocacy strategies for engaging policymakers, school boards, and community leaders while networking with other afterschool professionals to exchange successful event ideas and best practices.

Let Beyond School Bells help strengthen your confidence in event coordination, day-of-event operations, and action planning so your program can increase its visibility and community impact. If you are interested in participating in this virtual webinar series, “How to Host a Successful Lights on Afterschool Event” (July–October), please complete this registration form at the link below.

[Register for Webinar Series](#)





Free Virtual Workshops with Nickelodeon Animation

Team up with the Calibraska Arts Initiative to add **Free Virtual Workshops with Nickelodeon Animation** to your summer line-up! The workshops are live via Zoom on Tuesday afternoons: 6/9, 6/16, 6/23, 7/7, 7/14, and 7/21. There are 2 different workshops to choose from, Let's Draw! is for K-6th Grades, 12-12:45 MT / 1-1:45 CT, plus Topic-based workshops for 6th-12th grades, 1-2 p.m. MT / 2-3 CT! For more details on the workshops and to sign up as a satellite site, please visit calibraska.org/nickworkshops or email us at info@calibraska.org.

[Learn More](#)

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CALIBRASKA.ORG



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