
Beyond School Bells Newsletter-January 2025

From Beyond School Bells <bsbinfo@nebraskachildren.org>

Date Thu 1/9/2025 7:54 AM

Beyond School Bells
nebraskachildren



January 2025

News and Events

Registration OPEN: Nebraska's ELO Innovation Invitational 2025



NEBRASKA'S
EXPANDED LEARNING
OPPORTUNITIES

Innovation
INVITATIONAL

MARCH 10-12, 2025
UNL Innovation Campus
Lincoln, NE

It's just around the corner.

A free, Nebraska-centric conference focused on supporting high-quality, locally sustainable afterschool and summer programs providing fun, engaging, student- and family-centered expanded learning opportunities.

With 2025's arrival, now is the time to [register](#) to attend Beyond School Bells' third Expanded Learning Opportunities (ELO) Innovation Invitational, which will be held from March 10 – 12th at UNL's Innovation Campus.

This free event provides opportunities for afterschool and summer program practitioners and advocates to come together alongside community, state and national leaders to exchange ideas and participate in hands on workshops exploring the critical role that exciting, engaging and inspiring afterschool and summer programs play in the lives of children, families and communities across Nebraska.

By registering now, not only will **we** get a better sense of the number of attendees we can expect so that we can plan for the best conference experience possible, but as a registered attendee, **you** will start receiving regular, bi-monthly updates designed to provide you with additional information and resources that will enhance your conference experience.

These updates will include links to resources relating to our two returning national experts – Dr. Stephanie Malia Kraus, the author of *Whole Child, Whole Life* and the keynote at the 2024 GetConnected conference and Dr. Anthony Burrow, a national leader (and Lincoln High grad) on the role of cultivating Purpose in healthy youth development who headlined our first Innovation Invitational.

At the Invitational we will launch an ***Inventory of Innovations***, examples of innovative work taking place in Expanded Learning Programs across the state and we will use these updates to help build momentum this exciting new, year-long initiative.

And finally, as has always been the case at these gatherings, a strong youth voice / engagement component, including an evening event and a track to help high school youth learn the skills they need to provide quality afterschool and summer programming to younger youth, will be key part of this year's Innovation Invitational. Through reminders to registered attendees, we will share tools you can use to engage youth in your conference prep to provide insights from youth in your community we can explore together at the conference.

Space for this free event is limited, so act now to reserve your spot and start getting ready!

Register Today!



Beyond School Bells proudly announces joining the National AfterSchool Association (NAA) as an NAA affiliate. This partnership underscores a mutual commitment to supporting high quality, local sustainable afterschool and summer programs serving more Nebraska youth, especially youth living in high-need communities. As an NAA affiliate, BSB will promote membership, professional development and advocacy at the state level. A key responsibility of an NAA affiliate is to promote OST programming, opportunities, and job quality to strengthen communities, increase program access and empower youth and workers alike.

NAA is the leading network of OST professionals dedicated to fostering positive youth outcomes through advocacy, professional development, and community building. Through this partnership, BSB will access NAA's robust network, resources, and strategic initiatives focused on field leadership, job quality, and equity. Together, we will work to enhance the OST profession in Nebraska and across the country, ensuring that children, families, and workers benefit from enriching, inclusive, and accessible afterschool opportunities.

Afterschool professionals who are not paid NAA members, live in Nebraska and register for the 2025 Innovation Invitational are eligible for a free NAA membership. More information will become available for those professionals not able to attend the 2025 Innovation Invitational and would like a free NAA membership. If you prefer, NAA membership may be purchased directly from NAA on a sliding scale from \$25 to \$150. For more information about the National AfterSchool Association, visit naaweb.org.

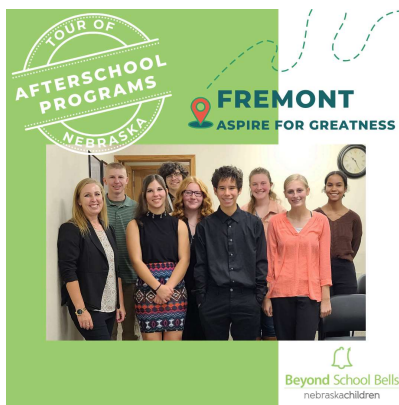
Program Spotlights

Tour of Nebraska Afterschool Programs

A celebration of high-quality afterschool and summer learning programs across Nebraska

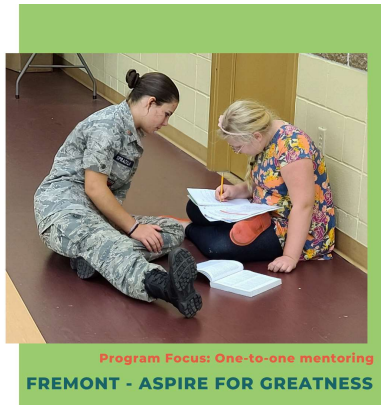


Aspire for Greatness – a middle and high school program in Fremont focused on career exploration and mentorship.



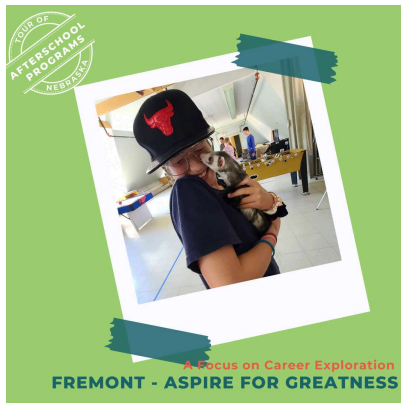
Aspire for Greatness is an outstanding example of what programs can accomplish with local partnerships and a focus on youth voice and choice.

Open to 7th-12th graders (and youth up to age 19) in the Fremont area, Aspire for Greatness focuses on out-of-school enrichment and one-to-one mentoring. Youth enjoy meals, life skills education, physical activity, career exploration and much more. There is a strong focus on building self-worth and fostering community connections.



"Having a focus on youth voice and youth choice has allowed us to offer career speakers in areas they are interested in, offer occasional peer led lesson time, provide choice in clubs to participate in, have high school youth lead clubs, offer an optional dinner at the end of the daily program during the school year, provide family engagement events, started a high school Mock Trial team, and incorporate a youth leadership program with participants being peer leaders within the program (currently in the implementation stage)."

—Executive Director, Kristen Widman



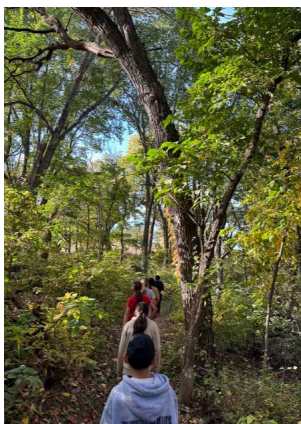
Beyond School Bells partners with Apsire for Greatness on important projects including our Summer Grants, Leverage Grants, and the high school Youth Leadership Council.

When we asked Kristen what she hopes for the future of afterschool in Nebraska, she said:

*"I hope communities across the state rally around their local afterschool programs and support their efforts to impact local youth and the community as a whole. **Together, we can have an extraordinary impact!**"*

We are proud of our partners throughout the state and look forward to continuing our tour of Nebraska programs. Follow along to see our next stop ([Instagram](#), [Facebook](#), [X](#), [LinkedIn](#))!

Go Beyond and Project Washkon



Continuing on the theme of partnership, we are excited to have collaborated with [Go Beyond](#) in 2024 and seen their impact grow into the afterschool world! Go Beyond is an organization dedicated to bringing together diverse groups of young people for self-discovery and community building through outdoor adventures and connecting to nature. Nearly one year ago, Go Beyond began their introduction to afterschool by partnering with the Walthill program, Project Washkon, to build a club for outdoor engagement in afterschool programs. They've centered youth voice and experience by leading activities that students enjoyed and could build upon – starting with using a compass and culminating with camping experiences based on students' own plans. Go Beyond has reminded us of the importance of slowing down, leaning into fun activities together, and creating opportunities for students to build

lasting memories. Later this year, BSB and Go Beyond will have a Camping Club guide to share based on experiences in 2024 and those to come in 2025. For more information on Go Beyond and a peek into their afterschool experiences, you can read their [2024 annual report here](#). Thank you for your leadership, Go Beyond!

GO BEYOND

LEADERSHIP THROUGH NATURE

Resources and Opportunities

National Geographic Slingshot Challenge – Last Call!

BSB Mini Grants Available to Support Projects



Last call for National Geographic Slingshot Challenge projects! [The National Geographic Slingshot Challenge](#) invites students aged 13-18 in teams of up to 6 students to submit a 1-minute video describing their innovative ideas for addressing local environmental challenges such as food waste, energy independence, or local sustainability. **Entries are due on February 7th 2025.** Don't wait to sign up, create and submit your videos at National Geographic's Videos for Change. Winners can earn up to \$10,000 in funding from National Geographic.

Beyond School Bells is committed to helping students share their solutions with afterschool and summer programs in 2025 with mini grants of up to \$5,000. Slingshot Challenge submissions are a requirement for funding. BSB has pre-packaged materials and dedicated support for solutions for food systems, energy, conservation, and many other local environmental opportunities. Reach out to Dakota Staggs (dstaggs@nebraskachildren.org) at Beyond School Bells for support.

[Slingshot Challenge Materials - National Geographic Society](#)

Winter 2025 Regional Connections

January 21-24

Regional Connections



PROFESSIONAL
DEVELOPMENT

Join us for a one-hour virtual Regional Connections meeting. We'll spend the hour thinking about an important piece of program sustainability: identifying your dream team! Who is a community champion of your program? Who is your program spokesperson? Who is your personal cheerleader?

Winter Regional Connections will be on Zoom.

- Kearney Area: Tuesday January 21, **1-2 pm Central Time**
 - Zoom link: <https://us06web.zoom.us/j/81766985478?pwd=o9ggnfRNEzGcCorhPaDhP6bZHj6Qkw.1>
- Scottsbluff Area: Wednesday January 22, **1-2 pm Mountain Time**
 - Zoom link: <https://us06web.zoom.us/j/87552681433?pwd=YkyLNZ9onbesaMTZZW2KflcAxK3P9S.1>
- Norfolk Area: Thursday January 23, **1-2 pm Central Time**
 - Zoom link: <https://us06web.zoom.us/j/85284907468?pwd=jegVnmijYIn5O8kTVCbD6R4LfUDv8p.1>
- Lincoln Area: Friday January 24, **1-2 pm Central Time**
 - Zoom link: <https://us06web.zoom.us/j/89934074813?pwd=0EbdZ2Pp00wlsu2yqHDe4bNflNfnCZ.1>

Contact Stephanie Vadnais (svadnais@nebraskachildren.org) for a calendar invite.

Young Professionals Leadership Camp

Planning is underway for our first ever Young Professionals Leadership Camp August 6-8, 2025, at Camp Comeca near Cozad, NE. This experience will bring high school and college-age afterschool professionals together for training, connection and leadership development. Registration will open on February 1.

To learn more, visit <https://beyondschoolbells.org/resources/young-professionals-leadership-camp.html>

If you have ideas or want to join our planning team, please reach out to Alana Pearson at apearson@nebraskachildren.org or 402-380-4552.

kid-grit Free Virtual Training Series

Holistic Wellness for Educators: The Path to Self-Care

- Holistic Wellness for Educators: The Path to Self-Care, **February 18:** [Register to Attend Virtually](#)
- Introduction to Holistic Wellness for Youth, **March 18:** [Register to Attend Virtually](#)

- The Key to Family Wellness, **April 22:** [Register to Attend Virtually](#).

**Our Contact Information**

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