
Beyond School Bells Newsletter – April 2025

From Beyond School Bells <bsbinfo@nebraskachildren.org>

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Beyond School Bells
nebraskachildren



April 2025

News and Events

Innovating Amidst Uncertainty - It's a Wrap!



Over 500 Nebraskans attended three days of events comprising this year's Expanded Learning Opportunity (ELO) Innovation Invitational – *Innovating Amidst Uncertainty*. Held at UNL's Innovation Campus, this free event provided afterschool advocates and practitioners

with opportunities to learn and grow alongside national experts, peers in afterschool programs across the state, and, most importantly, directly from Nebraska youth representing the future of afterschool in Nebraska.

Throughout the conference, BSB announced new initiatives that we will be piloting in the year ahead, some of which are highlighted elsewhere in this newsletter. Please check out **this blog** for a detailed recap of the exciting conversations that made this event a success and check out our conference website to access conference materials - <https://beyondschoolbells.org/innovation-invitational/>

We want to thank the many participants who were actively engaged in all aspects of this event as well as the partners and presenters who gave their time to make the conference a great success. This was our third Innovation Invitational – it has been our honor to host these early Spring energy boosts for Nebraska’s ELO community. While we anticipate this will be our final Invitational, BSB is looking forward to working with our partners to continue providing support that meets the needs of the dynamic ELO community in Nebraska.

New Network Leadership

In the spirit of continued support amidst change, Beyond School Bells is excited to announce changes to our own administrative team. Following the Innovation Invitational, long-serving BSB Network Lead and NCFF Vice President Jeff Cole announced that he would be stepping down from his full-time position later this year. Jeff has been leading BSB for 18 years and is looking forward to working as a strategic advisor for BSB programs as he pursues new opportunities internationally, as his wife has taken a position that will require significant foreign travel.

After an internal search process, NCFF is proud to announce that Dr. Alison O'Toole, BSB's current Associate VP will be moving into the Network Lead role. Jeff will work alongside Dr. O'Toole as a co-director for three months before shifting into a new role as Strategic Programs Director beginning in July. Dr. O'Toole has been heading up a variety of key BSB projects over the past year and is ideally placed to continue leading the Beyond School Bells team's continued success. Please join us in welcoming Dr. Alison O'Toole as the new BSB Network Lead!



SUMMER!

Summer of Reading Exploration Pilot Projects ***Applications Now Open!***

Get ready for an exciting Summer of Reading Exploration: Applications are now open for our Summer 2025 literacy-focused mini-grants! These funds can support innovative literacy projects linked to your Summer program. Choose from a range of creative pilot projects—from eye-catching Book Stands (a display of books available for use in your program and for young readers to take home) and program reading areas to engaging clubs. All pilots will include funds for a connected Family Engagement activity or event. Find more information on our website: <https://beyondschoolbells.org/summer2025/summer-of-reading-exploration-literacy-pilot-project-mini-grants.html>

First find and read the Summer of Reading Exploration Info Sheet, then access the application. **Applications are due Monday April 21 by 5 pm Central.** Direct questions and completed applications to Stephanie Vadnais, svadnais@nebraskachildren.org.

[Learn More](#)

REGISTRATION OPEN: Young Professionals Leadership Camp

Camp Comeca | August 6-8, 2025



We encourage you to register for the BSB 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.

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

To join our planning team, please reach out to Alana Pearson at apearson@nebraskachildren.org.

[Learn More](#)

Resources and Opportunities

Afterschool Program Site Visits...sign up TODAY!

Don't miss the chance to explore high-quality afterschool programs! This April, Beyond School Bells is hosting a series of Afterschool Program Site Visits. Experience firsthand how programs across the state support students and families in school-based afterschool settings. Observe best practices, exchange ideas, and gain fresh insights into extended learning opportunities. HELP make these visits a SUCCESS! Plus, enjoy refreshments at each location! If you can't attend, please send someone from your team and they can share with others what they learned!

The SIX site visit locations are:

- Friday April 4th – Wood River Elementary
- Monday, April 7th – Arnold Elementary – Lincoln
- Tuesday, April 15th – Centennial Elementary – Columbus
- Wednesday, April 23rd – Cozad Elementary
- Thursday, April 24th – Westmoor Elementary – Scottsbluff
- Tuesday, April 29th – Norfolk Middle School

[Sign Up Today](#)

Also, be sure to plan, create, and place orders in advance for...**Afterschool Professional Appreciation Week: April 21-25, 2025**

Reach out to Patricia at psanchezstewart@nebraskachildren.org if you need ideas.

Michelle Arehart ELO Administrator Fellows Program: Due April 11

The ELO Administrator Fellows Program will bring together six to eight experienced ELO program administrators from across Nebraska to collaborate as a cohort, learning from one another and exploring shared challenges while developing innovative solutions to support and expand Nebraska's ELO sector. Selected from a statewide applicant pool, Fellows will receive a **\$5,000 stipend**, be recognized at the 2025 Get Connected conference, and work together to create a final group presentation to be shared at statewide conferences. This program will launch in May 2025 with an in-person program design session and include regular, half-day site visits hosted by Fellows in their home communities, culminating in a final gathering in Lincoln.

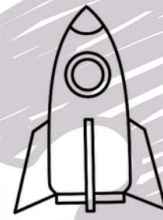


Each meeting will feature a working lunch provided by BSB and an opportunity for hosts to showcase their community's ELO program, discuss challenges, and highlight opportunities. Fellows will be chosen to reflect the depth and diversity of Nebraska's ELO community, and applicants will be asked to identify a key challenge they wish to explore through their participation. **Applications are due April 11.**

[Apply Now](#)



READY,
STEM,
GO! 2025



REGISTER TODAY!

A national alliance of 6 afterschool networks is partnering to host a free, two-day virtual conference, shining a spotlight on resources, strategies, and inspiration to boost afterschool and summer STEM programming! This virtual conference will provide opportunities for afterschool and summer professionals to network with peers from across the country, engage with speakers committed to supporting others in designing enriching STEM activities beyond the classroom, and ignite excitement to help youth explore STEM and all the ways it can inspire and set their lives up for success!

Register Today

Looking Ahead - GetConnected 2025

The 2025 Nebraska GetConnected Afterschool Conference is now accepting proposals for **workshops** and **Walk and Talk tables**! This year's conference will be held on **Friday, September 26, 2025, at the Younes Conference Center in Kearney, Nebraska**, bringing together afterschool professionals, educators, and community partners to share best practices and innovative ideas.

We invite you to submit a proposal for:

- **Workshops** – Interactive 50-minute sessions providing valuable insights, tools, and strategies for afterschool professionals.

- **Walk and Talk Tables** – A networking opportunity for organizations, businesses, and program partners to connect with attendees and showcase resources that support afterschool programs.

Walk and Talk Table Fees:

- **\$75** for non-profit organizations
- **\$150** for for-profit organizations
(Fees include conference registration, breakfast, and lunch for one participant.)

Key Deadlines:

- **Proposal Submission Deadline:** June 16, 2025
- **Acceptance Notifications Sent:** July 7, 2025
- **Conference Registration Closes:** September 12, 2025

Submit proposals by [clicking here](#).

We look forward to your participation in making this year's conference a success!

Program Spotlight

Tour of Nebraska Afterschool Programs

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



Next Stop: **BLAST - Beatrice Learning After School Time**



BLAST - Beatrice Learning After School Time is a place where students and families find a safe, supportive space after school. Whether it's providing a place for kids of working parents, offering extra academic help, or connecting students with community resources, BLAST is making a big impact!

One highlight? Healthcare Heroes! Since August, 3rd-5th graders have been getting hands-on experiences in the medical field, sparking curiosity and future career dreams.

This year, BLAST staff met a huge challenge—combining three programs into one space and transforming their operations. And they knocked it out of the park! Their dedication ensures students continue to thrive.



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](#))!



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