

Youth Voice

2023-2024 Project Summaries

Youth Leadership Council | Brainstorming Project | Design Studios



Beyond School Bells

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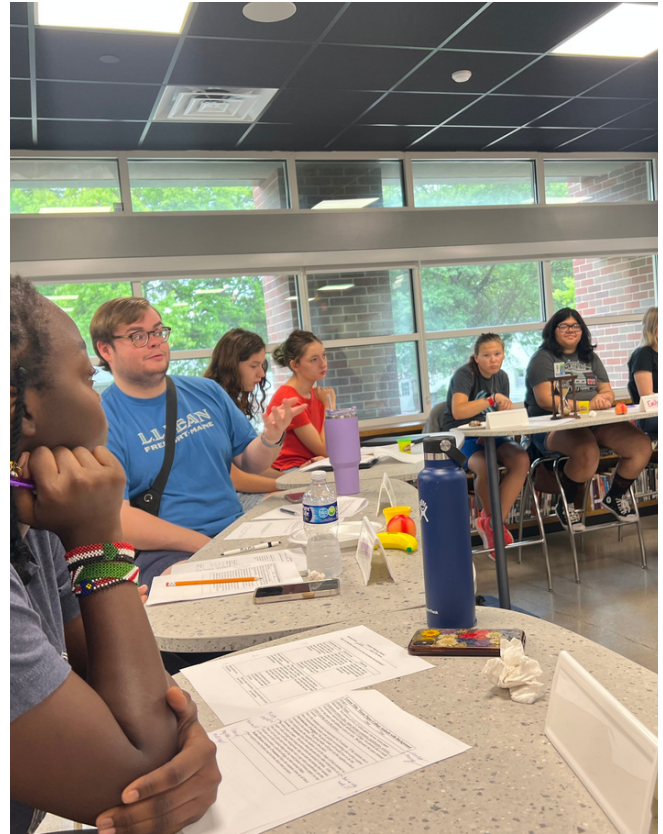
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Youth Voice: Elevating Student Perspectives in ELOs

Beyond School Bells believes youth are not just participants in afterschool and summer programs, but powerful partners in shaping them. The 2023–2024 Youth Voice initiatives—spanning the Youth Leadership Council, Youth Brainstorming Project, and Design Studios—created meaningful opportunities for young people across Nebraska to share their perspectives, lead projects, and design curriculum that enriches Expanded Learning Opportunities (ELOs).



The **Youth Leadership Council** brought together high school students employed in afterschool programs to connect with peers, develop leadership skills, and turn their ideas into action. Through the **Youth Brainstorming Project**, more than 270 elementary and middle school students in 23 communities shared what activities most engage them. Their feedback provided direct guidance for program planning, ensuring offerings reflect student interests and spark curiosity. In **Design Studios**, high school and college students collaborated with industry experts to create high-quality curricula in areas like engineering, entrepreneurship, test prep, and environmental education.

Together, these efforts ensure youth voice is central to BSB's mission—shaping programming that is relevant, inspiring, and transformative for Nebraska's young people.

Youth Leadership Council

Beyond School Bells
Goal Alignment



Quality



Sustain



Policy



Programming

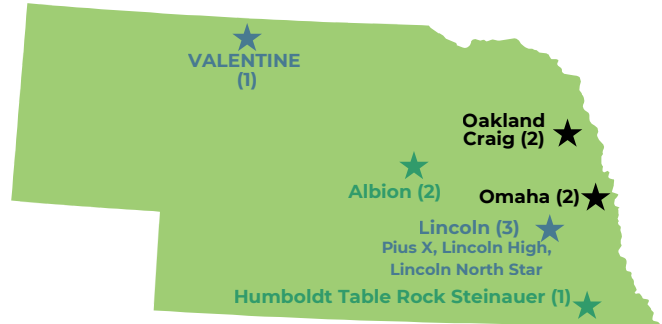
BSB's Youth Leadership Council was created to amplify the voice of students at afterschool and summer programs across Nebraska by engaging them to identify and propose solutions to challenges faced in their afterschool programs. The council is made up of high school students who currently work in their local programs and/or have been significantly impacted by afterschool programming.

Over a semester, students create and propose projects to either improve an aspect of their afterschool program or fulfill an unmet need. In Fall 2024, project topics included staff recruitment, parent engagement, and program marketing.

After participating in the YLC, **100% of the Fall 2024 youth cohort reported** that they:

- Felt more confident taking a leadership role in their program
- Learned one or more tactics to better engage with students
- Would recommend membership on Youth Leadership Council to a friend

The summer YLC experience was an accelerated one-month-long program. Students who participated in Summer 2024 voiced their opinions and suggestions about Beyond School Bells initiatives and designed personal service-learning projects for implementation at their afterschool programs for the following year. Project topics included training staff on strategies for building



★ Fall

★ Summer

★ Fall and Summer

5 NE afterschool programs were represented in Fall 2023

4 NE afterschool programs were represented in Summer 2024

10 high school ELO staff completed Fall 2023 and Summer 2024 council

relationships with students, updating program schedules to encourage more hands-on activities, and incorporating agricultural learning into afterschool programming.

Ten high school students from nine afterschool programs participated in the Youth Leadership Council (YLC) during Fall 2023 and Summer 2024. They reported valuing connecting with peers across the state who shared their passion for kids and afterschool programs, and they appreciated opportunities to put their ideas into action.

“

I learned how to better build relationships and the importance of putting kids first.

”

YLC Project: Teaching Technology

“Setting a Successful Path to a Tech Future”



Grade 11



Ladies in
Information
Technology
(LIIT)



Marian
High School

Majieahna W.

Omaha, NE

Summer 2024 Council

“This project will engage students with a set curriculum of fun STEAM activities. I picked this project because I have noticed that when students do not have a set schedule, things typically go off track. So, to combat this issue I want to implement surveys and student feedback to make sure we are doing what the kids want to do while keeping it organized and engaging.”

Majieahna shared her lesson from a YLC strengths and leadership exercise:

“I am a confident leader who is brave enough to stick up for others. I am committed to being someone people can rely on so that I can be a support system for people in their harder times.”

When asked why afterschool matters to them, students highlighted the importance of having a safe space, access to hands-on learning not always available in school or at home, and the chance to mentor and teach younger youth. In reflecting on their leadership, YLC members emphasized respect, kindness, and love as guiding values, and their desire to help build supportive, welcoming environments.

Students also offered advice for future YLC participants: share your story, embrace the opportunity, and know the experience will expand your learning and perspective.

“

Afterschool programs provide an outlet of learning for kids where they don't have to worry about grades and can enjoy learning and practice teamwork.

It is a more open and free place than most kids experience anywhere else, which is why it is vital. It teaches kids their first truly independent skills.

”

Brainstorming Project

Beyond School Bells
Goal Alignment



Quality



Sustain



Policy



Programming

In Fall 2023 and Summer 2024, programs receiving BSB Summer of Discovery Grant funds had an opportunity to participate in a data collection activity designed to shape programming. Students were asked to share the types of learning opportunities and experiences they enjoyed and wanted to see more of in their afterschool and summer programs. A total of **124 students** from eleven afterschool programs provided their opinions in Fall 2023, and **150 youth** across 12 school communities participated in Summer 2024. Each session lasted 45-60 minutes and was administered by program staff members familiar with the students.

Using the Youth Brainstorming Sheet, students were first asked to list their top three clubs or activities they experienced in the past. They then reviewed graphics of different themes and rated them from one to ten on their interest level. At the end of the activity, students added their own ideas in spaces provided on their worksheets.

Collected sheets were analyzed and assigned themes based on a model initially developed by Equimeasure Consulting during the 2022-2023 reporting period. These themes were updated during the administration of the activity in 2023 with the addition of a mindfulness theme, and the updated model was applied to the student data for the summer 2024 administration.

The facilitator prompted students to consider the best out-of-school-time experiences they've had. Expeimential learning activities are hands-on

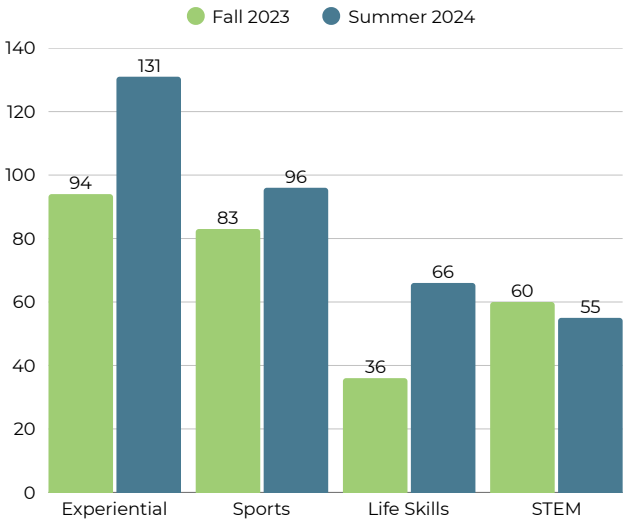
TOTAL PARTICIPANTS

Fall 2023 124

Summer 2024 150

experiences where youth learn by actively doing, rereflecting, and applying new skills in meaningful situations. For the 2024 administration, students overwhelmingly valued **experiential** activities the most. **Sports** and **experiential** experiences have consistently held the top spots for youth across Nebraska over the past two years. In the thermometer ratings section, where students assign a rating of one to ten on a thermometer graphic, providing **field trips** was consistently the highest-rated theme, along with **time with friends** and **hands-on activities**.

TOP 3 PAST EXPERIENCES BY THEME



TOP THERMOMETER RATINGS

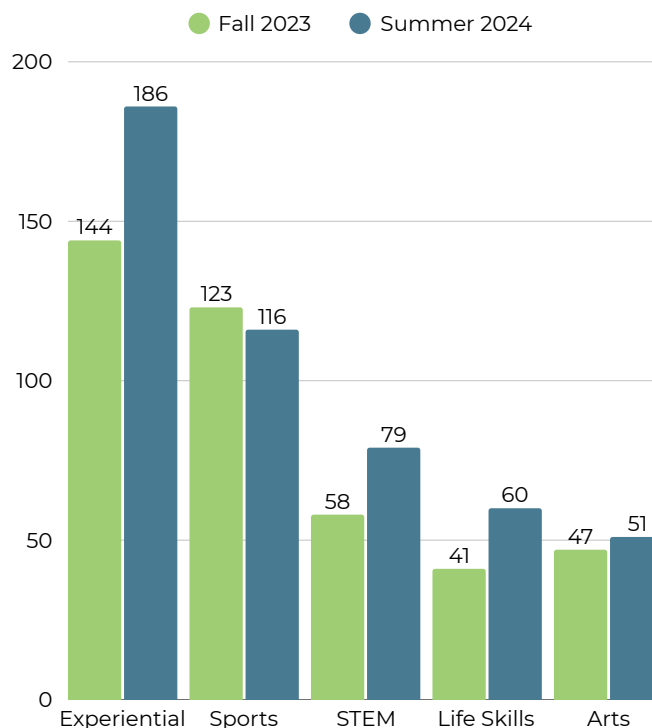


- 8.8 Field Trips
- 8.6 Time with Friends
- 7.8 Hands On!
- 7.5 Movement & Sports
- 7.4 STEM
- 7.4 Cooking

As part of the brainstorming activity, students suggested topics to learn more about, opportunities they wanted to experience, or activities they wanted to explore but couldn't access on their own. Themes based on students' responses were determined based on the methods for implementing students' suggestions. **Experiential** programming was by far the most common theme, with 186 suggested activities. Examples included field trips to the zoo, attending football camp, going to fast food restaurants, horseback riding, going boating, and touring museums. **Sports** (116) and **STEM** (79) were other high-frequency themes and included activities such as swimming, football, rock walls, learning about space, robotics, and creating stations.

The information collected can directly impact program planning and help to lift up student's preferences and interests.

NUMBER OF SUGGESTIONS BY THEME



TOP 3
LIST YOUR TOP 3 FAVORITE THINGS YOU HAVE EVER DONE IN AFTERSCHOOL:

1ST _____

2ND _____

3RD _____

WHAT DO YOU WANT YOUR AFTERSCHOOL/SUMMER PROGRAM TO LOOK LIKE?

YOUR IDEAS HERE

TITLE YOUR IDEA: _____

TITLE YOUR IDEA: _____

TITLE YOUR IDEA: _____

TITLE YOUR IDEA: _____

For access to the Youth Brainstorming Sheets and guide: <https://beyondschoolbells.org/youth-voice/design-studio.html>

Design Studios

Beyond School Bells
Goal Alignment



Quality



Sustain



Policy



Programming

Design Studios, also known as Design Sprints, are iterative design processes facilitated by Beyond School Bells, afterschool program staff, and industry professionals. These sessions bring together high school and college students over a shared topic to create a fun, engaging, and hands-on curriculum for use in afterschool or summer programs throughout Nebraska. Design Sprints occur over students' school breaks and have contributed to an online curriculum bank housed on the BSB website. Topics for developed lessons include ACT test preparation, aviation, and entrepreneurship.

DESIGN SPRINT DESIGN & SCHEDULE

During a sprint, students are tasked with taking ideas for a curriculum and translating them into lesson plans and material lists. Students also anticipate and problem-solve for potential implementation challenges. To provide information and context to the design, industry professionals connected to the areas of interest join the sessions as topic experts. Facilitators guide students through activities and discussions to help them progress toward their goals.

Each day of the sprint has a different focus. Early in the process, participants develop a long-term goal, identify challenges, and create inspiration boards. Facilitators support students' work by providing feedback. After the initial development steps, participants move into storyboarding and prototyping. Finally, students present their curriculum to a group of experts, receive feedback, and reflect on their overall experience.

STUDENT PARTICIPANTS

From 2019 to 2024

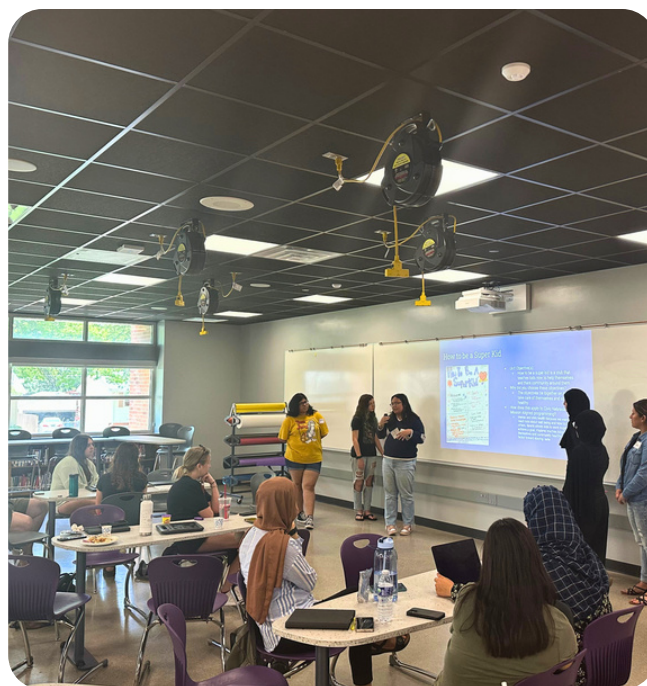
150 Total students

14 Afterschool Programs

10 Facilitated Design studios

DESIGN SPRINTS

- ▶ Take 4 to 5 days to complete
- ▶ Last 6 to 8 hours typically
- ▶ Provide electronic and physical resources to produce final products



For access to Design Sprint Guide and Design Studio Output examples, visit <https://beyondschoolbells.org/youth-voice/design-studio.html>

DESIGN STUDIO PARTICIPANT EXPERIENCES

Feedback from Design Studio participants has been overwhelmingly positive, with high school and college students focusing on highlights from the experience and details about knowledge gained. They explained that the experience provided numerous learning opportunities, better preparing them for their future education and career goals. Participants reported feeling included throughout the process, and they noted that the tools and resources necessary for success were provided. They identified that their ideas were heard and incorporated throughout and would recommend Design Studio participation to their friends.

“

“I felt like I really had an impact on afterschool programming in Nebraska.”

”

Students described how their efforts and suggestions were incorporated into a Design Sprint. Many noted that they shared their ideas and collaborated with fellow participants by dividing work responsibilities amongst the group. Students shared that their work contributed to larger modules, individual lessons, activities, presentations, and visuals. They also reported using a variety of resources during the process, including online design tools such as Canva and physical materials for prototype development.

When asked about improvements, many students reported enjoying the current program as it is. Those who had suggestions requested more time, as much as an additional day, to help finalize and edit their ideas. Additionally, some students requested

“

“I enjoyed how collaborative the whole process was.”

“I enjoyed meeting students from many backgrounds and connecting with them; we all had so many great ideas.”

”

that more information be provided before the event, as they felt they could have been better prepared and ready to participate.

Students shared that they enjoyed the Design Sprint process. Many felt that meeting students with different backgrounds enhanced their collaborative efforts. They also reported enjoying the various topics they learned about and learning from experts who shared their knowledge.

DESIGN STUDIOS IMPACTS

Design Studios provide numerous benefits for BSB, Nebraska afterschool programs, and student participants. BSB and programs gain high-quality curricula, designed by students who are near-peers with the intended audience. High school and college students develop valuable academic and workforce skills and experience through the planning and design process. Participating students reported enjoying the Design Studios structure and feeling a sense of ownership and pride about the created materials. In addition, many participants expressed greater interest in working for afterschool programs.

Design Studios: Developed Curricula

Design Studio	Curriculum	Status	Curriculum Link (if applicable)
College and Career Readiness	So You Want to Be A... 3.0	Complete and available	https://beyondschoolbells.org/curriculum/college-and-career-readiness.html
Engineering Mindset	CityBuild and Mission2Mars	Complete and available	https://beyondschoolbells.org/curriculum/engineering.html
Environmental	Environmental Education (BioBlitz, Waste, & Solar Energy)	Complete and available	https://beyondschoolbells.org/curriculum/environmental-education.html
ACTivate	College Test Prep	Complete and available	https://beyondschoolbells.org/curriculum/college-and-career-readiness.html
NextEra Wind Energy	Wind Energy	Complete and available	https://beyondschoolbells.org/curriculum/environmental-education.html
Environmental	Tree-a-thon	Complete and available	https://beyondschoolbells.org/curriculum/environmental-education.html
Environmental	Environmental Scavenger Hunt	Complete and available	https://beyondschoolbells.org/curriculum/environmental-education.html
Aviation	Aviation	Complete and available	https://beyondschoolbells.org/curriculum/engineering.html
Engler Entrepreneurship	Entrepreneurship Mindset	Complete and available	https://beyondschoolbells.org/curriculum/entrepreneurship.html
Makerspaces	Film Making 101	Complete and available	https://beyondschoolbells.org/curriculum/arts.html
Boys Programming	Crash Course: Island Survival	Complete and available	https://beyondschoolbells.org/curriculum/environmental-education.html
Working with Kids	Professional Development for High School and College Staff	final revisions, available soon	not yet available

