

State & National Reach

2023-2024 Impact Summary



Beyond School Bells

nebraskachildren

Statewide Professional Development & Trainings | Conferences

National Partnerships | TMC Labs | Policy Work



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Tools that include AI technology were used to edit or improve portions of the narrative text in this report.



State & National Reach:

Expanding Opportunities for Nebraska Youth

Beyond School Bells (BSB) advances expanded learning opportunities (ELOs) in Nebraska by weaving together local innovation, statewide capacity-building, and national partnerships. This multi-layered approach ensures that afterschool and summer programs are not only sustained but also positioned to grow and adapt to the evolving needs of children, youth, and families.

At the state level, BSB provides tools and training that boost program quality and sustainability. The ELO Blueprint/Start-Up Toolkit and Incubator Survival Guide give program leaders essential resources, while regional professional development events, sustainability workshops, and statewide conferences connect educators and community partners. Events such as the Innovation Invitational and GetConnected Conference create opportunities to share best practices, highlight youth voice, and strengthen networks.

Nationally, BSB leverages partnerships with organizations such as the C.S. Mott Foundation, Afterschool Alliance, and STEM Next Opportunity

Fund. These collaborations provide access to cutting-edge resources, research, and national learning communities that enrich local programs. BSB's leadership extends beyond Nebraska through initiatives like the Ready, STEM, Go! Conference, which connects educators from over 25 states, and through the expansion of its Think Make Create (TMC) Labs—mobile maker spaces now operating in multiple states and even internationally.

BSB also elevates the role of policy in sustaining ELOs, engaging Nebraska's policymakers through events, advocacy, and education. From hosting STEM luncheons to organizing ELO Awareness Weeks at the State Capitol, BSB highlights how afterschool and summer learning programs advance student success, workforce readiness, and community well-being.

Together, these state and national efforts position Nebraska as a leader in expanded learning—ensuring youth have access to high-quality opportunities that spark curiosity, build skills, and prepare them for success in school, work, and life.

Statewide Professional Development & Trainings

Beyond School Bells
Goal Alignment



Quality



Sustain



Policy



Programming

START UP TOOLKIT/SURVIVAL GUIDE

Beyond School Bells continued to refine its ELO Blueprint/Start-Up Toolkit, developed in partnership with NDE, in 2023-2024. In addition to basic guidance for programs, the freely-accessible toolkit includes high quality, STEM-based curricula offerings, thereby providing a wide platform for building STEM-centered mindsets into the new programs BSB is supporting across the state.

The toolkit is linked with the Incubator Survival Guide developed jointly by NDE and BSB's ESSER III management team, and it includes grant requirements, important dates and deadlines, and other necessary program function information, such as an overview of yearly evaluation requirements and fiscal reporting. This resource will continue to play an important role in supporting community-driven efforts to start and improve afterschool and summer programs serving youth, family and community needs across Nebraska.

To access the ELO Blueprint Toolkit/Survival Guide, visit <https://bsbtoolkit.org/nutsbolts/planning.html>

MONTHLY, REGIONAL, AND FUTURE STATEWIDE MEETINGS

Beyond School Bells launched a series of quarterly regional PD events in October 2023. The events covered core topics, including the essentials of running afterschool and summer programs, fostering identity and purpose for youth, and building partnerships to sustain programs. During



the reporting period, four in-person meetings were held across two locations (twice each in Norfolk and Crete), where attendees represented many of BSB's program partners.

Each meeting was tailored to the attendees. For example, the conversation drove deeper into sustainability and funding at meetings where attendees were mostly Program Directors. The meetings resonated with attendees, some of whom successfully networked and then continued to build relationships between their programs through additional independently organized meetings.

ADDITIONAL ACTIVITIES

During the reporting period the following activities were also completed:

- Four Regional Zoom meetings were held between January 12-18
- BSB presented a Sustainability Series consisting of 5 short recordings housed on its website and two Lunch-and-Learn Zoom meetings in February. The series led to BSB offering sustainability workshops at the Innovation Invitational
- Four Regional Connection meetings were held in early April. Two sessions were in person, and two were offered online
- BSB provided food for an independent lunch gathering for afterschool program staff

Conferences

Beyond School Bells
Goal Alignment



Quality



Sustain



Policy



Programming

BSB continues to partner with Nebraska Department of Education's 21st Century Community Learning Centers and Nebraska Extension on the **GetConnected Conference**, which takes place annually in September. The 2023 conference in Omaha was our largest ever, supporting 462 registered participants, with 426 joining in person and 36 attending virtually. Focusing on Innovation, it included a combined keynote and work session, led by Kiewit Luminarium President Silva Raker, linked to the resources available at the nearby Luminarium. Prior to the conference, attendees were invited to attend a hands-on learning expo at the Luminarium.

In March 2024, BSB hosted our second annual **Innovation Invitational** conference. The two-day event offered 44 workshops to approximately 250 attendees, including afterschool and summer program staff, informal educators, school district administrators, and ELO community partners from across the state.

The theme throughout the conference was Innovation for Sustainability. Attendees had opportunities to connect with and learn from one another through hands-on workshops and informal networking time. The conference highlight was a **Youth Voice Night** and reception, in which young people shared their afterschool experiences, including its impact on future career choices. Other highlights included:

➤ **250** in-Person Attendees

➤ **44** hands-on workshops and breakout sessions

➤ 4 Keynote Addresses:

- *Going Beyond* and *Looking Beyond* by Dr. Tony Smith, Whyspeople
- *Conversation with the Commissioner* by Dr. Brian Maher, Nebraska Commissioner of Education
- *Nebraska's Bountiful Resources* by Jeff Yost, Nebraska Community Foundation, and Silva Raker, Kiewit Luminarium

READY, STEM, GO! 2 THE MOON

BSB is part of a national alliance of six afterschool networks (IL, MT, NE, ND, OH, VT) that hosted the second annual Ready, STEM, Go! Conference in 2024. This free, two-day, virtual conference provided resources, strategies, and inspiration to boost STEM programming in afterschool and summer. Sessions elevated free STEM resources, unique STEM program models, and actionable steps for afterschool professionals to:

- Introduce high-quality curriculum options that challenge youth to problem solve with curiosity and creativity
- Increase access to STEM programming for all
- Implement facilitation methods to promote an engineering mindset and positive STEM identity in all youth

This second year conference saw record-breaking attendance numbers, with over 300 virtual attendees across the two-day conference from over 25 states. Attendees included administrators, site directors, youth development staff, and STEM specialists of all experience levels. Among the highest attended sessions was "Empowering Tomorrow's Innovators: STEM Career Exploration for All Youth," a panel that highlighted practical ways to engage and excite K-12 youth in practical, hands-on STEM career exploration. Other session topics included outdoor education, math games, and engineering practices.

National Partnerships

Beyond School Bells
Goal Alignment



Quality



Sustain



Policy



Programming

Beyond School Bells partners with multiple prominent national organizations that provide support for its work and avenues to collaborate on national initiatives and projects. National partnerships include the C.S. Mott Foundation, STEM Next Opportunity Fund, and the Afterschool Alliance.

CHARLES STEWART MOTT FOUNDATION

The C. S. Mott Foundation's 50-State Afterschool Network is the nation's premier initiative supporting and convening state-level networks working to build high-quality out of school time programs for youth in every state across the country. BSB has partnered with the Mott Foundation for more than 20 years and benefits from this partnership in many ways, including:

- Utilizing Mott-supported outreach materials and research summaries explaining the effectiveness of afterschool programs
- Opportunities to experiment with national promising practices we adapt to fit Nebraska's unique contours
- Networking with other statewide afterschool networks to share successes and lessons learned

Examples of collaborated project areas include recent and ongoing work around college and career readiness and exploration, service learning, and partnership on our TMC Labs initiative.

STEM NEXT OPPORTUNITY FUND

BSB's work supporting the expansion of STEM programming in ELOs is strengthened by a multi-year partnership with the San Diego-based STEM Next Opportunity Fund—previously the Noyce Foundation. Through this partnership, BSB has been able to bring national best practices in afterschool STEM programming to Nebraska to supplement and facilitate local efforts at supporting STEM literacy across Nebraska. This partnership also connected BSB to a national learning community focused on high-quality parent engagement via STEM. BSB has also collaborated with STEM Next on the intersection of STEM and workforce development—an area poised for significant growth in the years ahead.

AFTERSCHOOL ALLIANCE

BSB is a longtime partner of the Afterschool Alliance, a Washington D.C.-based non-profit that works with a broad range of organizations and supporters aimed at engaging public will to increase public and private investment in afterschool program initiatives at the national, state, and local levels. This partnership provides BSB with:

- Access to afterschool marketing materials
- Best practices toolkits
- Data-driven analysis, including research reports, briefs, and policy updates
- Support on policy activities, including BSB efforts to engage Nebraska partners in projects providing education credit for OST learning opportunities



TMC Labs

Beyond School Bells Goal Alignment



Quality



Sustain



Policy



Programming

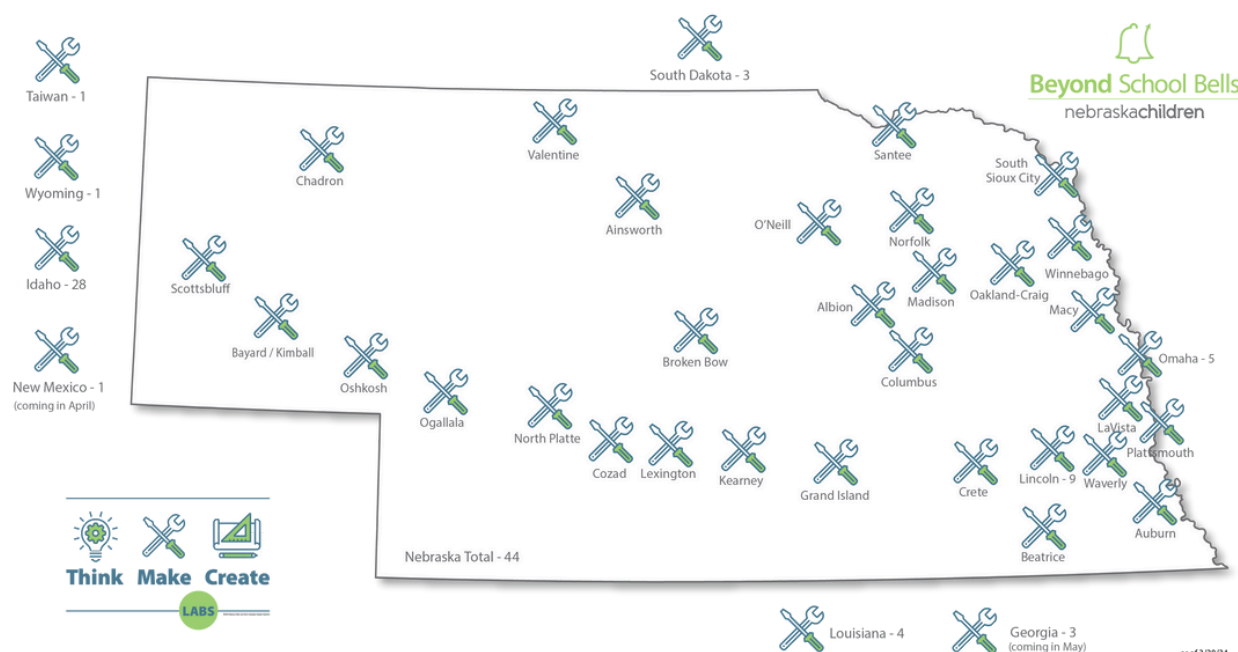
BSB's Think Make Create (TMC) Labs project was the first product of the ELO Innovation Network. From an initial prototype hand-built for Kearney in 2015, there are now 43 TMC Labs across Nebraska, as well as 33 labs in Louisiana, Idaho, South Dakota, Georgia, and New Mexico—and one international trailer in Taiwan.

Each TMC Lab is a converted 7x12-foot trailer providing afterschool programs with a mobile platform they can use to enhance existing programming for hands-on learning. Taking advantage of its mobility, the TMC Lab is designed for easy transport to community-based learning sites and special events. Tinkering and making can occur either outside of the trailer, utilizing preloaded equipment, tables, and pop-up canopies,

For TMC partner spotlights, activity ideas, and cross-state collaborations, visit <https://beyondschoolbells.org/mobile-maker-space/>

or inside the school. The supplies loaded in TMC Labs are designed to create opportunities for youth to tinker, explore, and problem-solve while serving as a low-cost strategy to promote long-term sustainability via new partnerships for rural ELO programs.

Looking ahead, Beyond School Bells hopes to engage partners across the state and country (and world) to develop innovative new programming strands that will enhance both the TMC Lab platform and the sustainability of high-quality ELO programs in communities across Nebraska over the next few years.



Policy Work

Beyond School Bells Goal Alignment



Quality



Sustain



Policy



Programming

And finally, in addition to supporting Nebraska's ELO programs with programming innovations, national and financial resources, BSB works at both the state and community levels to help educate adults about the importance of afterschool and summer learning and advocate for creating local and state policy to support and sustain this critical work.

Examples of these efforts include:

- ▶ Hosting annual ELO Awareness weeks in the State Capitol's Rotunda, where information about afterschool and summer programs is displayed.
- ▶ Sponsoring special proclamations for ELO-related events like Lights On Afterschool or Summer Learning Week.
- ▶ Cosponsoring special events for elected officials at the Capitol, such as STEM luncheons designed to elevate specific examples of the power of afterschool and summer learning programs to address priority needs in NE.
- ▶ Facilitated meetings between State Senators and their staff with rural afterschool program staff to educate policymakers about the importance of ELO programs.
- ▶ Sharing national, state, and local messaging tools and resources with Nebraska program staff to support efforts to educate local officials and other stakeholders.



