

ESSER III BSB Leverage/Sustainability Grants

Beyond School Bells
Goal Alignment



Quality



Sustain



Policy



Programming

In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, the Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief Fund (ESSER), administered by the U.S. Department of Education (US DoED), provided emergency financial assistance to public school districts nationwide. This general funding allowed state and local education agencies to ensure safe, in-person instruction, address learning gaps, and support evidence-based, sustainable programs that mitigated the pandemic's impact on students.

ESSER III Overview

In addition, recognizing their unique role of evidence-based afterschool and summer programs in helping address pandemic-related learning loss, the US DoEd provided almost \$11 million in additional funds to the Nebraska Department of Education (NDE) to grow and support NE's Afterschool and Summer programs. In May 2021, the State Board approved the creation of the ESSER Collaborative ELO in partnership with Beyond School Bells (BSB)—Nebraska's statewide afterschool and summer learning network and a program of Nebraska Children and Families Foundation (NCFF). NDE served as the fiscal agent, with BSB providing technical assistance, professional development, and grant administration. ESSER III-funded programming began in the summer of 2022 and ended in September 2024.

ESSER III dollars were provided to highly impacted districts with the goals of supporting pre-existing after-school and summer programs and starting new programs that would help students recover learning loss from the pandemic. To identify these communities and sites, NDE triangulated school identification (e.g., CSI, TSI, ATSI) and

achievement data, COVID-19 impact, and measures of a community's ability to respond to crisis (social vulnerability index). NDE then invited these targeted districts to participate in this new program.

Selected districts were categorized into Incubator, Accelerator, or Accelerator with Incubator sites.

Incubator sites were newly developed programs and/or sites that do not receive 21st Century Community Learning Center Funds.

Accelerator sites were districts with established programs that received 21st Century Community Learning Center funds in addition to ESSER.

Accelerator with Incubator sites were districts with established afterschool and/or summer programs that added new programming sites with ESSER funds.

ESSER III Outcomes

From Fall 2022 to Spring 2024, 35 ELO partnered districts received funding for 123 sites. On average, these programs served more than 9,000 students during the school year and more than 3,000 students during the summer. For newly created sites, ESSER funds provided the means to develop and implement unique programming, establish partnerships within their communities and with large-scale organizations in the state, and offer high-quality afterschool and summer programs. For established programs, these funds enabled expansion of current offerings and provided opportunities to enhance the quality of programming, staffing, and the number of community partnerships.

*ESSER-funded afterschool programs served
17,351 unique students in Nebraska*

ESSER III At A Glance

ESSER III impact was evident in several areas. Increased attendance, expanded programming, positive survey responses, growth in community partnerships, and improved assessment of program quality demonstrated the benefits for participating programs.

Overall Student Participation

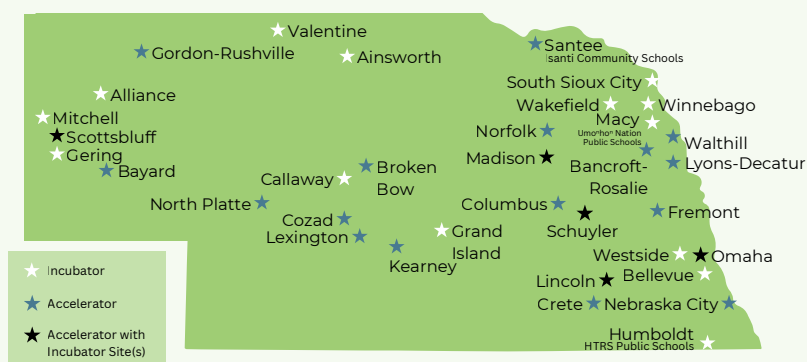
2022-2023	2023-2024
9344	9881
Summer 2023	Summer 2024
3761	3881

More than 70% of students from the 2022-2023 and 2023-2024 academic years, and more than 60% of students from the Summer 2023 and Summer 2024 sessions, were from rural areas. Most students who attended ESSER programs during the 2023-2024 school year qualified for free or reduced lunch (74%).

PROGRAMMING, CAMPS, AND CLUBS

Accelerator and Incubator sites provided approximately **18,000 hours of programming** during the 2022-2023 and 2023-2024 school years. Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM) programming was offered most often, followed by Academic Enrichment (including tutoring and homework help) and Healthy and Active Lifestyle programming. The number of sites offering programming within five key areas grew over the life of the grant (STEM, Academic Enrichment, Healthy and Active Lifestyle, College and Career Readiness, and Youth Leadership).

Sites operating in Summer 2023 and 2024 hosted **more than 900 clubs and 250 camps**. The number of clubs and camps offered increased from 2023 to 2024, with clubs growing by 18.6% and camps growing by 11.8%. The most frequent themes were art, science, and/or technology, sports, and physical exercise.



FIELD TRIPS, FAMILY ENGAGEMENT, AND COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS

During the summers of 2023 and 2024, programs hosted **722 field trips**, with the number of field trips increasing by 56% from one year to the next. The overall number of summer family engagement events held by ESSER-funded sites increased by 49% from Summer 2023 to Summer 2024, with sites hosting **157 total family engagement events**. From Fall 2022 to Summer 2024, the average number of partners for Accelerator Sites increased from 5 to 6 partners, indicating growth in community partner engagement for programs established prior to the grant.

PROGRAM QUALITY AND SURVEYS

To support continued growth and development, ESSER programs completed the Nebraska Afterschool Quality and Continuous Improvement System (NAQCIS) self-assessment and received feedback via NAQCIS external observations. The percentage of programs meeting the ESSER goal for the self-assessment increased in 9 of 10 domains from 2022 to 2023.

Caregivers and students completed surveys in the spring of 2023 and 2024. Caregivers consistently gave high ratings to the programs, agreeing that they were a benefit to their children and that their children experienced positive relationships with staff and other participants. Students reported high levels of peer connections (having friends and/or fitting in) and self-management (the ability to calm oneself down when excited or upset) in both years.

The BSB ESSER III Summary report provides more information on the impact of the grant:
https://beyondschoolbells.org/file_download/inline/ed4e6377-273e-401f-babo-cf535fa69102

ESSER III BSB Leverage/ Sustainability Grants

As ESSER III funding concluded, many programs highlighted its positive impact on program quality and community benefits, while expressing interest in sustaining efforts beyond the grant. Of the 17 Incubator sites surveyed in fall 2024, 12 planned to continue—an especially strong outcome given these districts were selected by NDE based on need rather than through an RFP process.

“

[The grant] providing opportunities for students who wouldn't otherwise be connected to the school was huge.

There is a huge need in their community for the afterschool program.

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After the conclusion of the ESSER III Collaborative, Beyond School Bells offered Leverage Grants for Greater Nebraska afterschool and summer programs. Eight ESSER-funded districts received Leverage Grants from BSB, including six Incubator programs. Administered during the 2024/25 school year and Summer 2025, the grant's primary goal was to sustain rural school-based ELO programs, with priority for Incubator sites established with ESSER III funds. Leverage Grant funding facilitated these programs' efforts to continue offering high-quality learning opportunities, strengthen partnerships with local businesses and organizations, and expand

ESSER III BSB Leverage Grantees



Incubator

Alliance
Grand Island
HTRS
Mitchell
Valentine
Wakefield

Accelerator

Bancroft-Rosalie
Bayard

opportunities for students and families during the bridge year after the ESSER period. Philanthropic partners played a key role by providing funds to extend and amplify the impact of federal dollars, demonstrating the power of public-private partnerships to impact youth, families, and communities in NE.

“

[We want to continue] elements that drive quality. [We] want to focus on this partnership and creating the program that most benefits kids and families!

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