

Afterschool HEALS

Beyond School Bells is proud of our work over the past decade to increase the scope of STEM programming in Nebraska's ELO programs, including projects encouraging girls to explore careers in STEM fields, areas where girls are underrepresented in key sectors expected to be drivers of future economic growth. Since BSB seeks to support ELO programming that allows all youth to thrive, we are excited to build on this existing work to explore programming meeting the unique needs of boys. As we began thinking about work in this area, we have been guided by research conducted by Richard Reeves, whose ***Of Boys and Men (2022)*** summarized and interpreted a vast array of recent research to argue modern society is leaving males, especially low-income males, behind in several key areas including: educational attainment, health / wellbeing, family structure, employment and economic prosperity, and an overall lack of purpose in our rapidly changing society. This short video summarizes **Of Boys and Men** main points <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DBG1Wgg32Ok>

For our purposes, BSB was concerned about the data on boys' educational challenges. The book summarizes statistics showing boys are, on average, lagging girls academically in many critical measures. The gaps start early and continue throughout boys' involvement in the ed system. Specifically:

- **Early Literacy and Language Skills:**
From the early years, boys tend to lag in reading, writing, and language development. These gaps can set the stage for later academic difficulties.
- **Grade Retention and Dropout Rates:**
Because of this slower start, boys are more likely to lag academically (lower GPA), be held back a grade and have higher dropout rates during secondary education, suggesting a systemic disengagement that can be traced back to early educational experiences.
- **Standardized Testing Performance:**
Across various standardized assessments - especially in reading and writing - boys consistently score lower than girls. This disparity is evident at multiple levels of schooling and serves as a measurable indicator of academic underachievement.
- **Lower Rates of Higher Education Enrollment:**
The cumulative effect of early academic struggles is reflected later in life, with fewer boys transitioning into higher education compared to girls (+15% in college grad rates), trends that continue into graduate and professional schools. This trend underscores current performance gaps but also suggests longer-term socioeconomic consequences for males.

Afterschool HEALS: Addressing Boys Learning & Employment gaps through ELO programs

Reeves identified Health, Education, Administration and Literacy (HEAL) as high growth career sectors where males are grossly underrepresented as prime areas for targeted investments / activities. He also suggests additional investments in career and technical education to better to reengage boys in learning and career readiness. At BSB, we believe afterschool and summer learning programs, because of their flexible structure and commitment to hands on, engaged, community-based learning, represent an opportunity to utilize HEAL based programming to acknowledge, address and ultimately close these learning and career opportunity gaps. We feel, as a first step, we feel there is a timely opportunity for Nebraska's ELO programs to integrate career exploration and workforce initiatives with Reeves' suggested HEAL framework. Such a focus would better support both boys and indeed all youth in their academic and career exploration, while at the same time helping to grow the critical HEAL-related workforce in Nebraska. At a community level, by integrating a HEAL career focus into afterschool and summer STEM learning programs, communities can create targeted interventions to help all youth succeed in education, prepare them for engagement in the local labor market and promote their overall well-being.