

# BEYOND SCHOOL BELLS

2021-2022 ANNUAL REPORT



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# OVERVIEW OF BEYOND SCHOOL BELLS



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Beyond School Bells is an initiative of the Nebraska Children and Families Foundation (NCFF), whose mission is to create positive change for Nebraska's children through community engagement. The focus of Beyond School Bells is to provide expanded learning opportunities (ELOs) to children in grades K-12 across the state of Nebraska. These opportunities include hands-on, engaged learning for students outside of their regular school day.

Research shows that when youth participate in high-quality, expanded learning opportunities, their attendance, positive behaviors, and overall school work increase and improve. High-quality learning programs can help low-income students succeed academically, and can also help high-performing students stay engaged and achieve greater levels of understanding. These programs, characterized by strong school-community partnerships, are critical to Nebraska's future economy.

## THE CORE ABC'S OF SCHOOL SUCCESS:



- ATTENDANCE INCREASES
- POSITIVE BEHAVIORS INCREASE
- COURSE WORK IMPROVES

Beyond School Bells is dedicated to improving access to and quality in Nebraska's ELO programs, and supporting ELO system-builders and educators as they work to build an educational system that better serves all Nebraskans.

The Beyond School Bells team also works to build partnerships between Nebraska initiatives and national organizations, that are committed to providing more youth with access to high-quality ELOs. Local partnerships are built to bring new energy to the ELO space, and help build long-term sustainability for ELO programs.

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## ELO INNOVATION NETWORK

In 2020, Beyond School Bells, with the generous support of NDE and private partners, successfully launched the ELO Innovation Network. The Nebraska ELO Innovation Network provides support to Nebraska schools, communities, educational institutions, and non-profit organizations in order to offer more high-quality, cost-efficient and locally sustainable afterschool and summer learning programs. The ELO Innovation Network also connects and supports new and established afterschool programs and informal education providers. These connections create opportunities for experimentation, piloting, and scaling-up new tools and approaches to high-quality, out-of-school learning that can be used locally and replicated statewide.

The ELO Innovation Network includes four components:

- 1 ELO DESIGN STUDIO**  
PROVIDES OPPORTUNITIES TO DESIGN AND PILOT NEW ELO CONTENT
- 2 PILOT PROGRAMS**  
SUPPORT TO COMMUNITIES LAUNCHING NEW ELO INITIATIVES
- 3 PROGRAM ENHANCEMENT**  
SUPPORT FOR COMMUNITIES EXPANDING EXISTING ELO PROGRAMS
- 4 CENTERS OF EXCELLENCE**  
SUPPORTS ESTABLISHED ORGANIZATIONS TO DEVELOP RESOURCES THAT CAN BE SHARED STATEWIDE

The work facilitating the ELO innovation Network was expanded in 2022 by deepening the public-private partnership with the Nebraska Department of Education. NDE was able to provide support in funding new opportunities as a result of the Federal COVID-19 relief funding.

“ THIS EXCITING \$11 MILLION-DOLLAR PUBLIC PLUS \$3 MILLION-DOLLAR PRIVATE PARTNERSHIP WILL HELP TO EXPAND ENGAGING, HIGH-QUALITY, SCHOOL-BASED AND COMMUNITY-POWERED AFTERSCHOOL AND SUMMER SCHOOL LEARNING PROGRAMS ACROSS NEBRASKA. ”

## BEST SUMMER EVER!

Experts agree that summer and after-school learning programs are top strategies for helping students recover academically from the impacts of the pandemic.

The Best Summer Ever (BSE) Grant is designed to support summer learning in schools and communities across Nebraska as a part of the Nebraska ELO Innovation Network. This grant provided summer learning programs with resources to supplement core learning with components that reflect youth interest, help build skills, and help students thrive in the wake of COVID-19 impacts.

## SUMMER LEARNING PROGRAMS PROVIDE:

- ENGAGED LEARNING
- HANDS-ON ACTIVITIES
- FUN CHALLENGES
- OUTDOOR EXPERIENCES
- CAREER EXPLORATION



Funding from the BSE Grant supported programs that were centered around environmental and conservation programming, youth-driven programming, service-learning, and civic engagement programming.

### ENVIRONMENTAL PROGRAMMING

GARDENING &  
OUTDOOR  
CLASSROOMS  
ENVIRONMENTAL  
SERVICE

### YOUTH DRIVEN PROGRAMMING

YOUTH IDENTIFIED  
TOPICS  
ENTREPRENEURSHIP

### SERVICE-LEARNING AND CIVIC ENGAGEMENT

ENVIRONMENTAL  
ACTION CIVICS  
YOUTH VOICE

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## PARTNERS GRANT PROGRAM

In 2013, Beyond School Bells (BSB) initiated the *Nebraska Statewide Coalition of Community-wide ELO Systems*—which is an informal partnership between Beyond School Bells and school-community ELO partnerships in multiple communities across Nebraska. In 2021, this BSB Coalition Grant was renamed and expanded to become the *BSB Partners Grant*.

The recipients of the BSB Partners Grant were schools and school districts working towards making their ELO programs exciting, engaging, inspiring, and supportive learning environments for the children and families in their community.

Beyond School Bells' work in supporting the Partners Grant Program focuses on three goals:



**ENHANCE** the long-term sustainability of high-quality, community-based ELO programming in BSB partner communities.



**SUPPORT** BSB partner efforts in developing and implementing effective communication tools, outreach strategies and events to promote ELO awareness.



**CONTINUE** to enhance the availability of innovative programming in ELO programs to youth in BSB partner communities.

Current investments in ELO innovation focus on STEM, entrepreneurship, environmental education, college and career readiness, family engagement, and social-emotional learning.

“THE BSB PARTNERS PROGRAM REFLECTS THE BELIEF THAT ELO PROGRAMS HAVE THE POTENTIAL TO BE AN EVEN MORE IMPORTANT ELEMENT OF THE EDUCATION LANDSCAPE ACROSS OUR STATE, AS NEBRASKA ATTEMPTS TO ACCELERATE AND ENHANCE LEARNING.”



# COMMUNITY PARTNERS

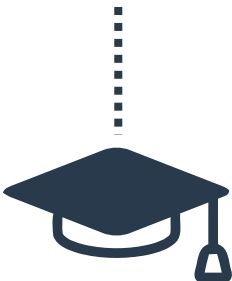
The communities involved in the ELO Innovation Network, Best Summer Ever, and Partners Grant Program each connected with several different organizations, sites, and local businesses to provide afterschool and summer learning opportunities to children and families across the state of Nebraska. The local partnerships made within each of the communities involved in one of the three grant programs vary in number, type, services provided, and activities made available to children and families.



WE WORK TO BUILD PARTNERSHIPS THAT RESULT IN MORE HIGH-QUALITY, SUSTAINABLE, OUT-OF-SCHOOL TIME PROGRAMS FOR NEBRASKA'S YOUTH.

## TYPES OF COMMUNITY PARTNERS

COLLEGES AND  
UNIVERSITIES



LOCAL SERVICE  
COMPANIES



LARGE SCALE  
ORGANIZATIONS



LOCAL  
BUSINESSES



SCHOOL AND  
COMMUNITY  
ORGANIZATIONS



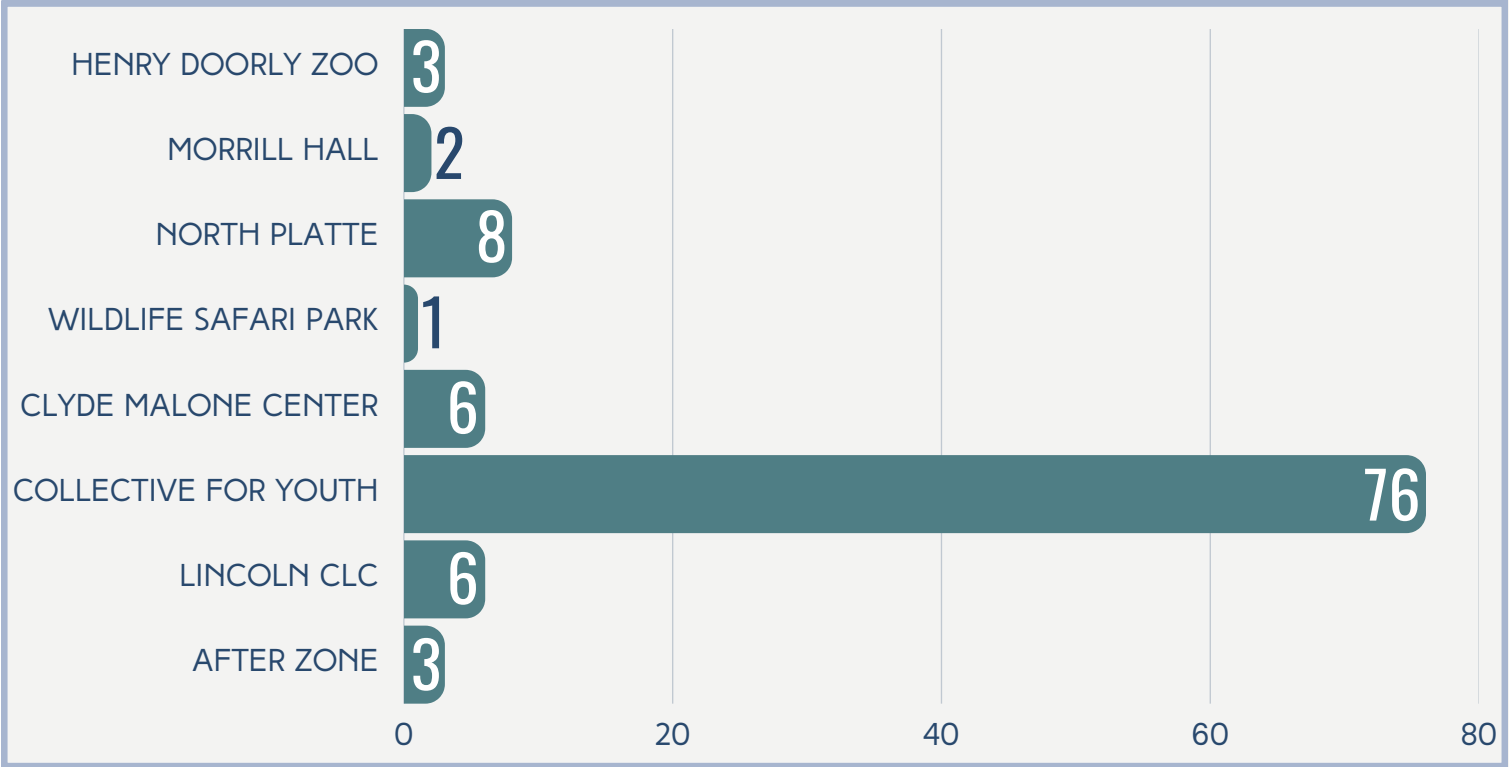
# ELO INNOVATION NETWORK

The ELO Innovation Network Grant was utilized by eight different organizations, who then partnered with a number of different local learning programs to pilot their curriculum and activities.

The chart below shows the number of partnerships made with sites where curriculum and programming were piloted using the ELO Innovation Network Grant in the 2021-2022 year.



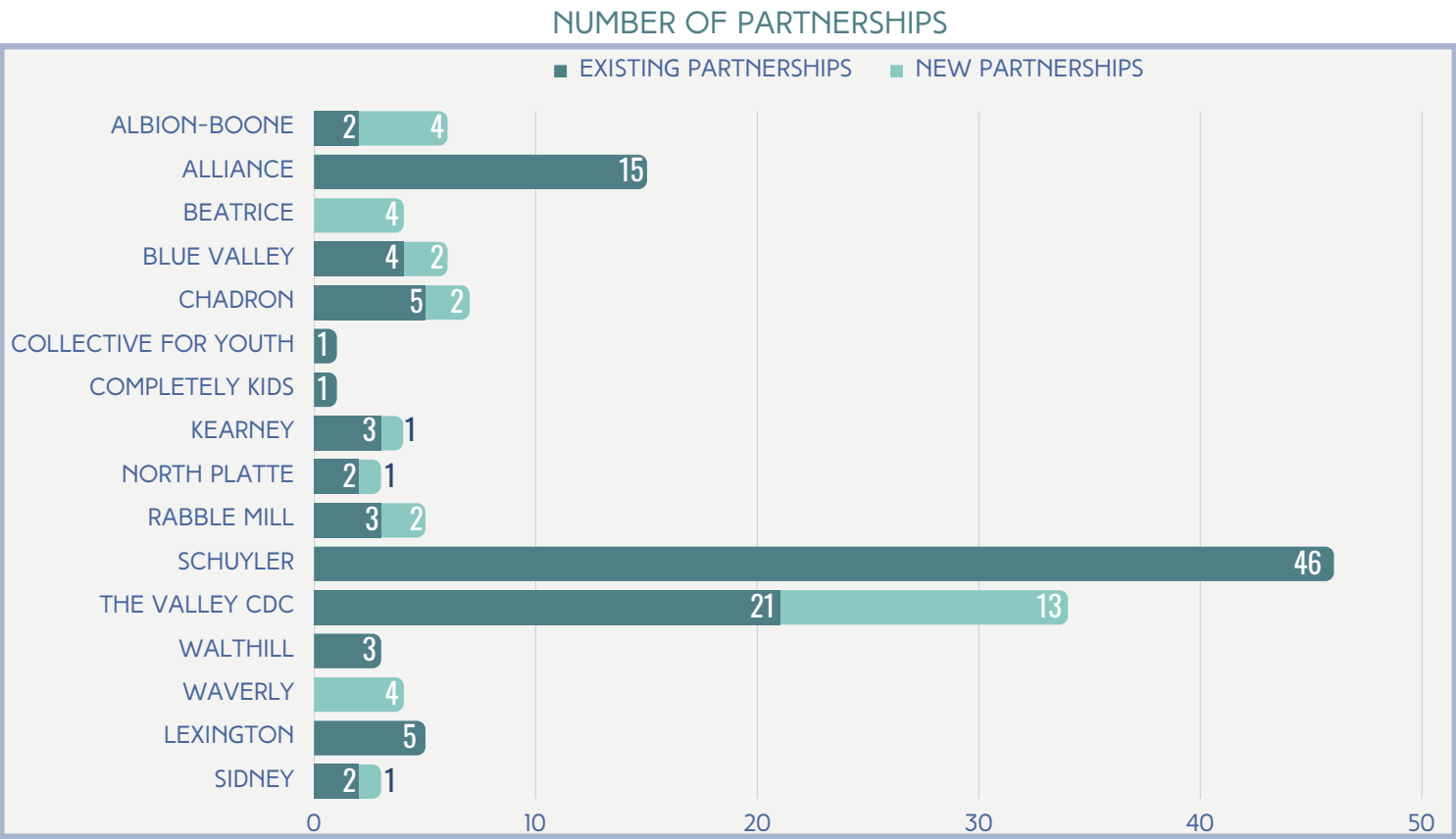
NUMBER OF PARTNERSHIPS



# BEST SUMMER EVER!

Communities involved in the Best Summer Ever (BSE) Grant reported that partnerships were formed with state or local organizations for their summer programming. In 2021-2022, 34 new partnerships were formed across the 16 communities. These new partnerships helped provide resources, general funding, programming facilitation and assistance, materials, and site staffing. The chart below shows the BSE communities, as well as the new and existing partnerships.

“THE PARTNERSHIPS WERE CERTAINLY SPOTLIGHTED THIS SUMMER. THEIR CONTINUAL INVESTMENT IN OUR PROGRAM IS A TESTAMENT TO OUR STRONG, RURAL COMMUNITY. TOGETHER, WE WILL ENSURE KIDS BEGIN TO THINK OF THEMSELVES AS BUILDERS, CREATORS, AND INNOVATORS.”



# PARTNERS GRANT PROGRAM

The Partners Grant Program involved eleven communities across the state of Nebraska. Each of the communities developed partnerships with various businesses, thus providing a wide range of support to their learning programs. In 2021-2022, 16 new partnerships were formed across the 11 communities. The chart below shows the Partners Grant Program communities, as well as the new and existing partnerships.



NUMBER OF PARTNERSHIPS





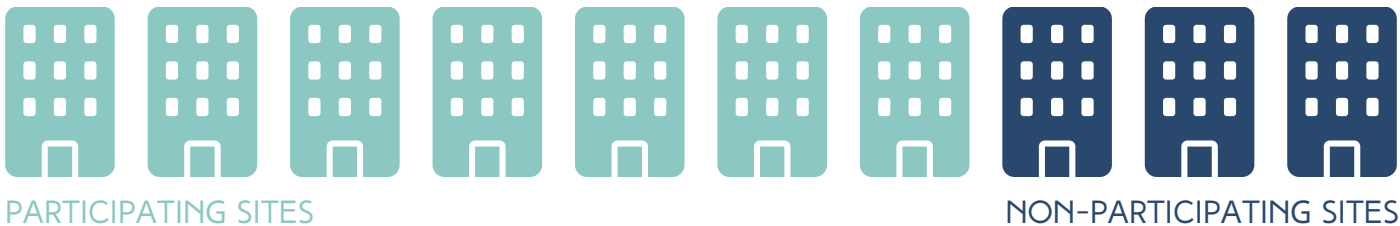
# COMMUNITY COLLABORATIVE

Community collaboratives bring local strengths and services together in communities with the aim of supporting families by giving them access to services they need to thrive so they can stay together, remain self-sufficient, and support the health and learning of their children. ELO programs participating in the Partners Grant Program are encouraged to attend their local community collaborative meetings where they can meet with nonprofit service providers, doctors, mental health practitioners, schools, churches, housing and transportation services, and even utilities companies to discuss how to effectively collaborate and utilize the resources and services in their community to meet the needs of its members.

ELO program staff who were able to attend the meetings reported several unique impacts. The first being that sites had the opportunity to renew contact with possible partners, by simply being in attendance together. A few sites also shared the importance of staying updated on community issues and events, and that the time spent hearing stories about what other programs are doing to serve their students was impactful.

However, ELO program staff did share that traveling to attend in-person meetings was challenging. This was due to conflicts in scheduling, and for some, a lack of communication regarding meeting dates and times.

The pictogram below represents attendance data reported from ten of the eleven Partners Grant communities.



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## SUCCESSSES

Across each grant program, similar successes were reported regarding the impact that community partnerships had on each site and its students. These successes include expanded opportunities for students, an increase in partnerships, an increase in staff and student numbers, and an increase in program funding and support.



The communities involved in each of the three grant programs shared similar reports regarding students having more hands-on experiences

and opportunities, as well as their exposure to new learning due to the local partnerships made. These connections also gave communities and sites the necessary resources to expand on the materials and program offerings already in place in their learning sites.

Some of the experiences and hands-on opportunities offered to students across the grant programs included, but were not limited to: **outdoor classrooms and gardening, entrepreneurship opportunities, cooking classes, cultural and historical exposure, field trips, and additions of new clubs.** The Cool Kids Club, located in Sidney and funded through Best Summer Ever, shared a partnership success story with a local bee keeper.

“ALICIA WEINBENDER WAS A GREAT HELP WITH GARDENING AND WHAT TO PLANT TO HELP POLLINATORS. SHE DID GREAT WITH THE KIDS AND KEEPING IT EASY FOR THEM TO UNDERSTAND. ALICIA BROUGHT US HONEY FROM HER BEES AND THE KIDS GOT TO EACH TRY SOME HONEY COMB. I HAVE ALREADY ASKED ALICIA TO COME BACK NEXT SUMMER.”

Many communities named the growth of new partnerships, and the number of students and/or staff, as points of pride for their program. This expansion is attributed to not only the local partners and new student experiences, but to the methods each community and site used to promote their program.

Programs utilized a variety of methods to promote their program and offerings in their community. Some of these methods included the use of social media (Facebook, Instagram, Twitter), video highlights

via YouTube, local advertisements (newspapers, magazines), and the use of podcasts to talk about their programs.

Some communities also reported that they were able to successfully fundraise by collaborating with their local partners. For some, this additional funding was braided with the monies provided by their grant, and was used to enhance the current program instruction and opportunities offered to students.



## PROGRAM PROMOTION



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## CHALLENGES

Communities involved with each of the three grant programs were also faced with a number of challenges when it came time to connect and build partnerships locally.

Several community sites found it challenging to get local businesses to commit to a partnership, due to many other individuals and outside agencies also seeking similar supports. Other difficulties arose in finding partnerships that had the financial means to support school learning programs and their participants.



Communities across the grant programs also reported that some local businesses could not commit to partnerships due to uncertainty about their own future following the COVID-19 pandemic. In addition, summer and afterschool learning programs struggled to bring some community partners back into sites because of ever-changing COVID guidelines.

Lastly, finding partners in the community who could provide the students with expert knowledge related to specific learning experiences proved difficult. As a result, some sites were not able to offer as many hands-on opportunities to their students.



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## FUTURE PARTNERSHIP GROWTH

To continue to grow partnerships between communities and local organizations, various learning sites plan to utilize several new and existing strategies.

Multiple sites shared that they intend to continue to foster the partnerships and connections already in place in their community.



These relationships will continue to thrive by holding regularly scheduled meetings, team planning, and get-togethers at annual program events.

Several grant program sites also shared their plans to reach out and connect with new businesses and organizations throughout specific points of the year. This way, potential partners can attend program-related events such as networking luncheons and conferences to learn more about what each program offers to the local community and its members.

Other communities plan to maintain and/or generate new positions within their programs, whose sole purpose will be to connect with and form partnerships with businesses and other agencies in the local area. These positions may entail a singular individual as a program coordinator or multiple people working together on an advisory team.



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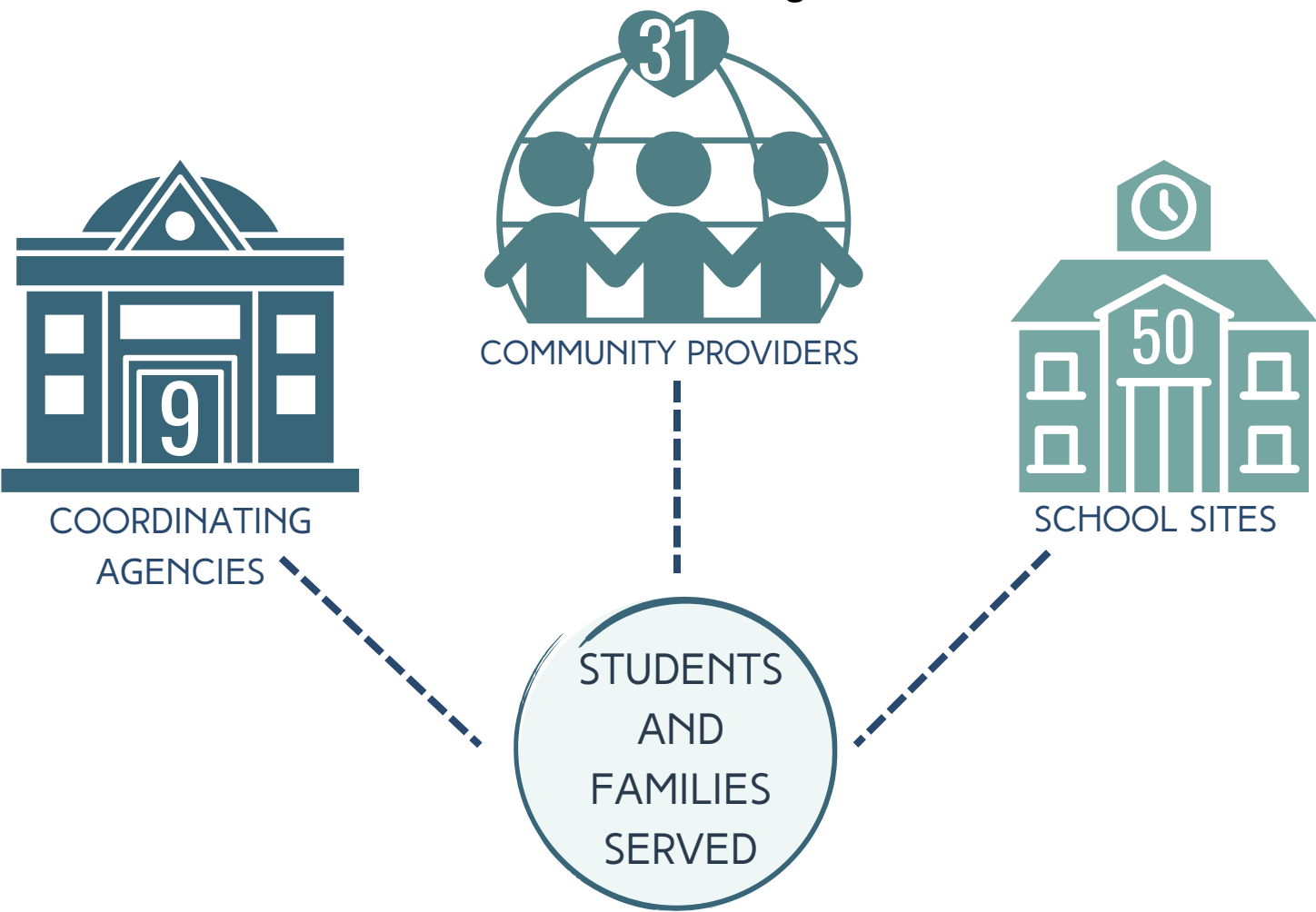
## WHO WE SERVE



# ELO INNOVATION NETWORK

The ELO Innovation Grant involved eight different organizations across several communities and programs that provided experiences and learning opportunities to students of all ages. These experiences were made available in a variety of educational settings.

Some organizations involved with this grant were able to bring students into their own learning environments (such as Henry Doorly Zoo), while others served the local youth by traveling to various recreational areas and sites across Nebraska. The ELO Innovation Network Grant served 50 school sites, nine coordinating agencies, and 31 other community providers. Hired staff varied per organization.





BEST SUMMER EVER!





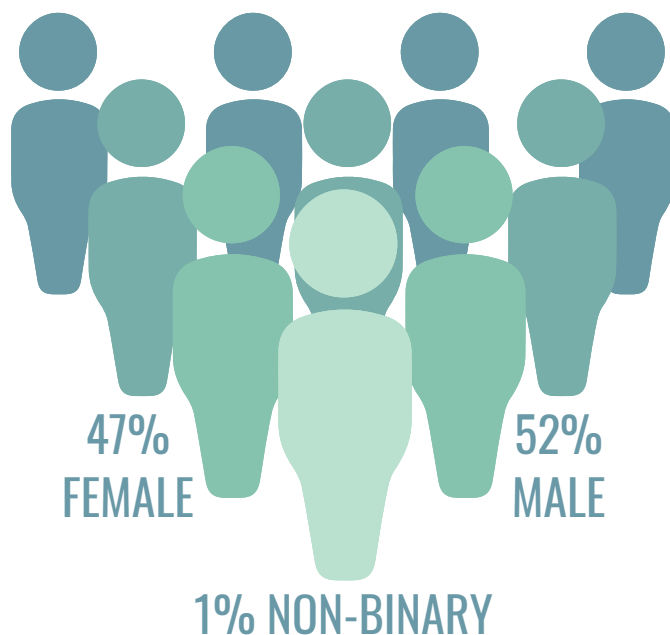
There were a total of 17 Best Summer Ever Grants awarded to communities in the 2021-2022 year. Of those, 16 communities reported data on the populations they served and the staff who supported summer learning.

Across the 16 communities, there was a total of 33 learning program sites. These programs included one mixed-age, six intermediate, and 26 elementary schools.

In total, 1,321 students attended Best Summer Ever learning programs. The majority of these students were elementary school-age (1,032), and the remaining 289 students were secondary.

Youth served ranged not only in age, but in gender as well. Across the total number of students

served, 47% identified as female, 52% identified as male, and approximately 1% identified as non-binary.

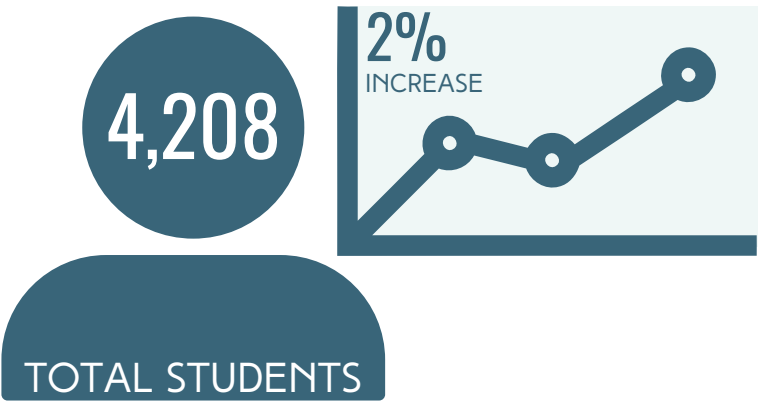


All respondents reported employing older youth for their summer programs. In total, there were 56 high school-age students and 43 college-age students hired across sites.

“WE HAD GREAT SUCCESS AT BRINGING A VARIETY OF YOUNG PEOPLE OF DIFFERENT AGES AND LIVED EXPERIENCES TOGETHER.”

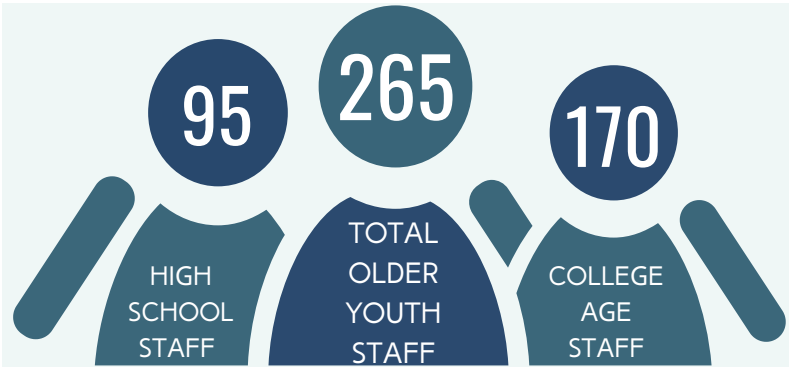
# PARTNERS GRANT PROGRAM

The Partners Grant Program involved a total of 11 communities. Within those communities, connections were formed with 51 different partner sites, and of those, 38 were elementary level, and 11 were secondary.



Across both elementary and secondary level schools, student enrollment totaled 4,208 students. Enrollment numbers increased by approximately 2% from the previous year.

The older youth who served as staff or program facilitators comprised of high school and college-age individuals. There was a total of 265 older youth staff members across communities and sites, and 36% of were high school-age, while the remaining 64% were college-age.



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# PROGRAM DEVELOPMENT

The funding provided to communities and programs through the ELO Innovation Network, Best Summer Ever, and Partners Grant Program allowed sites to further develop their learning programs and services. Several communities utilized braided funding to support their program, while others relied solely on stand-alone grant funding for these specific enrichment strands.

## MATERIALS

Communities across the three grant programs reported having similar needs as they related to materials, resources, staffing, and instructional tools. As a result, funds were used similarly to further develop student experiences and learning. Funding from each grant allowed communities to both update and

purchase new curriculums, update and purchase learning kits and trunks, purchase general student supplies, and purchase materials necessary to maintain current learning spaces.



## RESOURCES

Grant funds were also used to acquire a number of different resources for communities and learning sites. The most common resource reported was training materials and sessions so that staff could attend professional development.

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The training and professional development provided to staff varied in delivery. For example, some workshops were offered online, while others were provided as in-person training. Funding also helped some communities create professional development programs of their own to share with local partners and programs.

Funding also allowed communities to purchase resources that would support program outreach and promotion. For example, local advertisements and networking events.

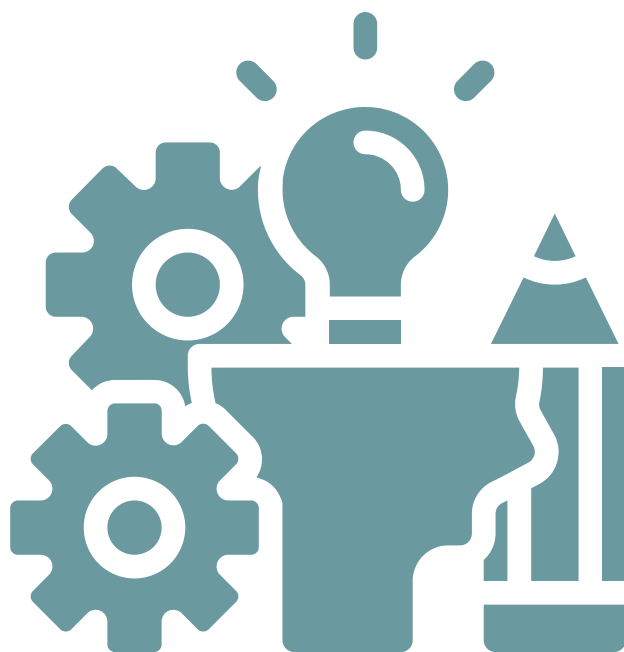
## STAFF

Some sites shared that the monies provided by their respective grant allowed for an expansion of staff as well. This not only included increasing overall staff numbers, but also developing new positions. For example, program director, advisory team, professional development facilitator, and other positions that focus on expertise as it relates to a club or activity.

## CURRICULUM

Several communities and organizations were able to utilize their funding to develop updated and new curricula for their learning programs. These sites shared the importance of creating a curriculum that was both high-quality and user-friendly, so that learning was clearly laid out and ready for educators and staff to utilize.

The following section will take a closer look at some of the curriculums, activities and other resources developed for learning.





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# CURRICULUM & ACTIVITIES

Several communities and organizations were able to utilize their funding to update and develop new curricula for their learning programs. These sites reported the importance of developing curriculum and instruction that was both high-quality and user-friendly, so that learning was clearly laid out and ready for staff to use.

In addition to new curriculum development, several communities were able to use community partnerships and funding to form new club offerings and activities for students, as well as create professional development opportunities for staff.

## ELO INNOVATION NETWORK

The organizations that were given funding through the ELO Innovation Network Grant updated

and created new curricula, activity kits, and club offerings for the youth they served. Additionally, monies were used to develop spotlight and training videos to be used for professional development across the state of Nebraska.

The following pages highlight these developments within each of the participating organizations.



## HENRY DOORLY ZOO & AQUARIUM

- Ocean Health at Sea Lion Shores curriculum developed
- Penguins of The World curriculum update
- Gorilla Conservation curriculum update
- Ocean Conservation curriculum update
- Zoo to You Boxes developed

## MORRILL HALL

Shoebox Science Kits developed

## NORTH PLATTE KIDS KLUB

- Social Emotional Learning (SEL) Program
- Pokemon Club
- Art Club
- Kendama Club
- Finger Skateboard Club
- STEM Club
- Disc Golf Club

## LEE G. SIMMONS WILDLIFE SAFARI PARK

- Importance of Pollinators curriculum developed
- Conservation-2-You boxes & virtual program developed
- The Native Butterfly curriculum updated
- Native Nebraska Animal curriculums updated
- Conserving Our Waters curriculum updated

## COLLECTIVE FOR YOUTH

A collection of on-demand videos and webinars were developed for training and staff development

## LINCOLN COMMUNITY LEARNING CENTERS

- A professional development webinar series on the Full-Service Community School Framework
- Coinciding workbooks developed

## COZAD AFTER ZONE

PowerPoints with basic information regarding starting and/or enhancing school gardens and programs developed

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## TMC LABS

The Think Make Create (TMC) Lab is a project of Beyond School Bells, and the first product of the ELO Innovation Network. The "Lab" is a converted 7x12 foot trailer that can easily be transported to ELO program sites and community-based learning sites. The TMC Lab provides afterschool programs with a tool they can use to enhance existing programming via a mobile platform for hands-on learning.

Tinkering and making can occur either outside of the trailer, utilizing TMC tables and pop-up canopies, or inside the school. TMC Labs are designed to be a low-cost entry point for Nebraska youth to tinker, explore and problem-solve while helping to promote long-term sustainability for rural ELO programs.

From an initial hand-built prototype in Kearney, the TMC Lab has grown to 44 units across Nebraska, with an additional 30

in four other states. Most recently, in 2022, one TMC lab has been placed for use in Taiwan.



Beyond School Bells hopes to engage partners across the state and country 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 and the nation over the next few years.

## TMC LABS: BIOBLITZ

TMCs are the perfect pop-up outdoor classroom station with a table and canopy to gather at and the basic materials students need to explore. These qualities make them a great platform for BioBlitz, which is a citizen science endeavor developed by National Geographic to explore and understand the living organisms inhabiting students' local environments. Combining BioBlitz with the mobility and opportunities provided by the TMC Lab, BSB developed 4 TMC stations to allow students of all ages to explore the natural world - Soil Life, Habitat

and Plant Life, Aquatic Life, and Animal Life. The stations provide younger students with opportunities like making mud-shakes and writing stories about plants they find; they provide older students with introductions to activities like biological surveying or other eye-opening experiences with the diversity of life around them. To everyone involved, it is a reminder of the value of getting outside and observing the natural world. In both urban and rural communities across Nebraska, TMC Labs have served as the key to BioBlitz and many other outdoor and environmental education experiences.





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## BEST SUMMER EVER

Communities and programs involved with the Best Summer Ever Grant used their funding to develop and provide a number of new activities and experiences to students. Some activities included outdoor education, hands-on

learning, field trips, expert instructors, and new club offerings. Programs also used this funding to maintain current activity offerings and learning spaces. The graphic below shows more detailed information on the innovative programming incorporated by each community.



### NORTH PLATTE KIDS KLUB

- Further developed the art program by incorporating natural materials found outdoors



### ALLIANCE ARC AFTERSCHOOL GARDENING & OUTDOOR CLASSROOM

- New STEM Cares student teacher hired to bolster the gardening program



### BLUE VALLEY CASTLE SUMMER PROGRAM

- New STEM Cares student teacher hired to bolster the gardening program



### ALBION-BOONE CARDINAL KIDS CLUB

- Added four new weekly themes
- Provided field trips for students



### BEATRICE BLAST ADVENTURE DAY CAMP

- Utilized community partnerships with: Fishing is Fun, Nebraska Forest Service, Project Wet & Gage County Extension to provide experiences



### CHADRON PUBLIC SCHOOLS

- Expanded academic enrichment opportunities
- Revitalized gardens to include individual student garden beds.



### COMPLETELY KIDS

- Created the CK Triangle (based on MTSSB & PBIS Frameworks)
- Implemented the PATHS/Emozi SEL curriculum across all programs
- Developed a calming room



### COLLECTIVE FOR YOUTH

- Launched Esports in 8 different sites in partnership with Future Kids

“OUR GARDEN PRODUCED SO MANY FRESH VEGETABLES FOR OUR STUDENTS. THE CROPS THAT WE HAVE HARVESTED HAVE BEEN INCLUDED IN OUR DAILY SALAD BAR AT LUNCH...IT IS OUR GOAL TO EVENTUALLY HELP FEED THE COMMUNITY”



#### KEARNEY COMMUNITY LEARNING CENTER

- Developed and implemented a Dungeons & Dragons club



#### SCHUYLER WARRIOR ACADEMY

- Developed a bicycle club to teach students about bicycle safety, arm signals, and how to ride a bike



#### RABBLE MILL GOOD LIVING CAMP

- Purchased recording devices to record sounds of nature, and then turn those sounds into music.
- Purchased new skateboards and supplies for skate club



#### THE VALLEY CHILD DEVELOPMENT CENTER

- Developed new weekly themes that involved collaborating with community partners



#### LEXINGTON PUBLIC SCHOOLS

- Business Builders Club
- Expansion of the summer market
- Provided a wide range of activities for students



#### WAVERLY VIKING DISCOVERY PROGRAM

- Improved gardening program
- Provided new gardening supplies, plants, and instructional materials (e.g., Farmer's Almanac)



#### WALTHILL PROJECT WASHKON

- Utilize the garden program so that students could grow their own food



#### SIDNEY COOL KIDS CLUB

- Gardening program for students
- An expert taught students about beekeeping

## PARTNERS GRANT PROGRAM

Communities involved with the Partners Grant Program were able to implement various activities, curricula, and experiences into their learning programs. This page outlines the activities and learning provided in each community.

### CHADRON

- Lakota Culture club
- Makerspace at Chadron Public Library for student projects and programs

### COLUMBUS

- Implemented Mizzen across programs
- STEM focus activities
- New theme-based activities
- Student-led activities

### YORK

- Implemented the E-Sports program
- STEM Activities
- New makerspace offerings

### FREMONT

- Equine therapy program through HETRA
- Robotics program using kits provided by VEX Robotics

### GRAND ISLAND

- Enhance and extend student learning using the mobile makerspace
- Field trips provided to students

### CRETE

- 18 Family engagement events
- Grow Nebraska Club and activities
- Activities designed and provided with the TMC Trailer

### NORTH PLATTE

- Summer STEM Club
- New Art clubs (ceramics, sculpture, textiles)
- Outdoor Classroom build

### LEXINGTON

- Addition of a part-time office assistant who helped provide assistance to staff, students and community partners as needed.

### NORFOLK

- Provided field trips to Ashfalls and Grove Trout Station
- Family Nights provided to the community

### KEARNEY

- Started a horticulture club, and was able to provide summer and fall gardens to students
- Art clubs with UNK art education majors

### SCHUYLER

- Bird Club
- Recycling Club
- Social Emotional Learning Club
- Digital Storytelling

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## OUTCOMES

The opportunities, activities, curricula, and training that were developed as a result of grant funding positively impacted communities and their youth in multiple ways.

Programs that developed outdoor classrooms and clubs found that students had the opportunity to learn about topics such as soil, plant growth cycles, and nutrition. These offerings also allowed students to build connections with others and learn about entrepreneurship as it relates to food and nutrition.

Field trips not only opened students up to new experiences and opportunities, but also helped them learn about topics such as art, history, research skills, science, and career opportunities. Some programs engaged local businesses and agencies for field trips, and destinations included cultural centers and museums, galleries, farms, and libraries.

The development of new clubs provided students with new opportunities to not only learn a new skill, but express themselves in ways they may not have had the chance previously.



“OUR STAFF AND STUDENTS REALLY LIKED THE ART SIDE OF THE PROGRAM. THEY ALL COMMENTED ON HOW FUN IT WAS TO SEE THE IMAGINATIONS OF OUR STUDENTS COME TO LIFE.”



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# CHALLENGES & SUCCESSES

Each community and organization experienced both challenges and successes throughout the planning, development, and execution of their program, and providing local youth with new learning opportunities. Many sites also shared what they learned throughout the year in regard to what worked well for their program and what needs still remain for their community and its youth.

## STAFFING

After-school and summer programs shared that one of the greatest challenges they continue to face is the need to hire and retain quality staff. Though staffing was a challenge before the pandemic, COVID increased staffing shortages in programs across the state. Illnesses due to COVID made it difficult for staff to be present consistently, and as a result, some

programs noticed less one-on-one time was able to be provided to each student.


It was also shared that the staff who currently support summer and afterschool learning programs have a need for high-quality, ready-to-use lessons. These would allow for staff to deliver quality instruction to students, despite their experiences educating children.



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## OLDER YOUTH STAFFING

ELO programs across Nebraska are dealing with staffing shortages in innovative ways. One leading approach in all programs is utilizing energetic and motivated older youth to provide additional staff support to after-school and summer programs so they can serve more kids and provide near-peer mentors for younger students. Communities and sites found that these older-youth staff members were able to build and provide consistent, positive relationships with students.



I ABSOLUTELY LOVE THE FRESH TAKE AND ENTHUSIASM THAT OUR HIGH SCHOOL AND COLLEGE STUDENTS BRING TO OUR PROGRAMS.

Sites also found that having older youth as staff brought new ideas, enthusiasm, and leadership opportunities to each program and

the students it served. One community shared that offering an increase in pay helped retain most of these staff during the 2021-2022 year.

In addition to the staffing shortage challenge, sites shared that retaining high-quality, older-youth staff proved difficult. Turnover and scheduling of the older-youth staff was a significant obstacle, as many of the high school and college staff members had athletic and academic obligations to the schools they were enrolled. That made it difficult to schedule those individuals on a regular basis. Programs also reported that continuous professional development and training are necessary to sustain high-quality, older-youth staff. In addition, many of the older youth who were employed needed to gain experience working in an educational setting with children. Communities also shared that it will be essential to offer competitive wages to combat staffing issues in the future.

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## BEHAVIOR

Student behavior was another topic commonly addressed by communities and sites. Several communities reported the positive impact programs were able to make on behavior by offering low student-to-teacher ratios in some settings. Staff at these sites shared that a small staff-to-student ratio allowed students to receive the necessary attention when learning a new skill or needing support.



Some respondents, however, reported challenges related to student behavior. Several programs developed and incorporated a Social Emotional Learning (SEL) curriculum to meet these behavioral challenges. Additionally, sites applied aspects of the Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS) and Multi-Tiered System of Supports for Behavior (MTSS-B) to their own support systems in place, to better serve students with behavioral and social-emotional needs.

## COVID-19

The COVID-19 pandemic impacted every community and learning program across Nebraska. Following the pandemic, ELO programs and learning centers have also found it difficult to reconnect with community partners. Due to COVID-related difficulties meeting their needs, these community partners found it challenging to return to local learning programs. Gathering in



in person for meetings and events was also a challenge for communities, which made communication between learning sites, community leaders, and local partnerships difficult.

However, programs reported that being able to return to in-person learning and gatherings for 2021-2022 made a big impact on their students and community members. This allowed programs to host multiple family engagement events and increase parent and caregiver involvement.

“THIS FUNDING GAVE US THE OPPORTUNITY DURING AN EXTREMELY DIFFICULT YEAR TO PAUSE AND REFLECT ON HOW CRITICAL PARENT VOICE, COLLABORATION, AND COMMUNITY EMPOWERMENT ARE IN ORGANIZING RESOURCES ALREADY PRESENT WITHIN COMMUNITIES TO SUPPORT STUDENT AND FAMILY SUCCESS.”





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# FUTURE PLANS & PROGRAMMING

The following sections will take a look at the future planning and programming shared by communities across the three grant programs for their staff, students, and sites.

## ELO INNOVATION NETWORK

Several of the organizations funded by the ELO Innovation Network shared their plans to continue providing professional development and training to their community and staff members. This training will focus on incorporating Social Emotional Learning (SEL) into instruction, and any other topics requested by staff.

Organizations that formed advisory teams also shared their plans to continue to implement these teams in order to support their program,



staff, and student needs. Organizations and sites also intend to hold regular meetings with program staff, community partners, and key leaders. These meetings will allow sites to continue gathering feedback to expand, refine, and update materials according to need.

Lastly, organizations that did not have the opportunity to pilot their developed curriculum or activities intend to do so in the upcoming grant year.

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## BEST SUMMER EVER

The Best Summer Ever communities shared several plans for the future of their programs. Several communities reported that they will continue to implement the clubs and activities that were new in 2021-2022, and extend their club offerings for the upcoming year. Specifically, several communities intend to maintain their gardening program, with hopes of providing more gardening materials and agricultural instruction to students in the future.

Communities also hope to maintain and expand the number of

partnerships with local businesses and organizations. Additionally, future plans will include increasing the funding provided to each program through these partnerships and fundraising opportunities.

Lastly, communities will plan to expand their community engagement strategies to include more parents and caregivers, and showcase what each program has to offer children. Programs will continue to incorporate community events, and collect qualitative information at the end of each program year in order to make continuous improvements.



CLUB & ACTIVITY  
OFFERINGS



PARTNERSHIPS



FUNDRAISING



COMMUNITY  
ENGAGEMENT

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## PARTNERS GRANT PROGRAM

The communities involved with the Partners Grant Program have also begun to make plans for the future of their programs. A few communities reported their intention to implement both student and teacher-led clubs, as well as a student advisory team, in order to expand on the ideas and opportunities offered within their sites.

These communities also shared their plans to continue utilizing their staff advisory team and their hiring of high school and college interns. The employment of older youth proved to have a positive impact on students, while also giving those staff the opportunity to grow as professionals, educators, and leaders.

Lastly, some communities shared specific plans related to the continued implementation of activities and club offerings within

their program. For example, one community shared that they plan to purchase mobile makerspace centers for each site using ESSER funds. Another community shared its plans to sustain the use of Mizzen activities, as well as add a focus on health and nutrition into their programming. Lastly, one community plans to incorporate E-Sports into their middle school programs for 6th through 8th-grade students.



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# PARTNERS

