

BSB Leverage Grants

2024-2025 Project Summary



Beyond School Bells

nebraskachildren



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



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BSB Program Goals

BEYOND SCHOOL BELLS MISSION

BSB's mission is to build partnerships that lead to policies and actions at both the state and local levels resulting in more high-quality, locally sustainable afterschool and summer programs serving more Nebraska youth, especially youth living in some of Nebraska's highest need communities.

GOALS AND OBJECTIVES



Goal 1: Quality

To support continued improvement of ELOs via an ecosystem of partnerships to enable high-quality ELO programs across the state of Nebraska

Objectives:

- 1.1 Network of Cross-Sector Partnerships
- 1.2 Knowledge Cultivation
- 1.3 Relationships with local ELO programs
- 1.4 Youth Voice
- 1.5 Family and Community Engagement
- 1.6 Frameworks
- 1.7 Coaching
- 1.8 Strategic Grants
- 1.9 Innovative, engaging curriculum



Goal 2: Sustainability

To leverage and align partnerships, people, and funding to promote local sustainability of ELOs.

Objectives:

- 2.1 Strategic Partnerships
- 2.2 Awareness Building
- 2.3 Tailored Support
- 2.4 Innovative Solutions
- 2.5 Resources



Goal 3: Policy

To promote the creation and refinement of local and state policies that support and sustain NE's ELO programs.

Objectives:

- 3.1 Policy-Oriented Partnerships
- 3.2 Capacity Development
- 3.3 National Policy Trends
- 3.4 Advocacy
- 3.5 Policy Environment



Goal 4: Strategic Programming

To develop, pilot, refine, disseminate and fund innovative active learning-based ELO programming.

Objectives:

- 4.1 Workforce Development and Career Exploration
- 4.2 STEM
- 4.3 Service Learning and Youth Leadership
- 4.4 Literacy
- 4.5 Collaborative Programming Leadership Aligned for Youth Success



Leverage Grants for Greater Nebraska

Beyond School Bells launched the Leverage Grants for Greater Nebraska Afterschool and Summer Programs during the 2024-2025 school year and summer 2025 to strengthen Expanded Learning Opportunities in rural communities.

The Leverage Grants were designed to:

- Support rural, school-based, and school-linked ELO programs in developing and sustaining models that reflect local community needs.
- Strengthen the quality of ELO programming across Greater Nebraska by fostering local partnerships and supporting sustainable staffing approaches.
- Advance meaningful student, family, and community engagement through effective outreach strategies, engagement tools, and events that build awareness and long-term support for high-quality, sustainable ELO programs.

Priority was given to newer programs (established within the past five years with ESSER III funds) and those serving high-need communities, including schools with high concentrations of students from low-income households or facing other educational challenges. The Leverage Grants provided one-year awards ranging from \$7,500 to \$50,000, with the potential for continued support based on funding availability.



A key strength of the Leverage Grant was its flexibility. Programs tailored funding to their local needs and capacity, using support for programming, staffing, family engagement, supplies, and sustainability efforts such as outreach and marketing. In total, BSB Leverage Grants supported 23 ELO programs during the 2024-2025 school year and Summer 2025.

LEVERAGE GRANTEES WERE GROUPED INTO FOUR CATEGORIES:

Group A: Programs that also received funding and technical assistance through Nebraska's 21st Century Community Learning Centers (21st CCLC).

Group B: Non-21st CCLC programs receiving Leverage Grants of \$25,000 or more during the 2024–2025 school year and Summer 2025. These programs received individualized coaching and technical assistance from Beyond School Bells throughout the grant period.

Group C: Non-21st CCLC programs supported only during Summer 2025. Grantees receiving \$25,000 or more were subject to additional evaluation requirements, including attendance reporting and participation in a youth brainstorming session.

Group D: Non-21st CCLC programs receiving Leverage Grants of less than \$25,000 during the 2024–2025 school year and Summer 2025.

Who We Served

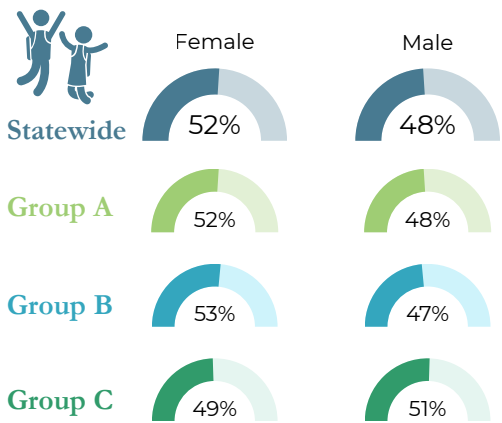
2024-2025



STUDENT DEMOGRAPHICS

Leverage Grants impacted **2210 students** during the 2024-2025 school year and summer 2025.

Group A: 1054 **Group B:** 982 **Group C:** 174



Free and Reduced Lunch Participation



Grade levels	K-5	6-8	9-12
Statewide	87.3%	8.0%	4.8%
Group A	95.0%	5.0%	
Group B	82.2%	9.2%	8.7%
Group C	68.3%	19.5%	12.2%

100% of Leverage grantee programs were in **rural communities**

Notes: Demographics are only reported for attenders enrolled in Nebraska public schools during the 24-25 school year or the 25-26 school year for summer 2025 attenders. Group D grantees did not report student demographic data.

Program Structure

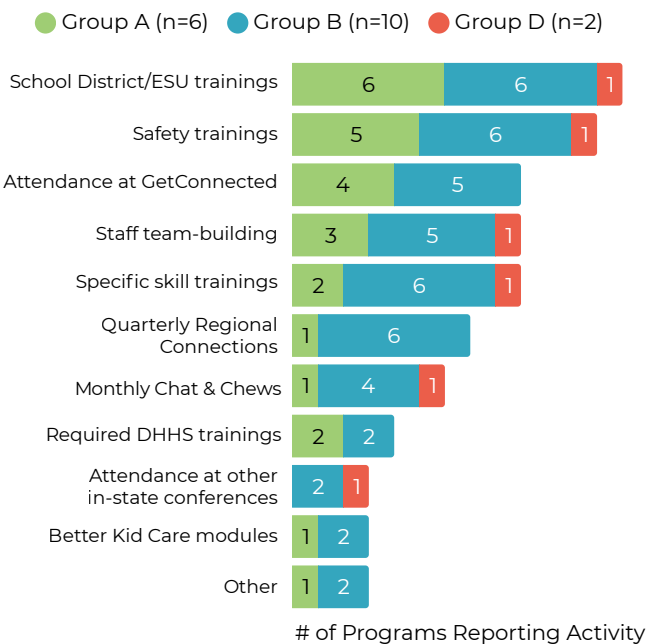
Professional Development (PD)

Leverage grantees reported participating in a wide range of professional development (PD) activities during the 2024–2025 grant year. The most reported PD opportunities (n=18) were school district or ESU-supported trainings (72%) and safety trainings (67%). Programs also supported staff development through participation in the GetConnected Afterschool Conference, team-building activities, and skill-specific training, such as the use of STEM materials.

Group B grantees were required to participate in individualized coaching and group PD offered by Beyond School Bells. These supports included one-on-one coaching sessions; monthly Chat & Chews, which provided brief, lunchtime opportunities for peer learning and resource sharing; and Regional Connections meetings, offered in person or virtually, that allowed for deeper exploration of priority topics.

When asked to identify highest-need areas for PD, grantees most frequently requested support with behavior management, particularly strategies

DISTRICT OR ESU-SUPPORTED TRAININGS WERE THE MOST COMMON PD ACTIVITY



effective in whole-group settings and for youth with disabilities. Programs also expressed interest in leadership development for older youth staff and volunteers, as well as continued guidance on fundraising, advocacy, engaging programming activities, and family engagement events.

OLDER YOUTH STAFFING

Older youth staff members at afterschool programs have a variety of responsibilities. They provide supervision, offer academic support, create activities, and collaborate with fellow staff, caregivers, and community partners. Leverage grantees (n=23) provided information about the older youth they employed in 2024–2025.

- **19 grantees reported** that they employed older youth staff during the grant period (83%).
- **18 grantees** employed a combined total of **104 high school students**. The most frequently reported job responsibilities for high school students were facilitating activities or lessons, cleaning duties, co-creating clubs and activities, and providing support to other staff members.
- **11 grantees** employed a combined total of **26 college students**. The most frequently reported job responsibilities for college students were facilitating clubs and activities, co-creating clubs, providing support to other staff, cleaning, and supporting program check-in and check-out.

Activities and Clubs

Afterschool and summer programs offered a mix of clubs, camps, programming strands, and field trips. During the 2024–2025 school year, clubs averaged 60 participants per site, while summer clubs and camps averaged 40 participants. Across the school year and Summer 2025, grantee programs reported a total of 44 field trips.

CLUBS

BSB defines clubs as themed learning experiences offered during part of the day. Many programs offered STEM-focused clubs or integrated STEM into existing offerings, including robotics and coding. Programs also reported strong participation in reading and academic skill-building activities. Summer club themes commonly included gardening, culinary skills, sewing, and visual arts.



- **127 total clubs** were supported at 23 afterschool programs
- **39 total clubs** were supported at 10 summer programs
- **45 total summer camps** were supported at 10 summer programs.
- **28 total programming strands** were supported at 8 summer programs.

CAMPS

Camps are defined as one- to two-week programs focused on a single theme. STEM camps were the most common, reflecting school-year trends. Other popular camp themes included LEGO building, animal science, and bracelet making.

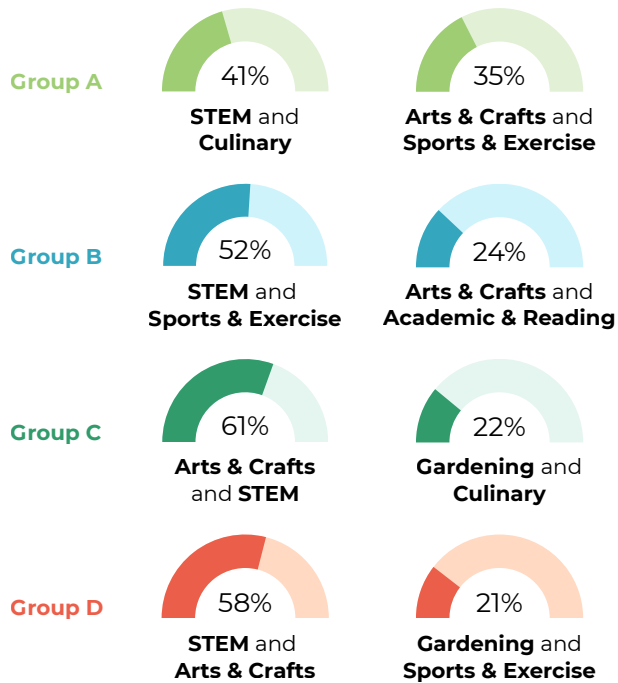
PROGRAMMING STRANDS

A programming strand is defined as a specific theme around which regular programming is offered, which was not structured as a club or a camp (e.g., a grantee could use BSB funds to purchase materials for gardening activities offered throughout the summer). STEM again was the most prominent strand during the summer. Other programming strands included physical activities and sports, summer reading/literacy, and gardening.

ACTIVITY HIGHLIGHTS

- Cooking clubs helped students build culinary skills while taking pride in their work.
- STEM activities using BSB-funded materials and equipment supported skill-building and hands-on learning.
- Gardening clubs engaged students in planting, harvesting, and preparing food grown on site.
- Team-building games and sports strengthened sportsmanship, collaboration, and problem-solving skills.
- Programs consistently reported high levels of student excitement and observed growth in participants' interpersonal and academic skills.

MOST ATTENDED CLUB, CAMP, AND PROGRAM STRANDS TYPES BY GROUP



Seventeen afterschool and 11 summer programs reported using funds for supplies across clubs, camps, and programming strands. Group A grantees reported the highest use across supply categories, though all grantee groups utilized funds in at least four categories.

MOST ATTENDED CLUBS, CAMPS, AND PROGRAMMING STRANDS

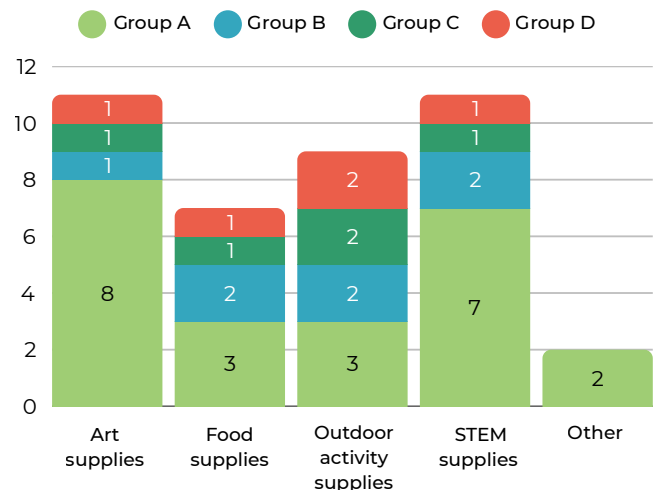
Across all Leverage grantee groups, STEM and arts-and-crafts offerings were the most attended, accounting for 29% of reported activities. Participation patterns varied by grantee group. Group C, which supported summer-only programs, most frequently reported gardening and outdoor activities. Sports and exercise offerings were especially popular in Groups A and B, while culinary-focused activities were common in Groups A and D. Group B reported the highest share of academic and reading-focused offerings (7.6%). Overall, these patterns reflect how programs tailored activities to seasonal contexts and local youth interests.

Supplies

Programs used BSB funding to purchase supplies that supported high-quality programming, including art materials, food, outdoor equipment, STEM resources, and other program needs.

Common purchases included STEM and art kits aligned to specific activities, literacy materials such as books, food and outdoor activity supplies, and other items such as gardening and cooking tools, vehicle equipment, and membership or licensing fees. Overall, supply expenditures reflected the diverse instructional and enrichment needs of grantee programs.

TYPES OF SUPPLIES BY GROUP



Advisory Teams and Community Engagement

BSB recognizes the value of community involvement and youth voice as drivers of program quality and sustainability. In the winter of 2025, 18 grantees reported on their use of advisory teams and community development meetings within the last six months.

- Student Advisory Teams are teams of students that regularly meet to inform afterschool practices in your program. **Four programs reported having a Student Advisory team in place in 2024-2025 (22%).**
- Community Advisory Teams are teams of stakeholders from the community that meet to inform afterschool practices at least 2-4 times per year. **Three programs reported having a Community Advisory team in place (17%).**
- Community Partnership Development Meetings are events/meetings held with the purpose of building partnerships and raising community awareness of afterschool and summer programs. **Three programs reported that they held Community Partnership Development meetings (17%).**

COMMUNITY COLLABORATIVES

The Nebraska Children and Families Foundation supports the implementation of Community Collaboratives in many cities and towns throughout the state. These collaboratives are designed to bring together government institutions, health care professionals, nonprofit and faith-based organizations, educators, and families to identify areas of need and develop long-term plans that will improve the lives for children and families in the community. Because these collaboratives are community-owned, goals and implementation strategies are driven by individuals with knowledge of community needs and investment in the outcomes.

“Community Collaborative Meetings have strengthened our program by connecting us with local partners, expanding student opportunities, and linking families to valuable resources. They have also helped build stronger relationships with parents and caregivers by showing that our program is part of a larger community network working together to support children’s success.”

BSB collected data on grantees’ involvement with their local Community Collaboratives, as the family engagement opportunities and academic, social, and behavioral benefits offered by afterschool and summer programs align with a holistic approach to community well-being. **Nine grantees (39%) attended at least one Community Collaborative meeting in 2024-2025.** Programs’ reported attendance ranged from one meeting to more than seven meetings.

Marketing

Grantees reported using a variety of marketing strategies to raise community awareness of their programs. The most common activity was posting program updates and photos on social media sites (e.g., program or school Facebook pages). Other strategies included hosting events to welcome prospective families, distributing flyers, engaging with local newspapers, producing newsletters, and participating in community events, such as parades.

“We have engaged in marketing through social media, and directly with community partners, potential donors, and participants and their families.”

Family Engagement

Leverage grantees highlighted their efforts to engage families during the 2024-2025 reporting periods. **Thirteen sites reported hosting at least one family engagement event (72%).** Event themes and activities included STEM, games, holidays, and student performances or showcases. Most grantees reported that the funds they received through the Leverage grant helped them to increase their levels of parent engagement. Indicators of improved engagement reported by programs included increased caregiver visits during or after programming hours and former students returning to volunteer. One site shared that their gardening club fostered intergenerational learning by including families and community members.

Programs shared how the BSB Leverage grant affected their relationships with parents and caregivers. Many programs noted that the funds they received allowed them to host more consistent family engagement events. One grantee shared that funds enabled them to hire more high school staff, which fostered near-peer connections and increased students' excitement. As a result, more parents visited the program, learned about the programming, and built relationships with program staff. Some programs reported hearing from families that they appreciated the exposure and exploration of activities that might otherwise be inaccessible to their children. Overall, many sites noted that increased connections between caregivers and program staff helped create collaborative, welcoming environments.

In the winter of 2025, 18 grantees reported on their activities related to the Leverage grant goals within the last six months, including family engagement strategies. These sites reported using **at least five different engagement practices.** A key strategy

Family Engagement Practice	Number of Sites Using Practice
Conversations at pick-up and drop-off times	100%
Events	78%
Using a school app	78%
Notes on programming	67%
Social media	56%
Feedback surveys	50%
Newsletters	44%
Open house	44%
Multilingual materials	28%
N=18	

reported by all grantees was capitalizing on pick-up and drop-off times to build relationships with parents and other family members. Most sites also used school applications such as Remind App and Class Dojo, and hosted events as additional ways to build relationships and increase family involvement.

Most sites (89%) believe that parents and other caregivers strongly support their programs. Positive feedback from parents, attendance at family events, and increasing student participation and enrollment were notable signs that parents and caregivers support the work of afterschool programs. When asked how BSB can further support family engagement efforts, sites requested additional ideas for family events and strategies for establishing clear, frequent communication with caregivers.

Community Partnerships

Leverage grantees reported more than two hundred community partnerships during the 2024-2025 reporting period. These partnerships provided funding, staffing, supplies, activities, programming, and spaces.

201 community partnerships
reported in 2024-2025

Group A: 66 **Group C:** 10
Group B: 101 **Group D:** 24

Leverage grantees, on average, reported
8 community partnerships.

Almost all sites noted multiple community partners, with partners providing funding or offering other types of support. In addition to enhancing students' experiences at programs, these partnerships fostered stronger connections between Leverage grantees and community stakeholders, including local businesses, city and state agencies, educational institutions, and non-profits.

COMMUNITY PARTNERS IMPACT

Programs shared how partnerships facilitated engaging activities to expand students' learning, provided monetary and in-kind support that programs could use to design new enrichment, and fostered a sense of local community. Sites shared that the activities, lessons, and resources accessed through their community partners benefited both students and families. Programs highlighted creative projects provided through art centers, STEM activities featuring Legos, robotics, and engineering, swimming lessons, and outdoor activities such as exploring nature, fishing, kayaking, and more.

Grantees reported that contributions from community members, businesses, non-profits, and educational institutions enabled them to offer more to their families. One program shared that the additional funds they received allowed them to hire an expert gardener to assist students with a gardening project. Other sites used these donations to purchase extra supplies for clubs.

Multiple programs highlighted contributions from volunteer staff. One program noted that their National Honor Society student volunteers and teacher volunteers supported summer activities and family nights. Some programs engaged their community partners to access spaces for their daily programming or special activities. Grantees expressed gratitude for the use of libraries, swimming pools, and school facilities.

The impact of partnerships during the 2024-2025 school year and summer demonstrates the power of building connections between afterschool and summer programs and community stakeholders. Developing those relationships supports high-quality engagement of students and promotes sustainability for programs providing expanded learning opportunities in Nebraska.

"A highlight of the summer was the sidewalk spray chalk activity, created in partnership with UNO and UNL students, international students, and professors. These experiences broadened their horizons and inspired excitement for learning..."



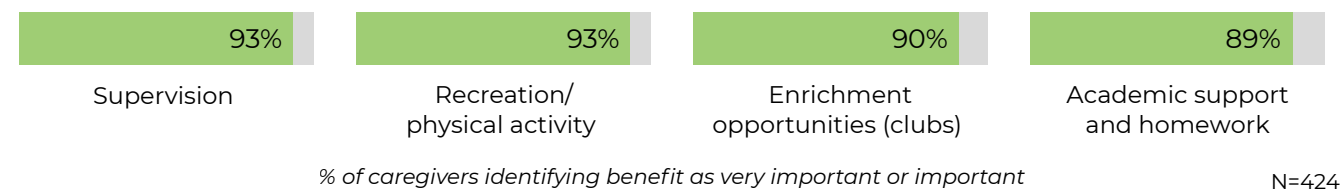
Program Quality

Group A Caregiver Survey Outcomes

For the 2024-2025 reporting period, the quality of Group A grantee programs was assessed through the parent and student surveys administered in Spring 2025 as part of the annual evaluation plan for Nebraska 21st Community Learning Centers. The caregiver survey, which was provided to caregivers of all students who attended during the 2024-2025 school year, is designed to provide a snapshot of program quality, experiences of the students, and caregivers’ reasons for enrolling students in the program.

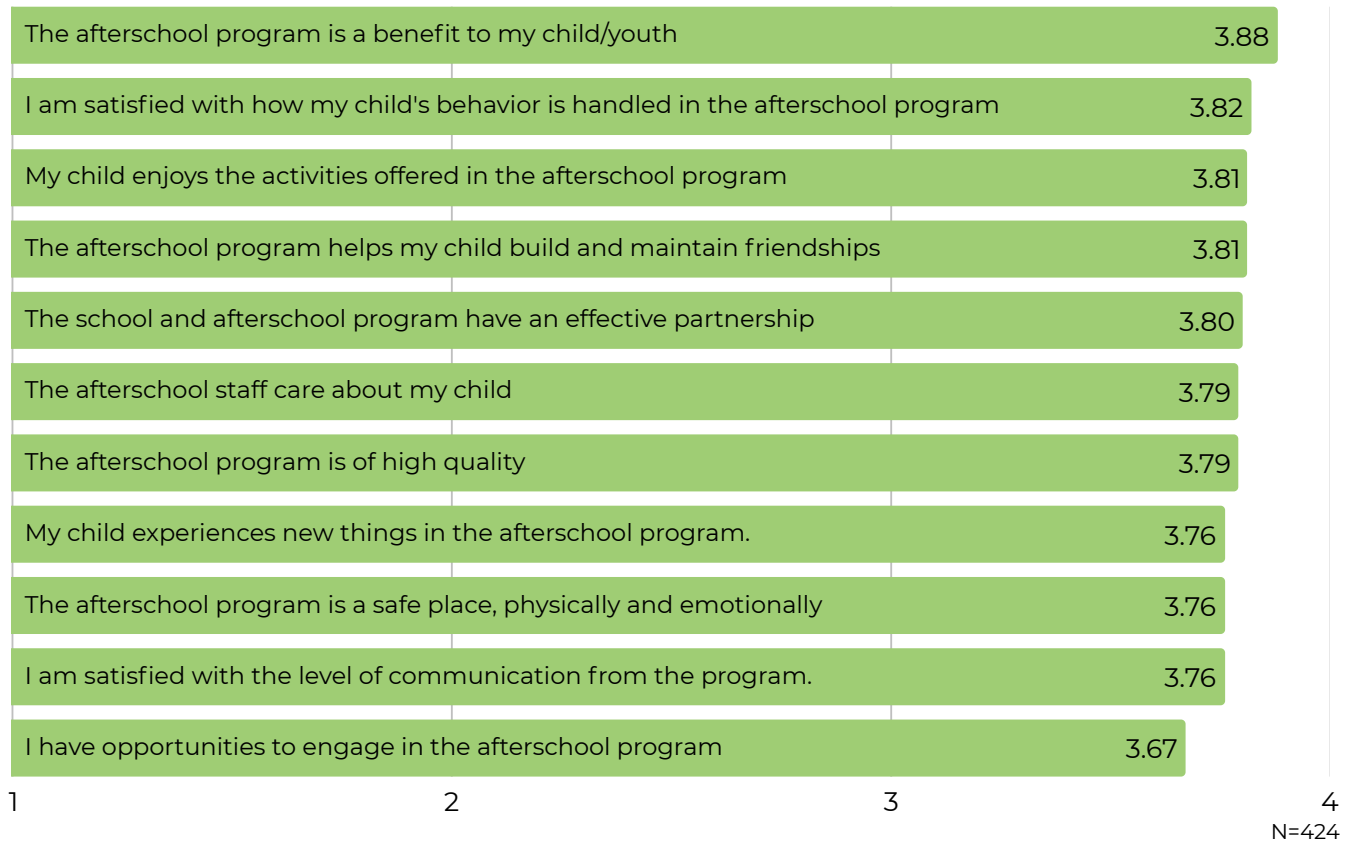
REASONS FOR PARTICIPATION

Respondents (n=424) were asked to rate the importance of four benefits of afterschool program participation as factors in their decisions to enroll their children at programs. The rating options for each component were very unimportant, unimportant, neutral, important, or very important. Caregivers reported that most benefits were either important or very important factors, and responses indicated that supervision and access to recreation/physical activities were the most prominent reasons for program participation.



CAREGIVER PERCEPTIONS OF PROGRAMS

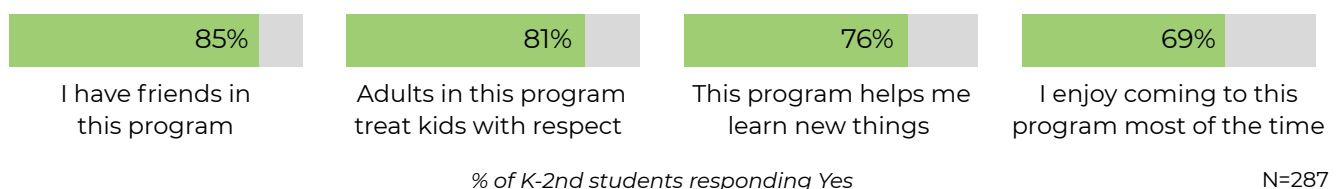
Respondents rated their levels of agreement to a series of statements about topics such as safety, learning, friendship, and communication between staff and parents using a 4-point scale (1=Disagree, 4=Agree). Caregivers, on average, said that programs benefitted their children, offered enjoyable activities, and helped participants build friendships. The comparatively lower rating for family engagement opportunities (3.67) indicates that programs could benefit from additional support and training in this area.



Group A Student Survey Outcomes

K-2ND GRADE STUDENT SURVEY

For students in Kindergarten through 2nd grade (N=287), a brief four-question survey was administered. The items relate to program belongingness and engagement, and students had the option to respond *yes*, *sometimes*, or *no* to each statement. Most students agreed that they had friends in the program and reported positive relationships with staff. Although still reflecting a majority of 'yes' responses, the lowest level of agreement was found in the item measuring students' enjoyment of attending programs.

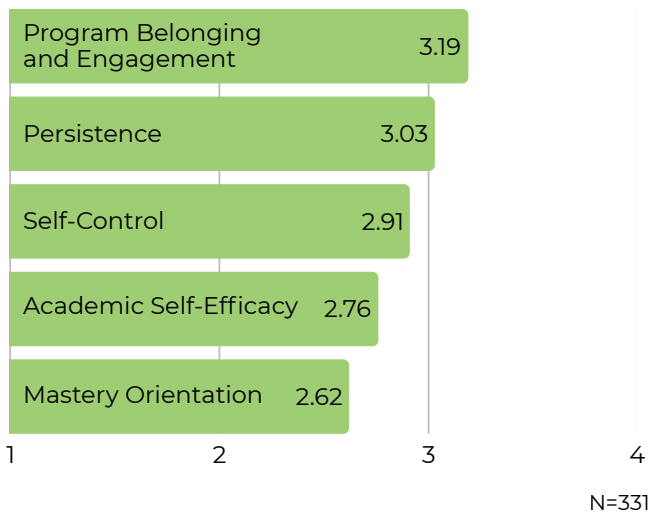


3RD-12TH GRADE STUDENT SURVEYS

Students in grades 3-12 completed different versions of a student survey (Youth Development Executives of King County, 2015) based on their grade levels. The survey asked questions across several areas pertaining to each student personally, and then regarding the impact of the program they had attended. Students were asked to rate each item on a four-point scale (1=Strongly Disagree, 2=Disagree, 3=Agree, and 4=Strongly Agree). Domain means were calculated at the statewide level.

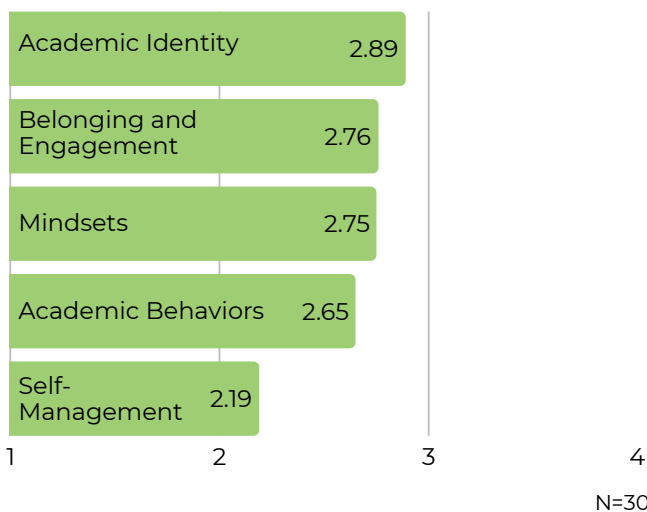
For 3rd-5th grade students (N=331), the highest ratings were for Program Belonging and Engagement. Items under this domain inquire about having friends (M=3.54), adult respect for students (M=3.38), and students' enjoyment of attending their programs (M=3.00). Persistence was the second-highest-scoring domain. Items in this area ask about behaviors such as trying harder the next time after doing poorly on a test (M=3.22) and consistently working hard on schoolwork. The lowest level of agreement in the survey was reported for the statement, "I do my schoolwork because I enjoy it" (M=2.54), which is part of the Mastery Orientation domain.

3RD-5TH GRADE DOMAIN AVERAGES



For 6th-12th grade students (N=30), Academic Identity was the domain with the highest average rating (M=2.89). This domain includes statements that measure students' attitudes about learning, such as beliefs that it is important to obtain good grades (M=3.23) and to do well in school (M=3.10). Belonging and Engagement was the second-highest-scoring domain (M=2.76). Items in this area include whether respondents believe program staff take the time to get to know students (M=3.40) and if students feel like they fit in at their programs (3.00). The lowest-rated statement, "This program has helped me learn how to calm myself down when I'm excited or upset" (M=2.00), was part of the Self-Management domain.

6TH-12TH GRADE DOMAIN AVERAGES



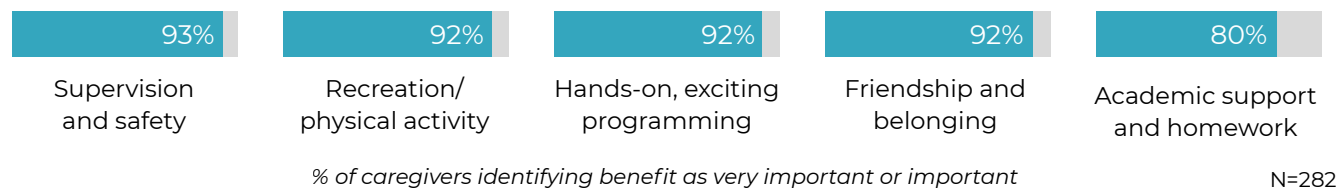
Youth Development Executives of King County. (2015). Youth Engagement Survey. Seattle, WA.

Group B Caregiver Survey Outcomes

Caregivers of students attending afterschool programs rated their programs on a variety of programmatic effects. Questions were crafted to measure elements of 10 Whole Life Practices outlined in Whole Child, Whole Life by Stephanie Malia Krauss.

REASONS FOR PARTICIPATION

Respondents (N=282) were asked to rate the importance of five benefits of afterschool program participation as factors in their decisions to enroll their children in programs. The rating options for each component were very unimportant, unimportant, neutral, important, or very important. Caregivers reported that most benefits were either important or very important factors, and access to a safe afterschool environment providing supervision for students was the No. 1 factor for program participation.



CAREGIVERS' PERCEPTIONS OF PROGRAMS

Caregivers rated their levels of agreement to a series of statements about topics such as safety, learning, friendship, and communication between staff and parents using a 4-point scale (1=Disagree, 4=Agree). Respondents, on average, said that programs were welcoming to students and families, that staff demonstrated care for students, and that programs benefitted students. Lower levels of agreement in the statements regarding caregiver engagement suggest that targeted technical assistance in that area could benefit programs.

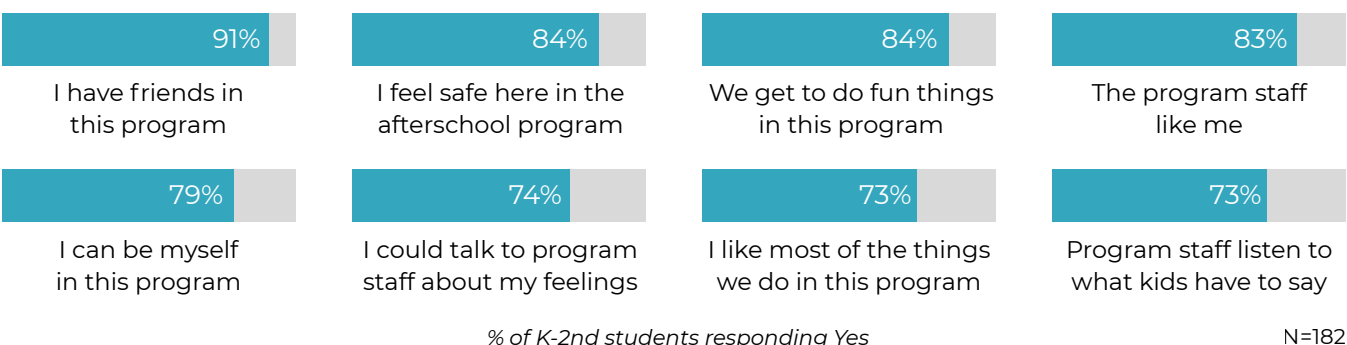


Group B Student Survey Outcomes

Surveys were administered for students attending Leverage Group B programs. Questions for all age levels —Kindergarten-2nd grade, 3rd-5th grade, and 6th-12th grade—were crafted to measure elements of the 10 Whole Life Practices outlined in *Whole Child, Whole Life* by Stephanie Malia Krauss.

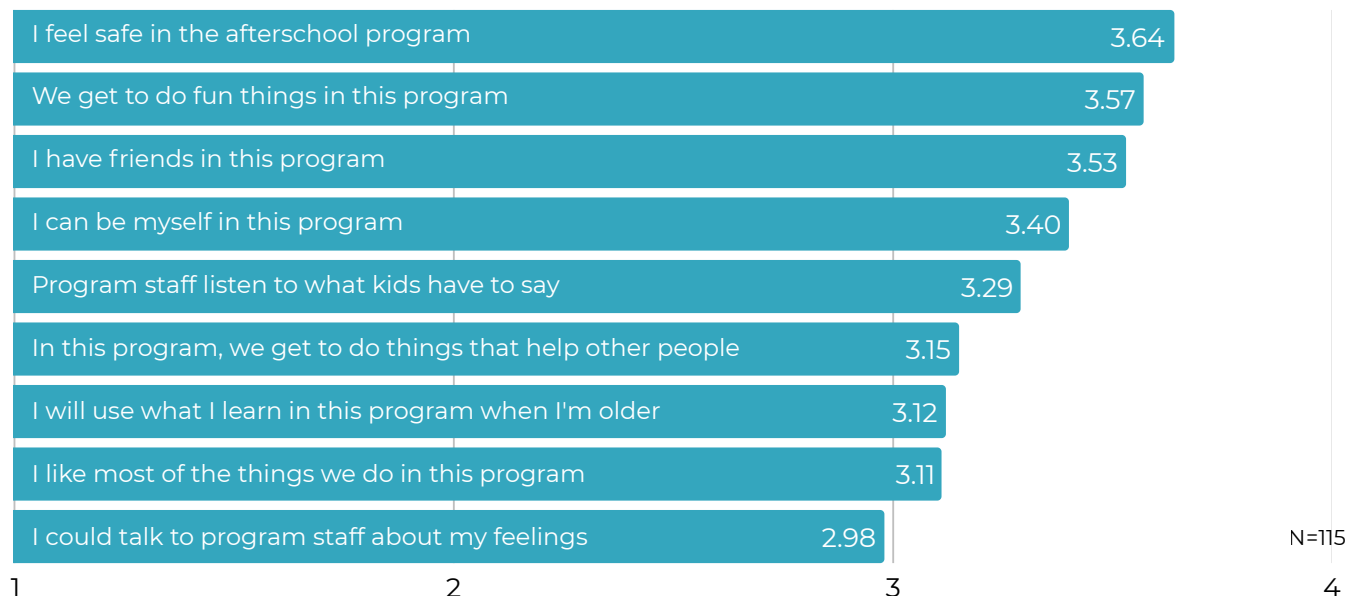
K-2ND GRADE STUDENT SURVEY

For students in Kindergarten through 2nd grade (N=182), a short eight-question survey was administered. Most students agreed that they had friends in their programs, felt safe while attending, and perceived that the program staff liked them, indicating that sites typically provided environments where students felt comfortable and connected to others.



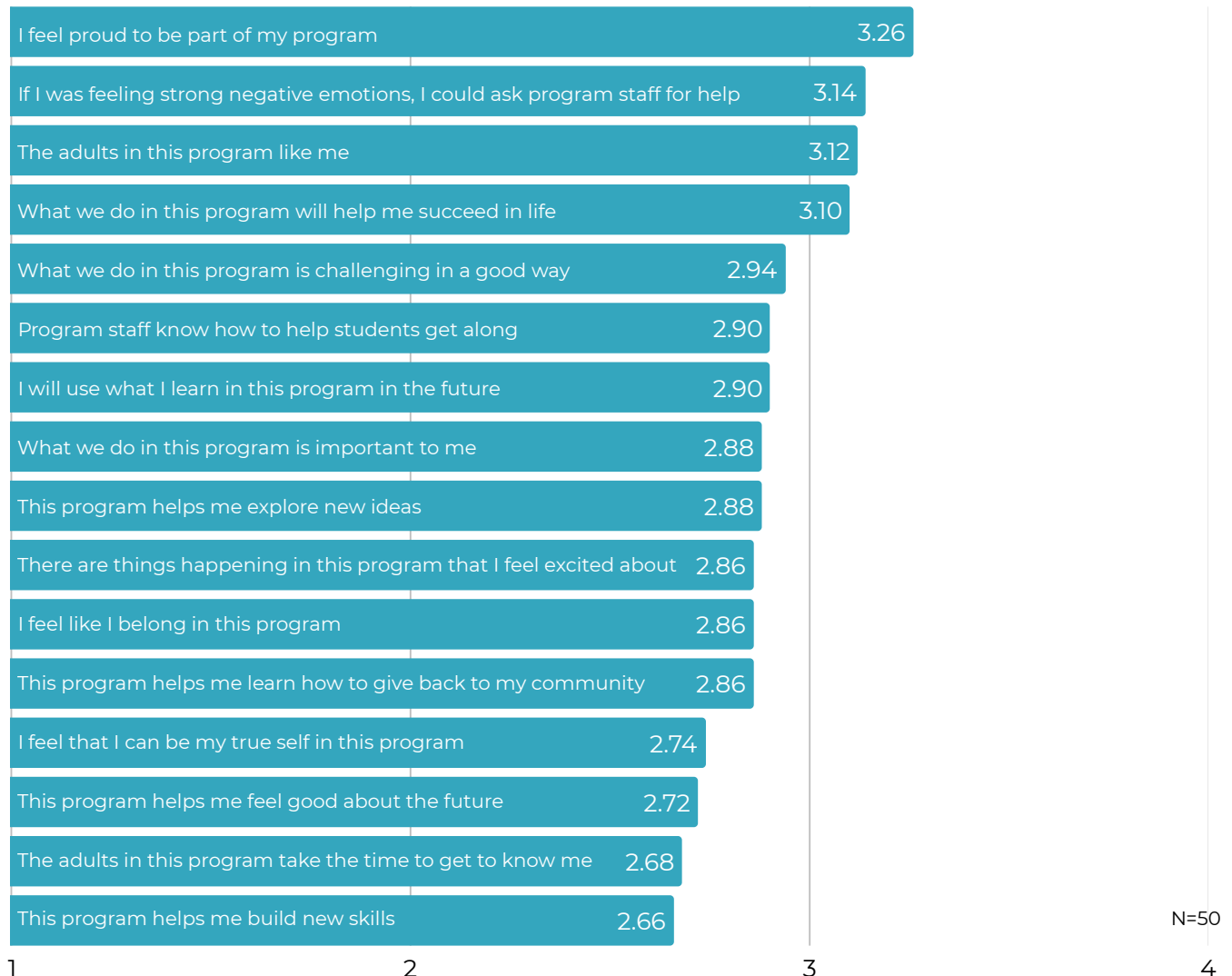
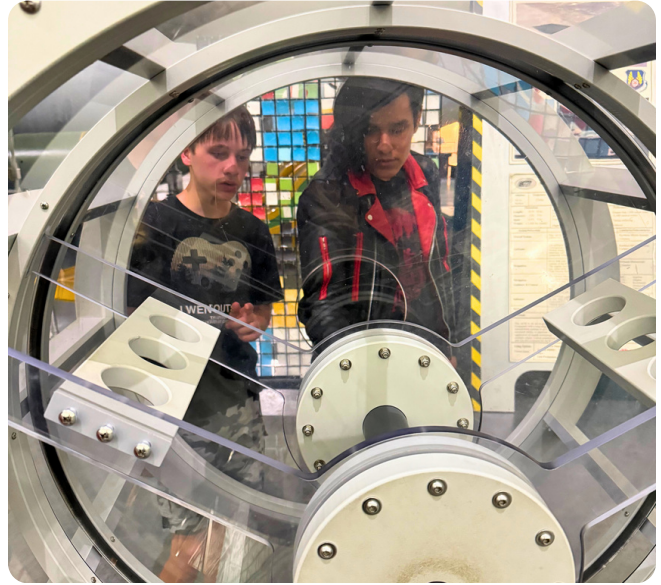
3RD-5TH GRADE STUDENT SURVEY

Students in grades 3-5 (N=115) rated their levels of agreement with nine statements using a four-point scale (1=Not at All True, 2=Somewhat True, 3=Mostly True, 4=Completely True). On average, students agreed that programs were safe places where they made friends, had fun, and felt comfortable being themselves. The lowest level of agreement was related to students' belief that they could discuss strong negative feelings with program staff.



6TH-12TH GRADE STUDENT SURVEY

Students in grades 6-12 (N=50) rated their levels of agreement with sixteen statements using a four-point scale (1=Not at All True, 2=Somewhat True, 3=Mostly True, 4=Completely True). Respondents, on average, reported feeling proud to be part of their programs. Students also reported that the adults at programs liked them and could help them manage strong negative emotions, both indications of supportive staff-student relationships. Students also, on average, agreed that the activities and experiences they accessed through their afterschool programs challenged them in good ways and would help them succeed in life.



Leverage Funding

Beyond School Bells designed the Leverage Grant model to give grantees the flexibility to use BSB funds in ways that best suit their unique needs, with an emphasis on sustainability. Potential uses included parent and family engagement events, programming and activity costs, marketing, and single-use or reusable materials, such as food, STEM kits, and athletic equipment.

As a condition of the grant, programs were required to secure funds that provided a 1:1 match for the amount awarded by BSB. Grantees reported the partner organizations that provided the matching funding, along with the dollar amount and type of funding provided by each partner.

- **Monetary:** The partner provided funds that the grantee could spend on program costs such as staffing, materials, food, and transportation
- **In-Kind:** The partner provided supplies and/or services, such as curriculum, materials, programming facilitation, or physical space, at reduced or no cost for programs.

Some partners offered both types of support to programs, such as providing funds while also facilitating programming.

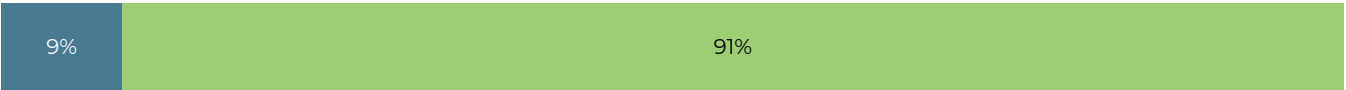


“The Beyond School Bells Leverage Grant made a real impact on our school age program. As a new program, we were able to use the funds to support our staff wages as we got up and running. This support allowed us the room in the budget to figure everything else out and get a solid plan in place moving forward.”

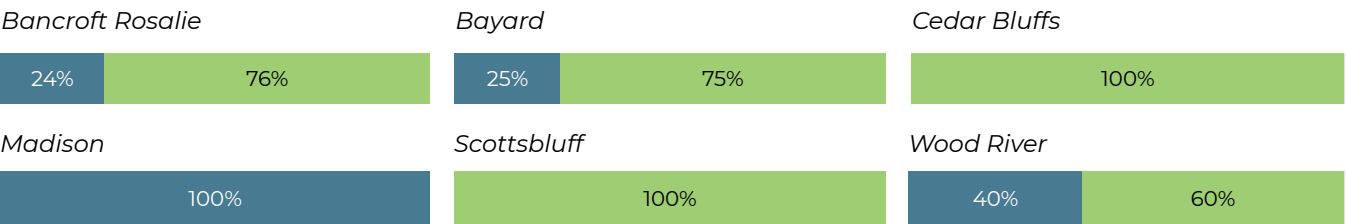
Programs reported a combined total of \$1,102,988 in matched funds provided by 114 partners. Monetary funding was the most typical funding type across all Leverage grantee groups, ranging from 80% of Group D funds to 98% of Group C funds.

GROUP A: \$417,566

Percentage of Funding by Leverage Type for All Group A Grantees (N=42) ● In-Kind ● Monetary



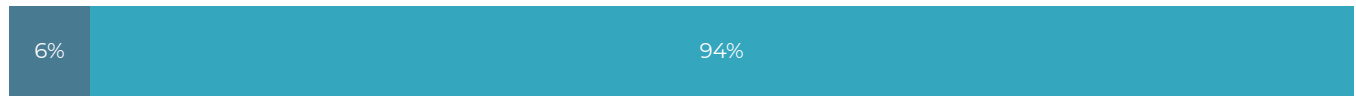
Grantees' Percentage of Funding by Leverage Type



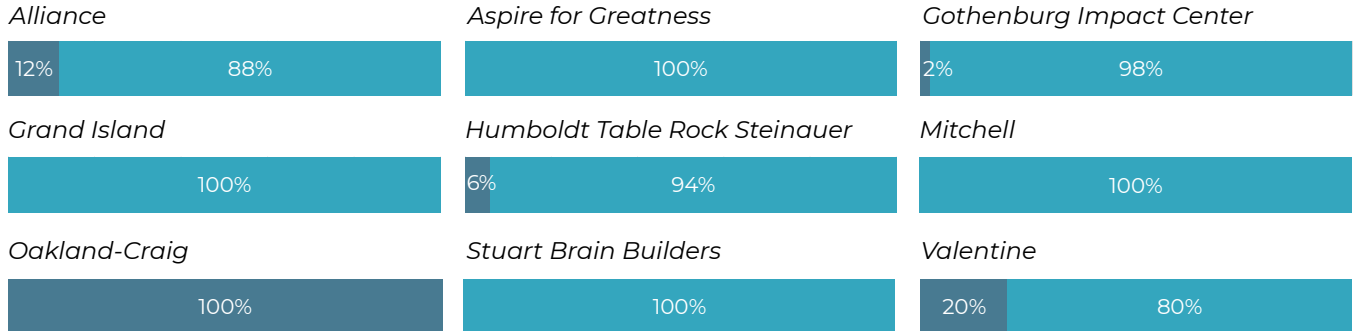
GROUP B: \$439,159

Percentage of Funding by Leverage Type for All Group B Grantees (N=41)

● In-Kind ● Monetary



Grantees' Percentage of Funding by Leverage Type

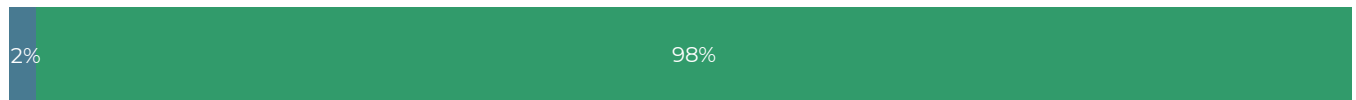


*Wakefield reported no Leverage partners for 2024-2025

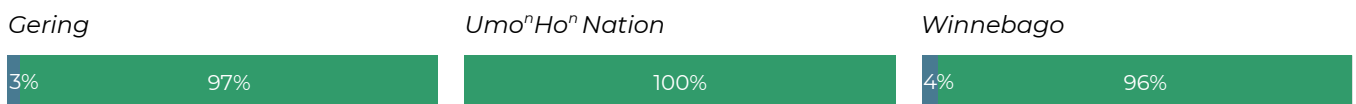
GROUP C: \$87,200

Percentage of Funding by Leverage Type for All Group C Grantees (N=10)

● In-Kind ● Monetary



Grantees' Percentage of Funding by Leverage Type



GROUP D: \$159,063

Percentage of Funding by Leverage Type for All Group D Grantees (N=21)

● In-Kind ● Monetary



Grantees' Percentage of Funding by Leverage Type



Grant Impact

Beyond School Bells asked grantees to share how the 2024-2025 Leverage Grant impacted their programs. In response, they highlighted benefits such as programming development and support, the ability to purchase new resources, improved staffing, and growth in family engagement. **For some programs, the grant was a key factor in their ability to start or continue providing services.**

Programs detailed how grant funds paid for **supplies for hands-on learning and skill-building**. One program reported that the grant supported the continued use of high-quality learning tools, such as DreamBox Math and Reading Plus, to boost student achievement. They were also able to use a new geothermal educational greenhouse and school garden. Another program reported that their STEM initiatives were strengthened by introducing new materials purchased with BSB funds, including STEM bins, LEGO Challenge Kits, and PVC Engineering Kits.

“Without the funds from the Leverage grant, we would not have the opportunity to fund the staff and the supplies that we were able to purchase with the funds.”

Leverage funds supported the **expansion of programming** in many programs. One grantee shared about the impact on students from the addition of their Run, Earth, Leadership, and Maker’s clubs, noting enthusiastic participation and the development of new skills and knowledge related to health, the environment, problem-solving, and leadership. Another program described how introducing their robotics club added a new

“The Leverage Grant had a meaningful and measurable impact...With this support, we were able to serve a greater number of families, expanding access to quality after-school care and enrichment opportunities.”

type of activity and diversified the expanded learning topics available to students. A grantee reported that BSB funds helped sustain a year-long art club and added additional monthly clubs to its programming rotation.

Many programs reported that the Leverage Grant enabled them to meet the demand of their growing programs by **paying for additional or diversified staffing**. One program shared that the funding supported the hiring of high school students, which increased student engagement by introducing near-peer connections. A grantee program in its first year of operation was thankful to have a fully staffed program with both adult and high school helpers. Another program also highlighted that the Leverage Grant provided for fair wages and training for high school staff.

Some programs highlighted the **family engagement events** they were able to host because of the Leverage Grant. They also shared successes from the events, including high attendance and families choosing to stay for the full durations. Some programs were able to host monthly family engagement events, thereby strengthening connections with their families.

Each program showcased how the Leverage Grant helped them sustain, grow, and continue serving their communities, highlighting the importance of the grant and BSB’s commitment to afterschool and summer programs.

Leverage Grantee Focus Groups

Across Nebraska, Beyond School Bells Leverage Grantees conveyed a compelling narrative: the grant is significantly enhancing afterschool programming, rather than simply addressing budget shortfalls. The funding arrived at a critical juncture for many, assisting those who had lost federal 21st Century funding or were struggling to stretch resources with growing program attendance. The use of grant funds helped facilitate staff retention, enabled the development of dynamic clubs, and promoted active student engagement. Many grantees spoke warmly about the support and responsiveness of the BSB team, especially the way guidance was delivered with both expertise and care. A key insight is that when communities are trusted and supported, they have the potential to transform their programs.

PROGRAM SUSTAINABILITY

- Nearly every site described the BSB Leverage Grant as crucial for maintaining programs or expanding offerings, especially in communities that had lost other sources of funding.
- The grant helped cover essentials like staffing, supplies, transportation, and new clubs or academic supports.

STAFFING IS A PERSISTENT CHALLENGE

- From hiring qualified adults to supporting older youth staff, grantees consistently mentioned staffing as both a challenge and a key area where funds made a difference.
- Programs valued the ability to pay staff, retain talent, and support volunteers.

“I think [the grant] allows us to really showcase...we have a good quality program.”

GRANTEES SURVEYED

Alliance	Mitchell
Fremont	Oakland Craig
Grand Island	Stuart
Gothenburg	Valentine
HTRS	Wakefield

(Humboldt Table Rock Steinaur)

YOUTH ENGAGEMENT AND PROGRAM OWNERSHIP

- Some programs showed a strong commitment to youth voice—involving students in decision-making, project design, and implementation.
- Many sites noted increased engagement and creativity from students when given space to lead.

PARENT AND COMMUNITY SUPPORT

- Grantees reported positive feedback from parents who saw benefits in their children’s academic, social, and emotional growth.
- Programs often mentioned strong community buy-in and partnerships, with some unexpected collaborations blossoming.

CREATIVE AND UNIQUE PROGRAMMING

- The grant supported distinctive experiences, including STEAM clubs, robotics, sledding outings, and service learning.
- These activities were often described as helping students discover new interests and feel more connected.

VALUE OF BSB’S SUPPORT AND RELATIONSHIPS

- Communities valued BSB’s ongoing coaching, flexibility, and resource sharing.
- This “high-touch” support model was appreciated as the funding itself.

2024-2025 Summary

Challenges

STAFFING

Leverage Grant focus group participants and end-of-year program survey respondents shared that maintaining the necessary adult staff and supporting older youth staff have been challenges. However, many programs also reported that their community and Leverage partnerships provided means to adequately staff their programs and facilitate clubs and activities.

FAMILY ENGAGEMENT

Caregiver surveys identified family engagement as an aspect of programming with room for improvement. Grantees reportedly faced challenges in engaging families due to a lack of time and opportunities. With this information, sites planned to integrate more regular communication via apps, and during pick-up times. They also hosted additional events, such as family nights and classes.

“The key is maintaining open and consistent communication while proactively scheduling parent engagement nights well in advance. This allows families to plan ahead and increases the likelihood of their participation, fostering stronger connections between parents, students, staff, and our programs.”

FUNDING

Many grantees, reflecting on the impact of the Leverage Grant, shared how sustainability is a frequent challenge in afterschool and summer programs. They cited difficulties in securing



consistent funding and other types of support within community partnerships. Grantees reported that the funds, training, and resources provided by BSB helped them expand their programming, build their staff, and host more events that engage families and community stakeholders.

Highlights

Programs expressed their gratitude for the Leverage Grant's support. Eight grantees previously receiving ESSER funds applied for and received BSB Leverage Grants in 2024-2025. Some shared that the grant sustained another year of programming and helped maintain current offerings. Grantees highlighted a number of positive program impacts, including sufficient staffing, a variety of clubs and hands-on activities, improved family engagement strategies and events, new community partnerships, secured monetary and in-kind support from leverage partners, and favorable ratings from caregiver and student survey respondents.

Key Findings

- BSB Leverage Grant funds **supported 2,210 students** from Nebraska's rural communities in 2024-2025.
- Staff at Leverage programs accessed professional development through school district or ESU-supported trainings, safety trainings, and other opportunities. Group B grantees also received individualized coaching from BSB.
- **Most grantees (83%) employed older youth staff, including 104 high school and 26 college students across 18 grantees.** These staff facilitated activities, co-created clubs, and supported colleagues.
- **Grantees offered 239 clubs, camps, and programming strands, primarily in STEM, arts and crafts, and sports.** BSB funds provided materials and curriculum that supported students' learning and skill development.
- Grantees engaged youth and community voices through Student Advisory Teams, Community Advisory Teams, and Community Partnership Development Meetings.
- **Seventy-two percent of sites hosted at least one family engagement events.** Programs promoted events via social media, and common engagement practices included conversations at drop-off and pick-up, family events, school apps, and notes.
- **A total of 201 community partnerships were reported.** Sites averaged eight partnerships. These partnerships provided monetary and in-kind support, expanding programming and providing materials and staffing.
- Caretaker surveys indicated that **programs were welcoming to students and families**, which benefited students and fostered friendships. Student surveys revealed that students had friends at programs, built positive relationships with staff, felt safe and comfortable, and took pride in their experiences.
- **Programs reported a total of \$1,102,988 in matched funds contributed by 114 partners**, reflecting a significant level of support and collaboration across the partner network.

Next Steps

The 2024-2025 Leverage Grant year demonstrated that when rural communities are trusted with flexible, relationship-centered support, they build programs that matter. As BSB looks toward the next grant cycle, the following priorities will guide our continued investment and learning:

- **Continue investing in locally sustainable afterschool and summer programs** by prioritizing funding for communities with strong partnerships, leveraging matching resources, and long-term sustainability plans beyond funding. These programs generated over \$1.1 million in matching support, proving the leverage model's effectiveness.
- **Expand support for older youth workforce development and leadership** by helping programs recruit, train, and retain high school and college-aged staff. With 130 older youth employed, the next funding phase can further enhance near-peer leadership, workforce readiness, and career exploration.

- **Expand and formalize older youth staffing supports.** With 83% of grantees employing high school- and college-age staff, and near-peer models effectively boosting student engagement, BSB will create targeted professional development and onboarding guides for programs that hire older youth to address the leadership development gap identified as a top PD need.
- **Increase focus on family engagement strategies and supports** by providing targeted professional development, practical tools, and peer learning opportunities that help programs strengthen caregiver participation, communication, and partnership. Family engagement was the lowest-rated dimension across both Group A and Group B caregiver surveys and surfaced repeatedly as a challenge in focus groups.
- **Strengthen and formalize advisory team and youth voice infrastructure.** Only 22% of reporting sites had Student Advisory Teams, and 17% had Community Advisory Teams in place. This is a significant gap given BSB's commitment to youth voice and community ownership. In the next grant cycles, BSB will include structured guidance and optional templates for establishing these bodies, with targeted technical assistance for programs ready to develop them.
- **Deepen community partnership development efforts** by helping grantees build stronger relationships with local businesses, nonprofits, postsecondary institutions, and community collaboratives. These partnerships continue to be critical drivers of program quality, sustainability, and expanded opportunities for youth and families.
- **Develop a leverage grant continuation and tiering framework.** With a cohort at various stages of maturity and capacity, a clearer support differentiation framework will better align resources with program needs and assets, enhancing the model's long-term sustainability.
- **Provide targeted coaching and professional development in priority areas** such as behavior management, family engagement, fundraising, advocacy, and support strategies for youth with diverse needs. Grantees consistently identify these as ongoing priorities.
- **Maintain BSB's high-touch support model** through individualized coaching, peer learning opportunities, and resource sharing. Grantees consistently identified BSB's relationships, flexibility, and ongoing guidance as valuable aspects to program growth and success.
- **Compile and disseminate a Leverage program practice library.** Grantees generated a remarkable range of creative, community-rooted programming, from geothermal greenhouses and robotics clubs to intergenerational gardening and near-peer mentorship. BSB will provide opportunities for near-peer learning and documentation of these models in a format that can be shared across the broader network, enabling programs to learn from and adapt one another's approaches.

LOOKING AHEAD

The 2024-2025 Leverage Grant initiative demonstrated that strategic investments paired with coaching, partnerships, and local flexibility can strengthen both the quality and sustainability of rural expanded learning opportunities. Future funding will build on these successes by taking action on the steps outlined above.

