



SUPPORTING **Youth
Success**

THE PROMISE OF
**Expanded
Learning
Opportunities**



Youth Community Connections
Minnesota's Statewide Afterschool Alliance



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Minnesota Youth Deserve Opportunities...

...to learn, grow and lead!

Decades of research and best practices have illustrated the supports and experiences young people need to be successful in school, work and life. They need multiple engaging opportunities to learn, grow and lead in their homes, community and school. They need chances to volunteer in their communities, to engage in the arts, to play sports and to explore future careers—to experience the world and learn the skills needed to be 21st century citizens.

It is time to create policies and structures within communities that ensure all young people have access to a variety of learning opportunities—specifically, policies and structures to create comprehensive learning systems that align, and complement, learning in the classroom with learning that takes place in the community through afterschool, youth development and summer programs. These policies and structures would effectively coordinate the key systems that provide learning opportunities through school and community programs—building upon the supports provided by parents and families.

...to be supported by their community!

One group or individual cannot make this change alone. The creation of a coordinated, comprehensive learning system will take the contribution of key stakeholders, both at the state and local level. Each partner, bringing a unique perspective as well as a diverse set of assets and resources, can help create sustainable policies and structures to make this seamless learning system a reality in communities across Minnesota.

...to be heard and contribute!

Minnesota youth need meaningful ways to engage with the world around them—whether in school, in community or at home. Minnesota's youth are motivated when learning is relevant and they are engaged with adults who support their success. 176 young people in Minnesota spoke in 13 communities around the State to tell us where they are learning and what adults can do to help them successfully gain 21st century skills—and we need to be responsive. We need to listen to their strong message, and do what is best for our youth—because their success is Minnesota's future!

Creating Comprehensive Learning Systems

We know the research and we've heard the youth of Minnesota—it's time to take action!

Youth Community Connections engaged multiple stakeholders in the *Minnesota Supporting Youth Success (SYS) Initiative* to create a policy framework that calls for the creation of comprehensive learning systems in communities throughout the state. Comprehensive learning systems provide seamless learning opportunities for youth to gain the skills, knowledge and abilities necessary to be successful in the 21st century.



The Supporting Youth Success model provides a graphic representation of what youth need for success—opportunities to learn, grow and lead in their school, community and home. The model also illustrates how communities and systems-level stakeholders support youth development and learning opportunities by:

- Increasing **access** to expanded learning opportunities in the community;
- Improving the **quality** of expanded learning opportunities and developmental experiences;
- Optimizing the use of human and financial **resources** of schools, communities and families; and
- Increasing successful **coordination** among stakeholders.

Comprehensive learning systems recognize the critical role expanded learning opportunities play in the development of young people. Additionally, comprehensive learning systems incorporate support for the infrastructure and systems that provide expanded learning opportunities in communities during the non-school hours.

It is time to move these ideas to action—to commit to our young people's future and to make this a priority. We know communities that have developed comprehensive learning systems have witnessed great results for youth and their families as they work collectively to prepare their young citizens to lead (Faris, 2006). It is essential that we invest our time and energy into making a comprehensive learning system a reality in every Minnesota community.

SUPPORTING Youth Success

THE PROMISE OF Expanded Learning Opportunities

Expanding Learning Opportunities

Young people learn in a variety of environments and contexts, including with family and peers, at school, at work and in their community. Each provides different learning opportunities—and approaches—that impact their preparation for, and success at, navigating the changes and transitions of their development (Roth & Brooks-Gunn, 2000). Each is critical and none of these alone is enough to prepare youth with all the skills and knowledge they need to be successful.




Youth need opportunities to volunteer in their communities, experience the arts, play sports, explore career options and engage in the civic process. Yet, too often youth success is defined only by success in the classroom. When youth have access to expanded learning opportunities at school, in the community and at home, they are more likely to gain the knowledge, skills and abilities necessary for life in the 21st century. More specifically, youth reap the greatest benefit when **intentional** connections between **cumulative** learning experiences occur (Vandell, 2007).

Some youth excel using formal learning approaches while other youth thrive using non-formal learning approaches, which are provided through expanded learning opportunities in the community. The recognition that expanded learning opportunities—provided through afterschool, youth development and summer programs—is critical to the success of all young people will require a broader definition of success than currently used.

Communities are central to all learning opportunities.

Broadening the definition of success for youth builds on the contributions of parents and families, and places communities in a central role to all learning opportunities. Families make homes in communities. Schools are located in communities. And young people first experience the world and learn to navigate life beyond their family and school in their community.

In order to support learning and development, communities must work collectively to meet the needs of its young citizens. It will take the collaborative work of educators, youth development experts, policymakers and community members to intentionally provide high-quality expanded learning opportunities in communities and in schools—creating a comprehensive learning system.

			
	Formal	Non-formal	Informal
Learning Approach	Learning is content centered.	Learning is youth centered.	Learning is experience centered.
Definition	Content-centered instruction; offered in structured environments; leads toward certification, diploma or degree; where participation by the learner is generally compulsory (Siurala, 2006 & Rogers, 2004)	Structured and highly contextualized learning; where participation by the learner is voluntary and personal development is emphasized (Siurala, 2006 & Rogers, 2004)	Learning in everyday life; opportunities may or may not be intentional (Siurala, 2006 & Rogers, 2004)
Examples	K-12 education, higher education or vocational education	Expanded learning opportunities, including afterschool, summer programs, community programs, sports programs or youth councils	Learning to cook with a parent, learning to fix a car with a neighbor or participating in family activities

What does it look like for a young person to successfully connect formal, non-formal and informal learning?



Jade's Story

Jade regularly participated in her local youth program after school. She built strong relationships with adults who worked in the program. Initially, Jade turned to the adults in her program for guidance about issues she was having at home and school. Sometimes she agreed with the advice and other times did not. Regardless, Jade was always invited to participate in the program.

Eventually, Jade was tapped for youth leadership work within the program and she began providing advice to younger participants. As she gained confidence she took a more active role in planning youth programming and began recruiting other youth to join the program.

This led to Jade's invitation to join a youth council in her community. The youth council advised the Mayor and City Council on policy issues related to youth. She was invited to share the voices and needs of other youth in her community at various community events.

Jade was excited to graduate. She was the first person in her family to graduate from high school and continue to college. She knew she was there because of her own hard work—and the ongoing support and opportunities to learn at school and in her community. Jade knew this day was important to her family, but she knew she wouldn't have made it without adults in her community that believed in her and asked for her involvement. Jade hopes to complete college in four years, and help her brother and sister graduate high school too.

Afterschool, youth development and summer programs provide critical expanded learning opportunities to young people.

Creating Comprehensive Learning Systems

Enable community and state leaders to effectively coordinate learning opportunities for youth—by creating mechanisms and policies that make it easier for communities to work together.

Comprehensive learning systems align multiple forms of learning approaches as well as the structures, policies and resources that support these learning opportunities to provide youth the essential elements to be successful, contributing citizens and to navigate the world around them (New Day for Learning, 2007).

It is the alignment of these systems, policies and resources, and the collaboration among those who are leaders in each, that will create sustainable change and both improve learning opportunities and youth success. We know that the responsibility for young people's success and learning cannot be put on school, home or community alone—that we must all come together to create a comprehensive learning system for youth in Minnesota.

We know the creation of comprehensive learning systems is possible in communities across Minnesota. It requires intentional planning and the coordination among various stakeholders who operate under different accountability systems (e.g. state law or local charter). Many communities have to create new mechanisms and policies, or receive waivers from state and federal government, in order to create a seamless learning system for youth that recognizes the contributions of learning in school and in the community.



In Minnesota there are 87 counties, 854 cities, 11 tribal nations and approximately 340 school districts. Each vary in size, geography, capacity and resources. Each makes separate decisions impacting learning opportunities in the community and requires communities and education leaders to connect in multiple ways.

Within those structures a host of siloed resources exist—with explicit rules about how they are expended—for schools, community education, libraries, youth serving organizations, transportation providers, and parks and recreation.

The *Minnesota Supporting Youth Success (SYS) Initiative* engaged multiple stakeholders to inform the development of this framework, to identify strategies that can contribute to the success of its young citizens, and to identify specific policy recommendations for local and state leaders to support comprehensive learning systems. Recommendations focus on building and supporting the infrastructure and systems that provide expanded learning opportunities in communities and schools.

The vision driving the development of this framework demonstrates what success will look like for Minnesota youth and is based on what we know young people need to develop into healthy, successful, contributing adults.

VISION

Minnesota's youth thrive because they are engaged in opportunities to learn, lead and grow in their communities, schools and families.

The goal recognizes that young people need access to all learning approaches. Aligning learning opportunities and approaches complements the contributions of parents and families.

GOAL

All communities across the state will create, coordinate and support comprehensive learning systems that provide access to a broad array of high-quality learning opportunities through formal and non-formal education approaches.

For more information on the *Minnesota SYS Initiative*, please visit Appendix B (page 19).



Success for Minnesota's Youth

We know that collaboration among community stakeholders such as educators, youth development experts, policymakers, community members and families will produce the long-term success for youth as highlighted in the center of this graphic.

The Supporting Youth Success graphic represents an ecological model where youth experiences and success are supported and shaped (and in many ways determined) by community and system collaboration, which wrap around the youth.

The community and systems supports represent the ways in which they can work together to contribute to the success of its young citizens:

- Increasing **access** to expanded learning opportunities in the community;
- Improving the **quality** of expanded learning opportunities and developmental experiences;
- Optimizing the use of human and financial **resources** from schools, communities and families; and
- Increasing successful **coordination** among stakeholders within communities and between state and local decisionmakers.



**Supporting Youth Success:
A Community Approach**

Youth Success

Learn... young people are engaged in learning in both formal settings and in the community at large. They will have opportunities to apply what they've learned in meaningful ways and to take advantage of their learning experiences to prepare for post-secondary education and/or a career.

Lead... young people have opportunities to lead and contribute within their community. These opportunities will ignite or nurture their passions and bring relevance to their learning experiences.

Grow... young people will make healthy life choices, and avoid negative or risk-taking behaviors. They will have positive peer-to-peer relationships and positive youth-adult relationships.

Recommendations & Strategies

Existing structures, policies and systems often create challenges for state and local leaders to work collectively toward a shared vision and goal of comprehensive learning systems. The following are a set of recommendations for communities and systems-level stakeholder to utilize to ensure the infrastructure and systems that support expanded learning opportunities in afterschool, youth development and summer programs are in place to create a community-wide plan or a comprehensive learning system.

RECOMMENDATION 1



Increase Access

...Identify ways to work collectively to increase access to expanded learning opportunities that are developmentally appropriate and hold community stakeholders accountable for success and improvements.

Families and youth have traditionally struggled to understand what expanded learning opportunities exist within a community. In some communities there are several opportunities within a neighborhood and its surrounding community. In other communities, distance remains the primary challenge.

Strategies to help increase access:

Local Strategies	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Provide access to school buildings beyond the school day or year to offer expanded learning opportunities through community education, community organizations or through school staff. School buildings are often the pillars of a community—providing essential gathering places for young people and families. Yet many school buildings are underutilized as public resources within a community. Keeping these places open to the public can enhance learning for young people in communities and optimize the use of existing resources. 2. Produce community-wide marketing materials to promote and coordinate expanded learning opportunities. This allows consumers to conveniently find reliable information about what is available in their community (e.g. creating a city-wide web-based database or city-wide brochures). 3. Coordinate public and private resources for transportation as a means to increase access to expanded learning opportunities. Many youth and families would access expanded learning opportunities within their community if they could find reliable, trustworthy transportation to and from the program/opportunity.
Supportive State Strategies	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Expand Minnesota's Targeted Services Program to all communities and school districts to provide additional learning opportunities and incorporate measures of success to guide program improvement. 2. Review state and federal safe student transportation policies and regulations to allow more flexibility and better coordination of school bussing with bussing for expanded learning opportunities. 3. Provide state resources for expanded learning opportunities (e.g. afterschool, youth development and summer learning programs) in the community to support equitable access for all young people with a specific focus on youth living in poverty.

RECOMMENDATION 2



Improve Quality

...identify ways to collectively improve the quality of expanded learning opportunities and to ensure consumers are aware of which programs are high quality.

The quality of programs, learning experiences and relationships with adults and peers contribute towards a young person's attitude and eventual success in that particular environment or context. It is essential the educators, youth development experts and decisionmakers work together to improve the quality of programs and practice through funding, training and transformation of knowledge.

Strategies to help improve quality:

Local Strategies	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Communities will convene public and private stakeholders to align and implement consistent measures of quality in afterschool, youth development and summer learning programs. Using existing research and frameworks, quality improvement plans would be created. The data collected would be used to drive enhancements in the quality of instruction and practice in expanded learning opportunities. 2. Communities will develop agreements and tools to share and coordinate data between expanded learning opportunities and schools. These tools would assist in determining the impact of learning opportunities and determine how to better support youth outcomes. Currently each system collects its own data which limits a community's ability to collect common data and work toward shared outcomes.
Supportive State Strategies	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. State policymakers will agree upon a comprehensive set of youth outcomes and encourage the consistent measure of growth toward these outcomes for young people in Minnesota. 2. Public and private funders will use consistent measures of quality in expanded learning opportunities and work collectively to provide the supports needed to ensure their implementation statewide.

RECOMMENDATION 3



Optimize the Use of Public and Private Resources

...to leverage and maximize existing human and financial resources to enhance the infrastructure and systems that support expanded learning opportunities within a comprehensive system.

Creating policies or mechanisms to allow the flexible use of resources can increase access, improve the quality of services and opportunities and increase the coordination of expanded learning opportunities within a community.

Strategies to help optimize resources:

Local Strategies

1. **Identify and document local (public) resources for expanded learning opportunities.** This will allow communities to better understand the current flow of resources as well as any gaps in resources. This information can be used to leverage new resources and help determine a more efficient way to provide sustainable learning opportunities in the community.
2. **Encourage staffing partnerships to support learning in the classroom and in the community.** Many public partners (schools, parks and recreation, community education and libraries) are partnering with nonprofit organizations and businesses within communities to meet the learning needs of young people. When a community is able to intentionally connect these partnerships, it maximizes the use of its resources.
3. **Identify barriers to leveraging resources for expanded learning opportunities for youth, and work to collectively address these barriers.** Each funding source has a set of rules (and/or laws) outlining their use. While these rules provide important protections and accountability over the use of resources, they can create unintended challenges and silos when communities work collectively to address needs through multiple sources of funds.

Supportive State Strategies

1. Allow communities (cities or counties) to include expanded learning opportunities as part of the levy cap. This would allow communities to fund programming if state, federal or private resources were unavailable.
2. Create policies and mechanisms to allow communities to collectively leverage and use resources (both public and private) at the local level to address the needs of youth through expanded learning opportunities.

RECOMMENDATION 4



Increase Successful Coordination

...of stakeholders in communities and among local and state decisionmakers, and work to decrease unnecessary competition and avoid duplication.

Coordination is more successful when communities develop a plan and agree upon benchmarks of success outlining their own contributions.

Strategies to help increase coordination:

Local Strategies	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Encourage youth voice and participation in planning and decisionmaking efforts related to expanded learning opportunities. Youth provide critical insights to the efficiencies, and inefficiencies, of existing learning opportunities and structures. They can assist in quality improvement efforts that can have immediate benefits (e.g. transportation services or eliminating duplication). 2. Encourage local leaders in public and private agencies (e.g. school boards, city councils, nonprofit boards, tribal councils) to coordinate and align decisionmaking bodies to provide shared opportunities to work toward common goals and utilize shared resources to support a community-level learning agenda and shared evaluations. Currently each of these stakeholders is accountable for different elements of learning. Each can make a greater impact when working collectively as a group than when working independently toward their own outcomes. 3. Encourage shared professional development opportunities for practitioners in schools and expanded learning programs. This maximizes the human resources and creates shared language, knowledge and goals among practitioners—leading toward a seamless, comprehensive learning system.
Supportive State Strategies	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> The Collaborative Governance Council (Ch 319 – 2010 Session Laws) will assist state and local governments as they seek to work more strategically to create comprehensive learning systems to support youth learning and growth. Minnesota’s P-20 Council will adopt a broader definition of success to include non-formal learning approaches through expanded learning opportunities.

Moving Ideas to Action

Creating comprehensive learning systems will take an investment in time and energy. It will take a continued commitment on behalf of many key players to make partnership and collaboration a priority in their work. In order to make this a reality, communities must come together to build a plan and take action.

There is no step-by-step process for developing comprehensive learning systems. There is no single model that should be replicated throughout the state. Because communities in Minnesota are so diverse, the paths that they take to achieve this goal will look very different, as will the final results of their work. Communities will need to decide what makes sense in their context, and what the right steps are to achieve their goals.

But they don't need to do it alone. There are community planning tools and capacity building resources available, and Youth Community Connections is proud to provide direction to communities who are working to create comprehensive learning systems in Minnesota. More information on how to access these resources or to receive assistance is located on the Youth Community Connections website at www.youthcommunityconnections.org.

It is both possible and essential that we create comprehensive systems for young people in Minnesota. None of these learning experiences alone is enough, and the benefits of each are enhanced by their coordination and connection.

Young people gain most from a broad array of learning approaches and experiences, which must include high-quality expanded learning opportunities. We need to commit to supporting the systems and infrastructure that allows youth to gain the skills and knowledge they need to learn, lead and grow into healthy, productive adults.

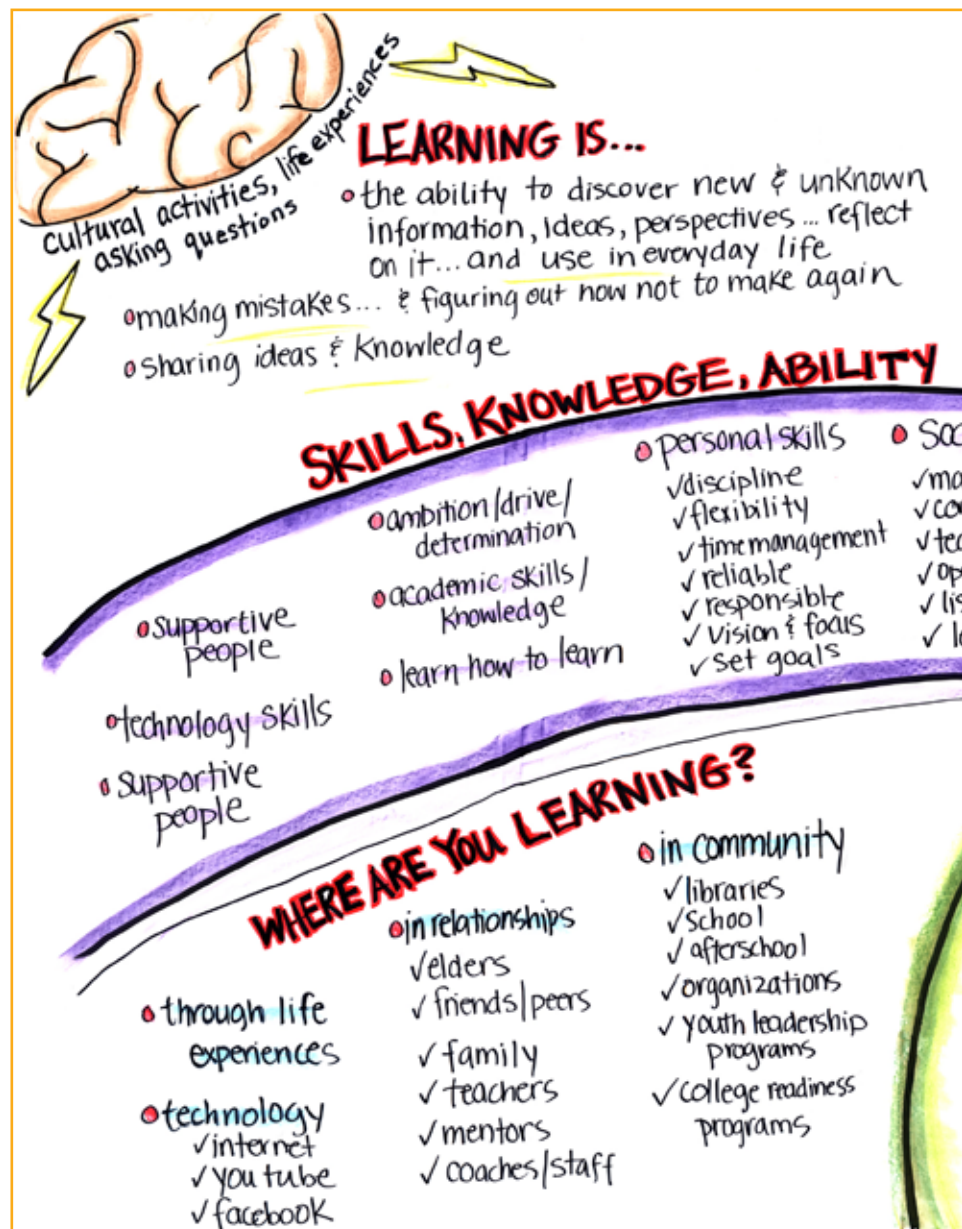




Minnesota Youth Learn at Home, at School and in their Communities

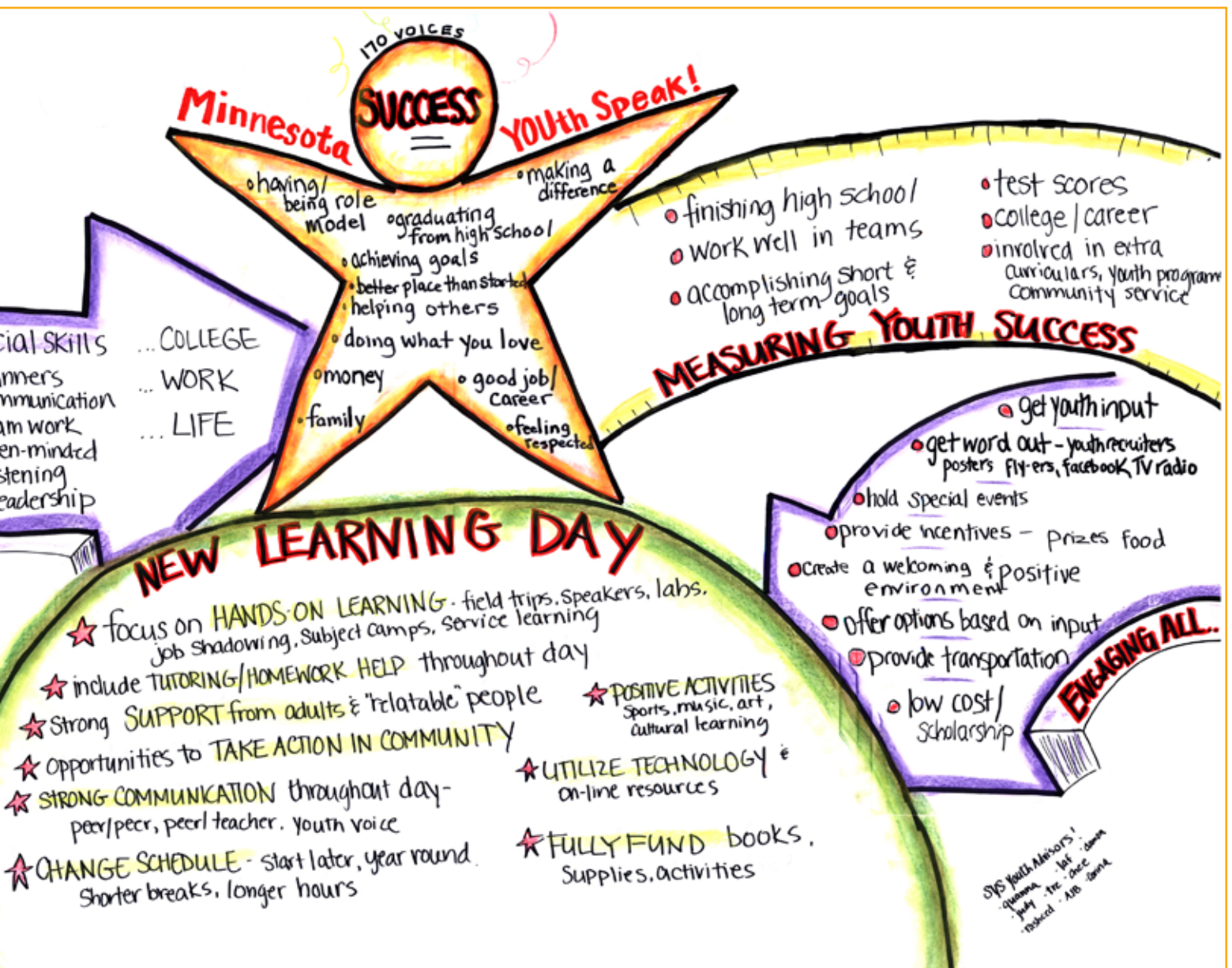
Youth Speak about How and Where They Learn

YOUth Speak Community Dialogs engaged 176 young people in 13 communities across the State. Minnesota youth are telling their state leaders they need multiple, diverse, engaging and coordinated learning experiences that provide them with opportunities to learn, grow and lead. They want meaningful ways to engage with the world around them, they want to participate in learning experiences that are relevant, and they want to engage with adults in school and community who support their success.



Minnesota youth tell us they would measure success by whether young people:

- Get involved
- Set goals (long and short term)
- Graduate college
- Connect school-family-education-career-success-retirement
- Have confidence
- Are happy
- Support of family and friends
- Demonstrate self-discipline
- Help others
- Are involved in school and community
- Create a better environment
- Are prepared to give back
- Contribute to increased safety in the community
- Have career choices
- Exhibit responsibility
- Participate in teamwork



APPENDIX A

Acknowledgements

This policy framework was made possible through a partnership of the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO), the National Conference of State Legislatures (NCSL) and the National Governor's Association (NGA) Center for Best Practices, and funding from the Charles Stewart Mott Foundation, the Greater Twin Cities United Way, The Sheltering Arms Foundation and The McKnight Foundation.

We are indebted to all the individuals who participated in the initiative and shared their valuable time and insights with us. This was truly a collaborative process and are grateful to the planning team members for their ongoing guidance and support of the Initiative and our expert facilitator, Laura Bloomberg of Full Circle Community Institute. Planning team members provided constant feedback and challenged assumptions, which was necessary to develop a statewide policy framework.

We are particularly grateful for the leadership and participation of Minnesota youth. Their willingness to share their insights and experiences in this area aided the development of the recommendations and strategies for creating comprehensive learning systems in communities across the state. We appreciate Andrea Jasken Baker for her role in supporting their leadership and providing guidance through this initiative.

We appreciate the insightful reviews and comments by Youth Community Connections' Executive Team: Dale Blyth, Chris Ganzlin, Kathy Lentz, Jack Tamble and Carol Thomas. The clarity of this report benefited greatly from their comments and suggestions. Finally, we thank our colleagues at Collaborative Communications Group for organizing our ideas and helping them take shape in this report.



Youth Community Connections

Minnesota's Statewide Afterschool Alliance

Youth Community Connections is a statewide alliance of public and private stakeholders who work collaboratively to support learning and development opportunities in the non-school hours.

Youth Community Connections focuses on policy and systems building efforts to increase access, improve quality and to maximize resources and partnerships on behalf of young people in communities throughout the state.

APPENDIX B

About this Report

This policy framework is the product of an 18-month process referred to as Supporting Youth Success: The Promise of Expanded Learning Opportunities. Youth Community Connections: Minnesota's Statewide Afterschool Alliance gathered and synthesized the knowledge and expertise of education and youth development experts, academics, municipal leaders, community organization partners, and young adult and youth leaders from across the state through a series of working meetings, focus groups and site visits conducted in 2009-2010 with the assistance of three key teams: a planning team, a leadership team and an advisory team (see page 20 for additional information).

This work builds upon the Charles Stewart Mott Foundation's Time, Learning and Afterschool Task Force report, *A New Day for Learning*, which identified five key strategies for creating seamless learning systems that recognizes learning in the classroom as well as the community.

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APPENDIX B CONTINUED

Minnesota's Leadership & Advisory Team Representatives

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