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Youth Voices, Informed Choices: A Blueprint for Cannabis Education and Opportunity



By: CAEC (Cannabis Awareness & Education Council for Youth)

A partnership of Ignite Afterschool, World Youth Connect, and Youthprise with the Brooklyn Bridge Alliance for Youth

Thanks to generous funding from Greater Twin Cities United Way and the CS Mott Foundation

CAEC Member Bios:



Darian L.

Darian is the Policy Associate at Ignite Afterschool, co-founder of World Youth Connect, and a college student in Saint Paul. He is motivated by making positive changes in the community, writing music, and elevating young people's voices and leadership.



Darius D.

Darius is a high school junior in Saint Paul and is the current president of the youth-led nonprofit organization World Youth Connect. Darius is endlessly curious, asking questions that lead to improving the community and building young people's leadership.



Emmett D.

Emmett is a Policy Fellow at Youthprise and has served on the Youth Advisory Board for several months. He attended Augsburg University, is a champion for restorative justice, and facilitates healing & trauma circles for youth, houseless, and recently incarcerated people.



Markos S.

Markos is a University of Minnesota Carlson School of Management student studying MIS (management information systems). He also works at World Youth Connect, a youth-led nonprofit organization where he served a two-year term as president.

Former CAEC Members:

Chancellor W.
Touri R.
Jaylen B.

Marissa D.
Fauzia S.

What is CAEC?

The Cannabis Awareness and Education Council for Youth (CAEC) is a:

- Core group of four young people 14-25 years old
- Partnership between Ignite Afterschool, World Youth Connect, and Youthprise with the Brooklyn Bridge Alliance with Youth.

The goals of CAEC are for young people to:

- Learn about Minnesota's recreational cannabis legislation passed in 2023;
- Analyze cannabis policy and put forth strategies to ensure cannabis policy has as little negative impact on young people's physical, mental, and economic well-being as possible; and;
- Get involved in policy, issue education, and civic leadership.

Introduction

During the 2023 legislative session, Minnesota enacted a new law making recreational cannabis use and sale legal in Minnesota for adults 21 and older. The Cannabis Awareness & Education Council for Youth (CAEC) is led by young people aged 14-25 and focuses on highlighting how young people are invisible and where they appear in Minnesota's Cannabis legislation. They argue that the legalization of recreational cannabis has a significant impact on the lives of young people. Yet, young people were not an audience deeply consulted or engaged in crafting Minnesota's Cannabis policy.

Research shows that the use of Cannabis prior to age 24 can negatively impact brain development¹. Listening sessions held with high school youth and led by this report's authors show that many young people are aware of the health *benefits* of Cannabis but not of the potential *risks*. As young people increasingly struggle with mental health coming out of the pandemic, empowering young people to have accurate information, to co-create policy that impacts them, and to have a voice in funding decisions is critically important to ensure current policies do not result in unintended negative consequences. This report is a summary of CAEC's past work, sets forth clear recommendations to improve how Minnesota approaches cannabis legalization, and marks the beginning of efforts to ensure young people's interests and voices are lifted up as the State moves into policy implementation.

2023

September

October

November

December

September 2023

- The first meeting of CAEC, the group confirms goals.

October 2023

- 2 meetings
- Youth dive deep into Cannabis policy
- First listening session with other youth

November 2023

- 2 meetings to engage guest speakers

December 2023

- 2 meetings to plan listening sessions & explore themes
- 3 listening sessions with other youth

2024

January

January 2024

- 3 meetings to finalize recommendations

February

February 2024

- release a final report and plan for next steps
- 1 listening session with other youth

Whats Next?

This report represents what CAEC members learned and concluded after a four-month deep dive into Minnesota's recreational cannabis legislation. In addition to these conclusions, their deep dive resulted in additional questions that need further attention.

Understanding Expungement & Youth Criminalization

Minnesota's cannabis legislation creates an automatic expungement process for low-level cannabis convictions and creates a board that reviews possible expungement or resentencing for felony offenses. CAEC members believe there should be more clarity on whether or not automatic expungement is available for those who were convicted as an adolescent or between 18-20 years of age. In addition, CAEC members need more information on whether or not young people and young adults aged 20 and under who are charged for cannabis offenses moving forward will be charged under pre-cannabis legalization criminal code or if cannabis offenses will be treated like underage alcohol or cigarette use. Also, will young people continue to have the option to have low-level cannabis offenses expunged at 21?

Moving Forward

While this report represents a conclusion of a portion of CAEC's work, it also represents a beginning. CAEC members are committed to continuing their efforts and bringing in more interested young people to join them. Next, they plan to:

- Work with state and local government agencies to understand how young people can be engaged in the implementation of youth-focused Cannabis education efforts;
- Continue their learning about cannabis legislation and how it impacts young people;
- Organize other young people to get involved and have a voice in policy.

CAEC Recommendation's

Make Information Youth-Led and Friendly

What: To help young people make healthy decisions, programs like D.A.R.E have been proven not to work². Young people want access to accurate information about cannabis law and the health effects of cannabis. Provide information in community spaces, not only in schools.

How: Fund young people to design education strategies and resources. Ensure schools, counties, and the state involve young people and youth-centered organizations in all youth education efforts.

Create youth-friendly career pathways

Why: The cannabis industry creates equity-centered career opportunities for Minnesotans. Current law makes internships and other cannabis-industry skill-building for young people aged 18-20 difficult and delays young people's ability to learn the skills necessary to enter the field at 21.

How: Create clear guidance for those in higher education and the Cannabis industry around education and skill-building options accessible to 18-20-year-olds that can feed into Cannabis career pathways.

Build Youth Leadership through Afterschool

What: Investing in young people's leadership and skill-building is better than investing in addiction treatment and incarceration. Afterschool and summer programs build skills and support young people to make healthy decisions.

How: Dedicate a portion of Community Renewal Grants (CanRenew) to high-quality, community-centered, out-of-school youth leadership programs. Ensure young people have a role in deciding which projects get funded.

Educate, don't incarcerate

Why: When cannabis use is legalized for adults, it can lead to an increase in policing and arrests of young people under 21, which continues to exacerbate racial disparities³. When young people become involved in juvenile justice, especially residential services, they have an increased risk of adult incarceration⁴. Focus on education, skill building, and leadership, not punishment.

How: Connect young people arrested for minor cannabis offenses with educational resources and community leadership programs. Groups of young people disproportionately impacted by arrests should be involved in decision-making around investments and strategies to support positive life choices.

Add Youth to the Cannabis Advisory Council

What: The inclusion of youth perspectives in the decision-making process concerning cannabis legislation and policy is crucial. Without direct youth involvement, decisions about youth-related issues may not adequately address the needs and concerns of young people.

How: Add youth representatives to the Cannabis Advisory Council. These representatives would ensure that decisions impacting young people, such as education strategies, youth leadership programs, and career pathways, are made with their input and understanding of their unique circumstances.



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Citations

- ¹ Pravesh Sharma, M.D. "How Youth Substance Use Impacts Life." Mayo Clinic Health System, Mayo Clinic Health System, 17 Jan. 2023, www.mayoclinichealthsystem.org/hometown-health/speaking-of-health/how-teen-marijuana-use-impacts-brain-development.
- ² Admin. "D.A.R.E. Program Effectiveness: Why It Failed." Talk It Out, 8 Aug. 2023, www.talkitoutnc.org/dare-program-effectiveness/.
- ³ "Racial Disparities Persist in Marijuana Enforcement, Even after Legalization." ACLU of Minnesota, 10 Mar. 2023, www.aclu-mn.org/en/news/racial-disparities-persist-marijuana-enforcement-even-after-legalization.
- ⁴ Copeland WE; Tong G; Gifford EJ; Easter MM; Shanahan L; Swartz MS; Swanson JW; "Adult Criminal Outcomes of Juvenile Justice Involvement." Psychological Medicine, U.S. National Library of Medicine, pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/35264271/. Accessed 24 Jan. 2024.

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