



Minnesota Youth: How to Support Our Success

What Youth Say About Learning, Leading & Growing

What does life success look like from the perspective of youth in Minnesota? Just ask them:

*Making a difference...Feeling respected...Achieving goals...Making money...Family...
Graduating from high school...Doing what you love...Helping others...Having/being a role model*

That is how Minnesota youth see success. In community dialogs, a total of 176 young people from across the state shared their dreams and insights on success – in school and in life – as well as the supports required to succeed.

Learning doesn't happen just at school. Youth spend twice as much time out of school, a period of time that represents a largely unrecognized opportunity for young people's growth and learning.

Saying that **where** they learn is not as important as **what** they learn, youth identify multiple avenues for learning: through life experiences, in relationships, with technology, and in community settings. If school is a formal place for learning, these other settings could be called "non-formal" or "informal" pathways for youth's growth and development.

We asked youth, "Where are you learning?"

Life Experiences

- asking questions
- sharing knowledge
- learning from mistakes
- helping others
- cultural activities

In Relationships

- elders
- friends/peers
- family
- teachers
- mentors/coaches

In Community

- libraries
- schools
- after school
- community orgs
- youth programs
- college-prep programs

With Technology

- internet
- computers
- smartphones

Building on the ideas and input of youth, the 2011 report, Supporting Youth Success: The Promise of Expanded Learning Opportunities, recommends creation of "comprehensive learning systems" in Minnesota communities. This involves coordinating efforts between existing systems like education and less developed networks like afterschool and summer youth programs. The new system (or network) consists of the relationships and resources necessary to provide expanded learning opportunities to youth – without service gaps or other barriers.

The Supporting Youth Success model (at right) shows the resources and support necessary for youth to learn, lead and grow in their school, community and home. The model also shows how communities, programs and systems must support youth development and learning opportunities by increasing access, improving quality, maximizing all resources and increasing coordination.





The knowledge and skills that youth say are important are learned across these different formal, non-formal and informal settings. When asked about essential skills and abilities they need to succeed in college, work and life, youth identify a range of skills.

We asked youth, “What skills, knowledge & ability are critical for success?”

Academic Skills & Knowledge

- learn how to learn

Personal Skills

- discipline
- responsibility
- set goals
- time management
- vision

Social Skills

- manners
- communication
- teamwork
- open-minded
- listening
- leadership

Other

- ambition/determination
- supportive people
- technology skills

If youth themselves acknowledge that learning happens in many different places and also focuses on a range of diverse skills and abilities, what kind of new approaches can responsively and effectively help youth achieve their dreams?

The vision of success shared by Minnesota youth is positive and holistic – even though adults sometimes think that youth are on an entirely different wavelength. Youth want to learn and be challenged. They want to learn from adults who care about them and who can relate to them. They want positive experiences that allow them to lead, grow and give back to their families and communities.

The voices and vision of young people can guide all systems and programs serving Minnesota youth. It represents new thinking and even some youthful wisdom, logically supporting the definition of “learning” as articulated by Minnesota youth: “the ability to discover new and unknown information, ideas and perspectives...reflect on it...and use it in everyday life.”

Now What?

The Supporting Youth Success framework can serve as a roadmap for communities looking for ways to better engage and support young people. Under this roadmap, a “learning day” replaces the traditional “school day.” The schedule also looks different – a year-round calendar, more hours in a longer day, and later start time for adolescents on different body clocks. When organized specifically for young people, the new learning day features more hands-on learning that is relevant to youth, with tutoring and homework help available all day long (rather than during a single time period).

Furthermore, there is strong support from adults and – in youth’s words – “relatable” people, with strong communication from youth to adults and from program to program. Positive activities build on youth interests and energy, providing opportunities for youth to take action in the community. Technology and books are up-to-date and fully funded.

These features of a new learning day were part of actual recommendations by Minnesota youth. In the spirit of “making no decision for us, without us,” youth ask that communities, schools and programs seek their input and then offer options based on youth input.

