Investing in the Enterprise of Youth: Youthprise & Learning Beyond the Classroom

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Overview

Youthprise is a Minnesota-based intermediary established in 2010 by The McKnight Foundation to increase the quality, accessibility, sustainability, and innovation of opportunities for learning beyond the classroom. Youth Community Connections (YCC), Minnesota’s Statewide Afterschool Alliance, merged with Youthprise in June 2011, bringing a strong history of policy advocacy and systems building around afterschool and out-of-school-time (OST) learning. The formation of Youthprise was carefully conceived by McKnight staff and multiple stakeholders from the OST field who envisioned a more efficient approach to supporting youth programs for under-engaged and underserved young people within the Twin Cities and throughout the state of Minnesota. Youthprise brings a strategic combination of human, financial, and practical resources to maximize programs’ impact on Minnesota youth. A central focus of Youthprise is addressing the “opportunity gap,” the unequal access to quality learning opportunities faced by marginalized youth — those who are low-income, homeless, GLBTQ, Native and youth of color, and young people with physical or developmental disabilities.

Mission

The mission of Youthprise is to champion learning beyond the classroom so that all Minnesota youth thrive. Youthprise works to build an effective and coordinated system that affords all young people access to high-quality learning opportunities during their out-of-school hours. This includes:

- building systems infrastructure — comprehensive data systems, quality standards and assessment tools, and coordinated efforts among public, private, and nonprofit partners;
- developing the organizational capacity of programs in the OST/youth development field and their capacity to participate in data collection and quality improvement efforts; and
- authentically engaging youth and their communities in designing, implementing, and evaluating programs and policies.

Youthprise aims to align and leverage resources to achieve the following goals:

- **Mobilize the power of youth** to enliven, expand, and transform programs and systems.
- **Expand access to quality learning experiences** that prepare youth for education, work, and civic life.
- **Advance integrated community-based systems** that increase opportunities to improve outcomes for all youth.
- **Leverage and grow resources** to close the opportunity gap for under-engaged and underserved youth.
- **Ignite public insistence** on engaging, accessible, quality learning opportunities for all youth.
Youthprise defines “learning beyond the classroom” broadly to include all programs that provide support for young people’s intellectual, social, emotional, spiritual, and physical development outside the traditional school classroom. Also known as expanded learning opportunities or out-of-school time, these opportunities are not limited to formal afterschool programs, although such programs can be viable sources of learning beyond the classroom. Quality learning beyond the classroom can occur at any time — during weekends, summer breaks, and holidays. Likewise, these opportunities can come in diverse settings, both in school- and community-based venues. Although they share an emphasis on non-formal learning strategies, out-of-school time learning experiences take a variety of forms, from tutoring to STEM-based programs; to hands-on, experiential learning pursuits; programs to build personal and social skills; as well as youth leadership initiatives.

Youth spend 2,000 hours each year outside of school — more than twice the time they spend in school. In Minnesota, 32% (394,354) of K-12 children are responsible for taking care of themselves after school and only 12% (113,003) participate in afterschool programs. Over half of Minnesota parents struggle to find things for their children to do when they are not in school.¹ Having quality learning opportunities available during these hours can play an important positive role in the academic and personal development of young people, especially in an era when many parents work full time. It can also provide some youth with an alternative to unsupervised time and activities that could put them at risk.²

Adolescence, by itself, is a period of rapid change on many dimensions. These include the obvious changes of puberty, but also developments in the brain and relationships with family, peers, and school. Areas of the brain responsible for higher cognition (reasoning, decision-making) and self-regulation mature; in fact, adolescence may be a critical period for “the coordination of a wide array of cognitive and brain systems into a self-aware, self-guided, and self-monitoring system of conscious control.”³ The parent-child relationship undergoes a shift during adolescence, resulting in temporary increases in discord and distance between teens and their parents.⁴ Forming relationships with peers is also an important developmental task, and adolescents have much more unsupervised time with peers than younger children. Youth who successfully form these relationships have greater self-esteem,⁵ yet friends who engage in risky behavior can have a negative impact on young people’s well-being. Adolescents whose friends place less value on pro-social behavior and academic success are more apt to engage in risky behavior and perform worse in school than others.⁶ During adolescence, young people’s lives in school change as well. Most youth transition from a small elementary school where they are known to teachers, administrators, and peers to a larger, more impersonal middle school.⁷ The result is often a lack of fit between the school environment and young people’s developmental needs and a decline in self-esteem, intrinsic motivation, and school engagement.
Positive Outcomes from Learning Beyond the Classroom

One key opportunity that can support young people’s present well-being and future success, and level the playing field between those who are advantaged and disadvantaged, is learning beyond the classroom. Youthprise is founded on this idea. Research and evaluation studies indicate that children and youth benefit in multiple ways from access to high-quality OST learning opportunities. Youth who participate in high-quality summer and afterschool programs gain both short-term and long-term academic, social, and personal competencies. Additionally, learning opportunities beyond the classroom may be an essential resource for closing the achievement gaps that afflict our educational system. These positive outcomes can have a favorable impact on education, public safety, health and wellness, workforce development, and economic success. Evaluation studies have shown that youth who participate in quality learning opportunities beyond the classroom tend to:

- **Do Better in School.** A 2010 study on outcomes of afterschool programs showed that these programs lead to improvements in school attendance, positive social behaviors, school grades, and test scores. Furthermore, preliminary data indicate that academically at-risk youth may profit more from afterschool programs than their higher achieving peers.

- **Attain Higher Levels of Education.** Youth who take part in extracurricular activities, including community service and sports, are more apt to attend college, complete more years of college, and are more likely to earn a college degree than others. These effects occur as well for youth at risk.

- **Gain Important Life and Social Skills.** Youth participating in expanded learning opportunities exhibit stronger connections to adults and improvements in peer relationships and enjoy school more. These effects can strengthen young people’s engagement in education and help keep them in school.

- **Decrease Their Likelihood of Involvement in Problem Behaviors.** Since many OST programs include a preventive component aimed at discouraging unhealthy behaviors, youth in these types of programs have exhibited a decrease or lack of involvement in harmful behaviors, such as alcohol and drug use, delinquency, and sexual activity.

- **Make Healthier Lifestyle Choices.** Youth who take part in learning opportunities beyond the classroom have shown increases in physical activity and fitness, as well as improved knowledge of nutrition and health practices and improved body image.

- **Lessen Probability of Being a Perpetrator or Victim of Violent Crime.** Studies show that peak hours for youth involvement in violent crime — both as perpetrators and as victims — are between 2 p.m. and 6 p.m. A California study of afterschool programs showed that violent acts among afterschool program participants decreased by more than 50%.

Supporting learning activities beyond the classroom not only benefits youth, but is a sound financial investment for states and local communities. For example, The Oklahoma Afterschool Network found that for every dollar invested in quality afterschool programs, taxpayers saved approximately $3 in costs. Furthermore, when considering the residual effect these programs have on crime reduction, cost savings increased to $8 – $12. Closer to home, two Minnesota studies also purport a positive return on investment (ROI) associated with OST programs: The first estimated a $2.72 dividend per dollar spent on quality youth programs. The second reported an estimated $4.89 return per dollar invested in quality early intervention programs with high-risk youth. Given that Minnesota’s youth have nearly 2,000 hours of unstructured out-of-school time annually — nearly twice the amount of time they spend in school — it is critical that we harness these hours to promote youth learning and positive development, particularly for youth who lack these opportunities.
Youth Engagement as a Core Strategy

Recent research connects youth civic engagement with positive outcomes and points to the need for a paradigm shift from current approaches that view youth as simply beneficiaries of services to a model that promotes youth as having direct involvement in decisions on programs, services, and resources focused on meeting their needs. While relationship-building had been a focus for many years, the field is now trending toward laying the groundwork for youth to become more involved in their own development, while also becoming active contributors to the betterment of their communities.

Opportunities for entrepreneurship and the creation of new enterprise are global priorities, as thriving new businesses can create new jobs and promote economic security. Supporting opportunities for youth enterprise can be especially beneficial to Minnesota. By doing so, the state can contribute to lowering its unemployment rate among young people, while harnessing the ingenuity of youth in forging innovation and advances in technology.

Stakeholders engaged in developing youth programs, policies, and evaluation measures currently use a set of guiding principles aimed at promoting positive youth development. Simply stated, these principles are that:

1. society must have a vision for its young people,
2. young people grow up in communities and programming should take into account the full environment, circumstances, and situations in which development occurs; and
3. youth and adults are joint stakeholders, each having an integral part in successfully advancing positive youth development efforts. Active and equal involvement of youth in decision-making about the dynamics that impact their lives encourages a sense of community, inclusion, and belonging, and creates longtime advocates for important social and economic issues.

Shifting Demographics Present New Opportunities

Like many other states across the country, Minnesota is experiencing a significant shift in its populace. Minnesota’s 65 and over population is the fastest growing age group in the state. While the number of older adults is growing statewide, Minnesota’s child population has remained stagnant over the past 10 years, and in some areas, it is fading. Based on the current trajectory, Minnesota’s retirees will outnumber its schoolchildren by 2020 — a first for the state. In light of an aging population both statewide and nationally, discussions often focus on the financial ramifications of this trend. Fewer conversations have given attention to the enterprise of youth as a viable human capital component to overall future sustainability. Our state’s greatest untapped resource is the energy and ingenuity of youth, who will play a vital role in the state’s ability to prosper.

In addition to an aging population, the state’s demographic landscape is trending toward an increasingly diverse composition in terms of race and ethnicity. According to the Minnesota State Demographer, the number of Minnesota’s Hispanic residents increased by 75.5% between 2000 and 2010. Although the state’s white population increased by 2.8% during that 10-year span, Black/African American, American Indian/Alaska Native, and Asian populations grew by 58.8%, 10.8%, and 50.9%, respectively. This increasing diversity also holds true for the state’s younger generation. Projections indicate that between 2000 and 2030, youth of color ages 10 to 19 will grow from 16% to 27% of Minnesota’s adolescent population.
These two trends — the rapidly aging population and its increasing diversity — create challenges and opportunities when considering the future, especially for Minnesota's young people. Considering the data on risk factors and outcomes for young people nationwide and in Minnesota, attention must be given to prepare youth, particularly youth of color, to embrace the leadership role that they will inevitably shoulder in the years to come. This can be done by closing the opportunity gap and improving access to high-quality learning opportunities beyond the classroom for underserved youth, such as youth in communities of color. Disparities in academic achievement across the state underscore the importance of creating new opportunities to prepare our young people for the future, especially in light of the state's demographic transitions.

A Gap in Access to Learning Opportunities

How well young people navigate the transitions of adolescence is key to their well-being and personal, economic, and civic productivity as adults. Although young people are not pawns in their development, the “developmental environments and future life paths” they are able to choose depend on the opportunities available to them, which in turn are a product of sociocultural and institutional factors in young people's lives.

Many Minnesota youth are marginalized and at risk because of an “opportunity gap” — a lack of access to spaces that support their well-being and future success. These marginalized youth include youth who are homeless or low-income; have physical or developmental disabilities; or are GLBTQ, Native American or youth of color. Fifteen percent of Minnesota children live in poverty, an increase of 3% since 2006. Furthermore, 5% of Minnesota children now reside in areas of “concentrated poverty,” (defined as areas where 30% or more residents live below the poverty threshold). African American, American Indian, and Latino children are much more likely than the majority to live in these areas, which pose particular risks. Young people from these populations also have lower levels of engagement. For example, although Minneapolis-St Paul ranked second overall in the nation for having the lowest percentage of disconnected youth (defined as young people between the ages of 16 and 24 who neither work nor attend school), the area has the second largest disparity for African Americans. Whereas the area's overall rate of disconnected youth sits at 9%, the rate for Minneapolis-St. Paul's African American youth is 22.5%.

According to new data from Robert Putnam, social class gaps in children's access to out-of-school learning opportunities have increased since the 1970s. For example, between the 1970s and 2010, the amount of money that affluent parents invested in enrichment activities for their children (e.g., preschool/child care, camp, lessons) increased by $5,300 compared to an increase of $480 for poor parents. The social class gap in parents’ investments of time in their children also increased during this period. Although all parents are spending more time in “developmental” activities with their children (e.g., reading, playing) than in the 1970s, affluent parents currently spend an hour more per day on these activities than working class parents do. On another indicator of access to learning opportunities outside the classroom, participation in extracurricular activities, there are marked gaps between children from advantaged and disadvantaged backgrounds. Fifty-six percent of children from non-poor families in grades K-8 participate in extracurricular activities in school (e.g., sports, clubs) and out of school (scouting, community service) compared to 30% of those from near-poor and 22% of those from poor families. High school students from affluent families are also much more likely than working class youth to be involved in extracurricular activities (e.g., sports, religious activities, and community service).
Evidence from Public Agenda showed that parents of low-income and minority youth were much less likely than other parents to have easy access to affordable afterschool programs. Studies also show that Black and Latino youth are less likely than White youth to participate in OST activities. Within these underserved groups, there is a subset of even more severely marginalized young people, called “opportunity youth,” whom it is particularly critical to reach. Disproportionately male and from minority groups, these youth may be at risk for becoming high school dropouts and/or involved with the criminal justice system. According to the Minnesota Juvenile Justice Advisory Committee, statistics for juveniles across the state show a disproportionate number of arrests in all categories for youth from minority populations. For example, although African American youth represent 7.4% of the juvenile population, they represent 38% of the total arrests for serious and violent crimes and 65% of the arrests involving curfew, loitering, and runaway infractions.

Furthermore, Minnesota’s four-year graduation rate is 77%, but only 49% for Black students, 51% for Hispanic students, and 42% for American Indian/Alaska Native students. In 2009, the state’s White eighth grade students scored 302 out of 500 for standardized math testing; whereas Black students scored 266, one of the highest disparities in the nation in 2009. Although Minnesota’s overall unemployment rate is below the national average, disparities still exist across racial and ethnic lines. The Twin Cities has one of the largest employment gaps nationwide. With a 22% unemployment rate, African Americans are more than three times as likely to be unemployed as their White counterparts, and the Latino unemployment rate is nearly twice the White unemployment rate. Taken together, these findings underscore the need to be more intentional in creating support and opportunities for opportunity youth, Native youth, and youth from communities of color who experience vast disparities in a state that traditionally ranks high overall in areas concerning education, health, employment, and other socioeconomic indicators.

**Challenges Facing Learning Beyond the Classroom**

Minnesota has an abundance of programs and activities aimed at engaging youth in meaningful learning opportunities during the 2,000 hours of out-of-school time they have each year. Despite the many promising programs that exist, these programs, both individually and collectively, face several obstacles presented by a number of external factors. In forming Youthprise, five barriers were identified:

1. **Inadequate funding.** In Minnesota as elsewhere in the U.S., many OST programs are sorely underfunded and cannot sustain adequate staffing levels to operate programs effectively. A national study of the state of afterschool programs in 2012, which included approximately 1,000 surveys representing 5,000 afterschool programs, found that these programs were struggling with reduced funding at the same time they were facing growing demand. Sixty percent of programs reported that their funding was down from three years ago, and more than 50% indicated their current budgets prevented them from meeting the afterschool care and learning needs of their community. As a result of funding cuts, many programs had closed sites and reduced staff. In addition, program components had been discontinued, diminishing program quality and reducing opportunities.
2. A fragmented system that is characterized by inconsistent programming and quality. Minnesota has a host of strong OST programs that are doing outstanding work with youth. Unfortunately, many of these programs are working in isolation with little visibility and no agency or processes to disseminate their work. In addition, with no prescribed statewide agenda to promote standardized quality measures, content standards, or desired outcomes, OST programs in general lack guidance. Comprehensive learning systems are being created at the local level with leadership from mayors and municipal leaders. The Sprockets out-of-school time network in Saint Paul is a prime example, but such efforts are not yet widespread throughout the region.

3. Lack of youth and community voice. Perhaps one of the most disturbing barriers to the state’s current OST programming is the absence of deliberate efforts to involve youth in the development of policies and programs that are designed to serve them. Too often, those most impacted, who disproportionately represent communities of color, are marginalized by the very programs and systems that seek to address their life challenges. Gardner and colleagues argue that negative attitudes toward programming may help explain the low participation of low-income and minority youth in afterschool programs. Studies have helped articulate the central role of youth in policy planning, programming, and community development activities. Opportunity Road: The Promise and Challenge of American’s Forgotten Youth showed that many at-risk youth are more likely to respond to programming that is intended for their benefit if they are viewed as “part of the solution rather than the problem.” Though well-intentioned, many OST programs are missing this element, which is so essential to connect with and engage youth.

4. Inadequate coordination and alignment with schools. To prepare our youth to succeed in a 21st century world that is becoming increasingly global, knowledge-based, and technology-driven, we must provide a variety of high-quality opportunities for learning. Although formal education is the system most responsible for the overall educational experience of youth, schools cannot do this work alone. The nation, states, and communities must invest in supplementing classroom-based learning with additional meaningful, engaging, and productive opportunities beyond the classroom. We need to make the best use of the 2,000 out-of-school-time hours students experience each year. Both formal and non-formal means of education play an important role in youth achievement, whether evidenced by meeting academic standards, such as grades and test scores, or non-academic indicators, including civic involvement and entrepreneurship. Furthermore, programs that provide opportunities for learning beyond the classroom can offer enrichment experiences, such as mentoring or internships that go beyond those available through schools. The K-12 education system and the out-of-school-time field should be partners in providing educational and enrichment endeavors. In order to maximize the impact of these partnerships, coordination is necessary to ensure that OST and school staff work closely in planning programs that are aligned with educational curricula and standards. In addition, school systems need to share data on outcome measures that will enable OST programs to make data-informed decisions for future program activities.

Why an Intermediary Like Youthprise?

Minnesota’s landscape of learning beyond the classroom faces myriad challenges that require the involvement of multiple organizations, systems, and other stakeholders to effectively address them. An intermediary can play a vital role in extending the reach and impacts of youth programs. Nonprofit, business, and government leaders agree that no one sector can meet the needs of youth alone. As Ashcraft points out, “Collaboration among youth development organizations has emerged as a strategy of choice for those that lead youth and community development organizations” (p 27).
Coordinating the efforts of Minnesota’s various OST entities can be greatly enhanced through the direction of an intermediary organization with a singular focus on merging these various initiatives into a cohesive system. An intermediary can increase funding for, quality of, and access to OST programs. A recent survey of intermediaries nationwide shows that 80% have helped increase the number of children served by OST programs in their communities over the past five years. Further, intermediaries have reported contributing to shaping policy and increasing funding through legislation.45 Also, approximately 85% of the intermediaries reported playing a role in developing quality standards for OST programs.46

Youthprise was formed expressly to serve as an intermediary and a resource that helps coordinate, fund, and advocate for efforts aimed at providing high-quality learning opportunities beyond the classroom for Minnesota youth. Youthprise’s aim is to increase access to these programs so that ALL of Minnesota’s youth can thrive, with special attention to those who are traditionally under-engaged and underserved. We recognize that one organization cannot achieve this alone. Accordingly, Youthprise’s strategy involves forming partnerships and collaborations with other stakeholders in the field. Although we will use our position to have a direct impact on the field, Youthprise will also seek to indirectly influence learning beyond the classroom by supporting other organizations through grantmaking, serving as a convener, and working in coalition.

Youthprise’s theory of change offers a roadmap for long-term sustainability of the OST field in Minnesota. The model is built upon explicit values and priorities that guide the organization’s decision-making and operations, as well as clear methods and expectations that are grounded in research and sound theory. Further, the Youthprise theory of change guides strategy implementation, evaluation of progress, and achievement of intended outcomes. The theory of change creates a framework for Youthprise’s integrated approach, which combines a laser focus on building an effective coordinated system with the authentic engagement of young people — and their communities — in designing programs and policies, and vigorously evaluating the results.

Youthprise is executing its theory of change by focusing on six objectives:

1. **Building a strong organization that supports learning beyond the classroom.** Youthprise recognizes the importance of maintaining sound organizational structure, supported by strategic policies and practices that promote fiscal responsibility, engender public trust, and ensure the fulfillment of the mission. To that end, Youthprise is guided by the Accountability Standards set forth by the Minnesota Charities Review Council (revised Dec. 9, 2010), which address fundraising, public disclosure of information, financial practices, and governance.47 Youthprise employs guidelines and implements procedures that result in the exemplary management of resources; board membership and organizational leadership that is reflective of the organization’s stakeholders; sound business models that promote fundraising and sustainability; the presence and active participation of youth; and a good working climate that promotes a learning agenda and produces a discernible impact in the community.
2. **Increasing support for programs that offer learning beyond the classroom.** Youthprise will work to address the issue of declining funding and the challenges to meet demand faced by many programs by strengthening the financial base for learning beyond the classroom. Specifically, Youthprise will a) provide a set of comprehensive, targeted technical assistance tools and activities aimed at increasing programs’ capacity to fundraise, manage resources, and deliver high-quality programming; b) leverage outside resources through direct grant-seeking and through collaborations with other funders; and c) explore innovative collaborations that leverage the existing resource base and maximize programs’ impact. Additionally, to benefit the OST field in Minnesota, Youthprise will be a strong champion for learning beyond the classroom, communicating successes in programming, and advocating for policies that sustain the existing work and increase opportunities for vulnerable and at-risk youth.

3. **Positioning youth to transform programs and systems.** Youthprise promotes the importance of engaging young people and their diverse communities in the design, implementation, and evaluation of the intervention models that impact their lives. It values diversity within the organization and has taken measures to ensure that the composition of staff, board, committees, and contractors closely reflects the population served. Another central tenet of Youthprise’s work is the belief that youth are the best architects of their own learning. With that in mind, the organization employs a youth-adult partnership model that engages youth at all levels of the organization, including serving as board members, sustaining involvement on special projects, and providing input on programmatic and grantmaking decisions. As Youthprise seeks to fundamentally change society’s perceptions of young people, repositioning them as assets worthy of investment and capable of pioneering systems change, we will support, incentivize, and elevate practices within the OST field that authentically engage youth in all aspects of programming.

4. **Filling gaps in opportunity.** Given the research that strongly links learning beyond the classroom and productive activity during young people’s discretionary time to achievement and positive development, it is incumbent upon all stakeholders to invest in improved access to OST learning opportunities for youth from underserved groups. In addition, it is critical that OST programs seek out and involve “opportunity youth” to provide an alternative developmental pathway to disengagement from school and criminal activity. A primary aim of Youthprise will be to develop a coordinated effort involving both large and grassroots organizations working together, with each utilizing their strengths to reach underserved and under-engaged populations. Youthprise will work with these programs to ensure that affordable, comprehensive, and quality programs are available to these youth in locations and at times that meet their needs. In addition, Youthprise will support these programs in going beyond availability to develop outreach efforts that attract youth who may not be reached through traditional methods of publicizing programs and to utilize the unique insights of underserved youth in program design.

The effective implementation of this will require an assessment that reveals where opportunity gaps currently exist. To that end, Youthprise and our partners will conduct a baseline study that seeks to identify present gaps in OST opportunities, with an end goal of developing a strategy to address and eliminate disparities.
5. Advancing systems that promote opportunities for high-quality learning beyond the classroom. Youthprise seeks to respond to the needs of youth and the uneven quality of OST programs in two ways. First, we seek to maximize the impact of the research on quality out-of-school-time learning and the exemplary work that is already being done in the state by consolidating evaluation-based evidence about best practices and translating findings into training and resources to OST programs. In addition, Youthprise will work to develop a professional learning community across and within OST providers geared to improvement and sustainability. This effort will include supporting programs to develop data-driven decision-making structures and processes that collect and use data about effectiveness to improve programming, fundraising, and professional development. The intermediary will support the ability of municipal networks to implement data management systems, identify quality standards for assessing and evaluating providers, monitor program quality, and coordinate professional development and training. Finally, we will develop an online learning community among OST providers where programs can share strengths and examples of best practice, discuss their findings and how to address weaknesses, and dialogue about new ideas and challenges in the out-of-school-time field.

The second component of our efforts to develop systems will involve creating comprehensive learning systems that align the work of schools, OST programs, other youth development entities, and parents. By investing deeply in systems that address fragmentation, redundancy, and inefficiencies, Youthprise will improve access to quality opportunities beyond the classroom, maximize financial resources and human capital, and facilitate better communication among OST stakeholders.

6. Raising the profile of learning beyond the classroom. Youthprise seeks to raise awareness of the value and necessity of expanding quality. As we work to ignite public will and leverage resources, Youthprise seeks to raise awareness of the value and necessity of expanding quality learning opportunities beyond the classroom. This is accomplished by advocating for statewide policies and resources that support quality OST programming; highlighting the exemplary work of systems, model programs, and individuals; and building a community of advocates who champion learning beyond the classroom. Youthprise will utilize its organized base of influence to promote greater understanding of the opportunity gaps that exist, as well as help formulate solutions that address how systems can become more inclusive in linking under-engaged and underserved youth to opportunities that are experiential, culturally relevant, and focused on building 21st Century skills.

Following from this are three needed public policy reforms at the federal, state, and local levels. First, legislative bodies should increase public funding for high-quality opportunities for learning beyond the classroom, particularly for programs that create strong school-community partnerships. The federally funded 21st Century Community Learning Centers is a prime example. Second, policy makers should enact policies that support systems-building for learning beyond the classroom. This would include pooled funding streams instead of silo-ed funding, facilitating access to shared data by reforming data privacy laws, or extending the school day in schools that partner with community-based organizations and provide hands-on, experiential learning opportunities. Third, policy-making bodies should promote youth voice in programs, systems, and policies through the creation of youth councils. These councils can serve as advisory bodies to policy makers so that any policy changes that are enacted reflect the experiences, values, and innovative ideas of those most affected by the policies — our youth.
Conclusion

Now is the time to act, for the future well-being of Minnesota’s youth and our economic prosperity. In order to effectively make meaningful advances in learning beyond the classroom that afford high-quality opportunities to all Minnesota youth, we must adopt a deliberate, collective strategy that includes:

1. education and youth development stakeholders from traditional and non-traditional sectors working in partnership, sharing information, and combining resources for the best interest of our young people;
2. the provision of authentic opportunities for youth to lead and inform the development of policy, programs, and strategies aimed at serving them;
3. inclusion of disenfranchised and historically under-engaged populations in the decision-making process for programs that impact their communities; and
4. the thoughtful development of efficient and coordinated systems that build organizational effectiveness and ensure all youth have access to high-quality learning opportunities beyond the classroom.

In keeping with our commitment to advancing youth, Youthprise will continue to work in partnership — not in competition — with youth and with other youth-serving organizations, providers, policy makers, and funders to ensure that opportunities for learning beyond the classroom are provided in a thoughtful, efficient, and coordinated manner.


12 Ibid.


21 Ibid.


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26 Supra note 24.

27 Ibid.


33 Supra note 29.


42 Supra note 9.


46 Ibid.