



IN SEARCH OF YOUTH POLICY

ABOUT THE YOUTH POLICY SCAN

The Forum for Youth Investment (FYI), a national leader in youth policy, asserts that policy action will increasingly happen at state and local levels. Policies may be laws, public or private regulations, formal or informal procedures or accepted patterns of behavior that function as norms or guidelines. The need for policies becomes evident when individuals recognize organizing principles that unite them in striving to reach commonly shared goals. Attention to policy should be at the center of efforts to promote positive youth development because “policies signal what we care about as Americans.”¹ The devolution of policy responsibility from federal to state and local jurisdictions has provided a new opportunity for states to think about how current youth policy structures serve the needs of their youth.

While Minnesota has multiple programs for young people, the state lacks a coherent vision and policy framework to ensure youth have access to the supports and opportunities they need to successfully reach adulthood. An informal youth policy work group, formed in spring 2002, convened to explore what was known about youth

policy in Minnesota, and to identify avenues for youth to contribute to the dialogue. The group met from January of 2002, to Spring of 2003, motivated by the mission to work with youth to **connect their learning** during their in-school and out-of-school time; **enhance their development** beyond, but including, their academic achievement and **engage their contributions** to community and the state. This work group recommended documenting Minnesota's current policy investments in children and youth.

POLICY SCAN METHODOLOGY

Information gathered for the Minnesota Youth Policy Scan focused on public monies spent by the state of Minnesota – either from state revenues or federal revenues allocated to the state – during 2003. Funding dollars gathered in communities, counties, or by organizations through private sources were not considered in the study. The policies reviewed included funding streams that directly benefit children and youth, but not those designed to indirectly benefit children and

¹ Andrew Hahn, “Thinking Smarter About Public Policy for Out-of-School Time”; November 20, 2002 presentation prepared for the Howland Symposium.

youth through parents or caregivers. Seven departments and approximately 70 programs within Minnesota state government were included in the policy scan:

- Department of Education
- Department of Human Services
- Department of Health
- Department of Economic Security
- Department of Corrections
- Department of Agriculture
- Department of Natural Resources

Data highlighted in this research brief are based on 2003 statistics, including those cited in pie chart calculations. Organizational data for the Department of Education and the Department of Human Services were updated with 2004 information and are included in the Policy Matrix. All other departmental data in the Matrix refer to 2003 program statistics and are in the process of being updated for the final Minnesota Youth Policy Scan report.

POLICY HIGHLIGHTS

Figure 1

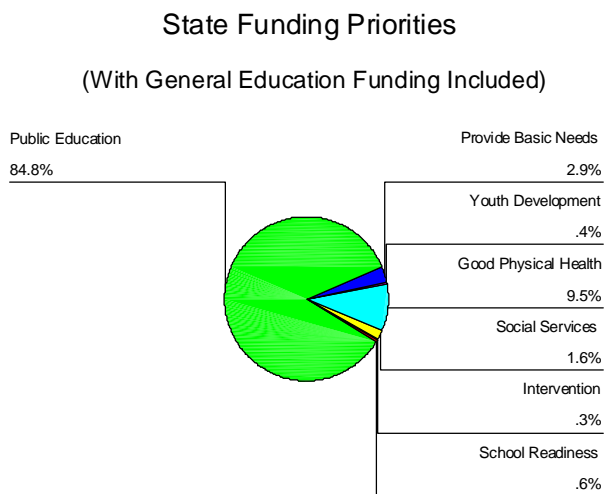
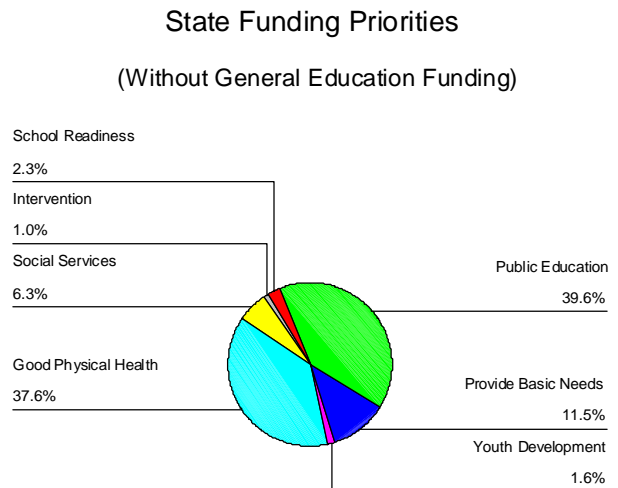
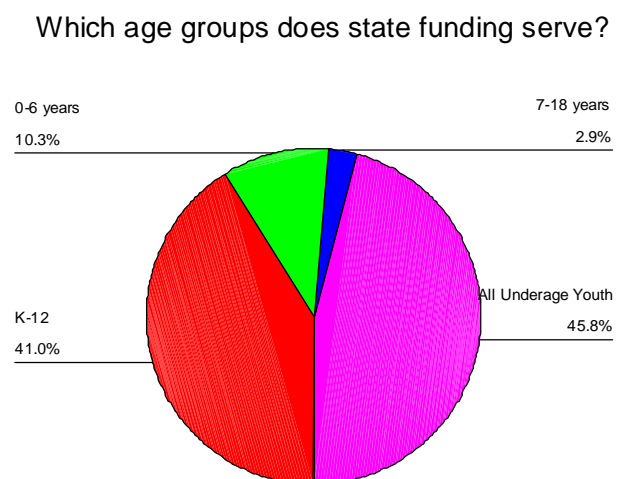


Figure 2



Public education is the state's clear priority. However, with youth spending 40% of their waking hours in places other than a school,² greater attention to opportunities for learning and development during non-school hours is justified. Youth development initiatives receive less than 2% of the state funding for children and youth. School readiness, social services, and intervention for troubled youth make up less than 10% of the funding dollars for children and youth. (Figures 1 and 2)

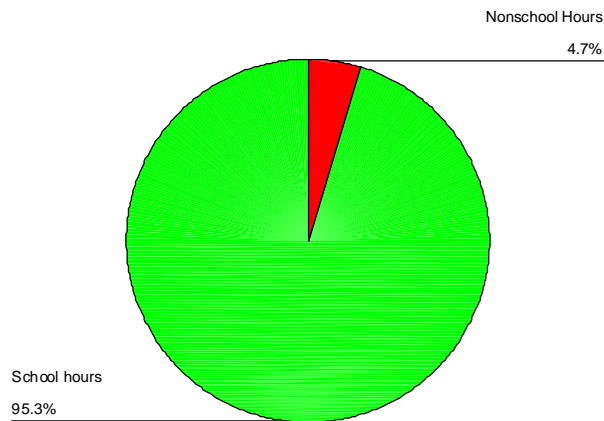
Figure 3



² Timmer, S.G., Eccles, J., and O'Brien, I. *How Children Use Time, Goods, and Well-Being*, Juster, F.T., and Stafford, F.B. (editors) Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan, Institute for Social Research, 1985.

Developmental research indicates the importance of age-appropriate policies and programs. Yet, when eligibility by age group is examined, few policies target youth by developmental age or stage. While individual programs may specifically focus on certain age groups, most policies apply more generally to broad age categories. It is difficult to determine if the needs of all age groups are being addressed through current policy guidelines. (Figure 3)

Figure 4: When are opportunities available for youth?

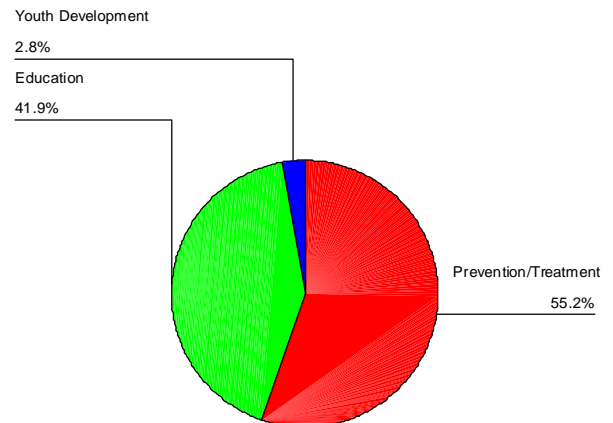


Only 4.7% of all funding supports children and youth during times outside the school day- during weekends, late afternoons, evenings, and summers. This suggests that public youth policy monies are largely devoted to times when children and youth are engaged in academic learning with supervision and instruction from academic staff people. The small investment in out-of-school time hours per se heightens the importance of documenting youth needs for additional types of supports and opportunities during their discretionary times. (Figure 4)

Comparing policies, studied by purpose or focus, three funding priorities are evident:

- 1) Prevention and Treatment
- 2) Education
- 3) Youth Development

Figure 5: Are policies problem-focused or strengths-based?



Policies aimed at preventing problem behavior or intervening when problem behavior occurs are categorized here as *prevention or treatment*. Policies aimed at educating youth or preparing them for school are categorized as *education*. Policies focusing on youth strengths and promoting positive development are categorized as *youth development*. It is evident that policies targeting prevention or treatment are a higher funding priority than those designed to promote positive youth development. (Figure 5)

CHALLENGES EMERGING FROM YOUTH POLICY SCAN

ABSENCE OF CLEAR VISION

Policies appear to be driven by either special needs of individual children/youth, such as children with disabilities; or a determination that groups of children and youth require programs to support specific life circumstances, such as growing up in low income families. While these policy criteria are well intentioned and possibly correctly focused for the children and youth they target, a clear vision of what all Minnesota children need to successfully reach adulthood is lacking.

PROBLEM FOCUSED

Youth policies in Minnesota are largely driven by a deficit-based approach. This is evident in the 2.8% of funding dedicated to strength-based

youth development policies, despite convincing research evidence pointing to the effectiveness of approaches that invest in positive policies to promote healthy youth growth and development.

INCONSISTENT TERMINOLOGY

There are different definitions of important terms used across policy responses for children and youth. *Children*, *Youth*, and even the term *Positive Youth Development* are used inconsistently, making comparisons difficult. These discrepancies in language complicate efforts to determine target age groups, intent and goals of youth policies.

LACK OF COORDINATION AND AN OVERARCHING POLICY FRAMEWORK

Areas of responsibility for addressing identified aspects of need for Minnesota children and youth are distributed across state departments. Yet, there is no single entity within state government with overall responsibility for youth policy. No state entity holds jurisdiction and accountability for youth outcomes. There is no comprehensive authority to monitor the effectiveness of youth policies in terms of their impact on youth outcomes.

INCONSISTENT DATA COLLECTION

Inconsistent data collection methodology and analysis across policies impedes accurate calculation of youth needs and funding priorities. If intentional planning for youth needs were a state priority, state departments would benefit from collaboration and coordination in customizing and linking data collection processes.

MINIMAL INVESTMENT IN OUT-OF-SCHOOL TIME

This review of Minnesota youth policy reveals that the majority of public funding for children and youth is concentrated in the time periods when young people are attending school. With only a 4.7% investment of funds during non-school hours, it becomes crucial to understand how many children have access to opportunities for learning and development during their out-of-school time. There is no way to calculate the percentage of Minnesota children and youth who have access to supports and opportunities for learning and growth during non-school hours.

CONCLUSION

This analysis is intended to point out trends in state spending on children and youth in Minnesota. The report seeks to answer questions about policy priorities reflected in funding investments on their behalf. This information is intended to advance understanding about the way the state funds initiatives for children and youth, encouraging discussion about funding criteria and apparent priorities. Research findings reveal that there is not a clear statewide vision driving policy decisions for Minnesota children and youth. Before today's youth become the adults of tomorrow, a coherent, comprehensive and proactive vision for their healthy growth and development would be a priceless investment in their futures and the futures of generations to come after them.

This brief was prepared from *In Search of Youth Policy: A Scan of Categorical Programs, Funding and Priorities that Provide Supports and Opportunities for Minnesota Young People*. Principle authors Nadja Hogg, Ann Lochner, and Dr. Andrew Hahn.

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