

DRAFT OF COMMISSION PROBLEM STATEMENT

7/23/04

Young people need positive opportunities to choose, learn, grow, and contribute. These opportunities can occur in families, classrooms, and a wide range of community settings. Each setting has different strengths, limitations, and responsibilities for providing opportunities and helping youth choose wisely. Yet it is through youth's choices and this full range of opportunities that young people develop skills, values, a sense of competence and confidence, the feeling of belonging and the ability to contribute to their community.

Most youth today (but not all) have an increasing number of choices and yet too often do not select meaningful, constructive opportunities. Families today are increasingly challenged to support and help youth find and use such positive opportunities. Schools today are increasingly focused on academic competence and challenged to succeed in this critical mission. Communities today often struggle to build a sense of connection among its citizens and are challenged to find ways to support young people effectively. As a result, too many young people in too many of our communities lack the positive opportunities they need to succeed. Furthermore, today's youth face a more diverse, technologically sophisticated, and global society in which they must learn to function and succeed. How young people choose to spend their time, and especially the range of positive opportunities they have to choose from during the critical out of school hours, can dramatically affect their ability to learn, respect differences, and build the assets they need to succeed.

As a state then, we must find ways to provide the full range of opportunities young people need and encourage them to make healthy choices. It is this full range of opportunities that helps them develop assets – the strengths they need to thrive and become productive workers, responsible and well-adjusted adults, potential parents, active citizens and leaders. Research has shown, and the public is increasingly aware, that many of these opportunities occur during non-school and non-family time – the period often referred to as out of school time. Yet it is the opportunities available during these hours, and the choices youth make, that we are least intentional in supporting. Opportunities during these hours offer unique ways to support young people's growth – partly because youth have a greater say in the choices made. By deliberately working to systematically enrich the quality and accessibility of these opportunities and encourage positive choices during these

critical hours, we can better support learning in schools as well as the broader preparation for life.

The Minnesota Commission on Out of School Time is focused on ensuring young people quality learning opportunities during these critical non-school hours – opportunities that are accessible, engaging, and linked to their positive development as well as their growing competence. Opportunities that young people will both choose and use in their own development.

For all these reasons, the Commission’s work now needs to focus on finding effective recommendations and strategies to address what we believe are the four critical issues that affect whether youth have, choose, and ultimately benefit from such non-formal learning opportunities in their communities during the out of school hours. To succeed we must find ways to accomplish the following:

- 1. Ensure that every young person is encouraged and guided to make positive choices among a range of quality learning opportunities during the non-school hours.***
- 2. Build public will and articulate the civil compact that holds citizens and leaders accountable to advocate, create and sustain a range of relevant quality opportunities for young people***
- 3. Create mechanisms in every community that both stimulate positive choices and coordinate quality learning opportunities***
- 4. Establish effective statewide mechanisms for supporting, resourcing, assessing and assuring access to quality learning opportunities***

These four issues are how we propose to begin work as subgroups of the Commission to craft viable and creative recommendations for Minnesota. The Commission’s statement of its vision for Minnesota, possible strategies, and the discussions of why we must act both drove the selection of these issues and will now guide the discussion of how each of these are advanced. In addition, each of these issues will be examined and used to address the variety of tensions, choices, and critical needs identified thus far by the Commission. Staff will work with Commissioners to assist in the development of concrete recommendations in each area for discussion at our September meeting.