



The Minnesota Youth Caucus on Out-of-School Time Report on Proceedings

Andrea Jasken Baker, Caucus Coordinator and Facilitator, and David Moen, Caucus Director, prepared this briefing paper. While some of the material has been consolidated and clarified with permission from Caucus members, the vast majority of the language used in these recommendations and supporting information comes directly from presentations by Caucus members.

The Minnesota Youth Caucus

The Minnesota Youth Caucus on OST was one of several strategies the Minnesota Commission on OST used to hear directly from youth. Prior to the Caucus, Commission staff gathered input from youth through an OST survey and eight youth focus groups. Twenty youth leaders from around the state were invited to come together as the Youth Caucus to discuss issues in more depth and create a series of recommendations to better inform the Commission's final recommendations. While it was recognized that 20 youth could not fully reflect the population of youth across the state, the intent of the Caucus was to:

- reflect on a broad range of youth voices from surveys, focus groups, and interviews;
- critically analyze and synthesize that information;
- examine elements of quality, quantity, and accessibility of both programmed and independent OST; and
- create a series of recommendations.

To bring together this statewide group, Caucus staff worked with various youth development professionals from different regions to recruit high school-aged youth applicants from large urban centers, suburban cities, and Greater Minnesota (for a list of names, see page 4)

The Recommendations

As consumers of programs, Minnesota youth have a vested interest in decisions made regarding

OST opportunities in the state. After in-depth exploration of issues surrounding OST, including the review and synthesis of information collected from youth around the state, the Caucus sets forth the following recommendations for consideration by the Minnesota Commission on OST. Following each recommendation is a summary of the background rationale and discussions that led to consensus.

The first three recommendations broadly address OST oversight in the state.

Recommendation #1:

Community organizations, schools, and governing/administrative bodies work together and partner to act as resources to provide quality OST programs for youth.

This recommendation resulted from the knowledge that complex programming requires collaboration and is most effective if it draws upon all available resources. Youth expressed the belief that bypassing bureaucratic and "turf" conflict is the only way to effectively sustain youth programs.

Recommendation #2:

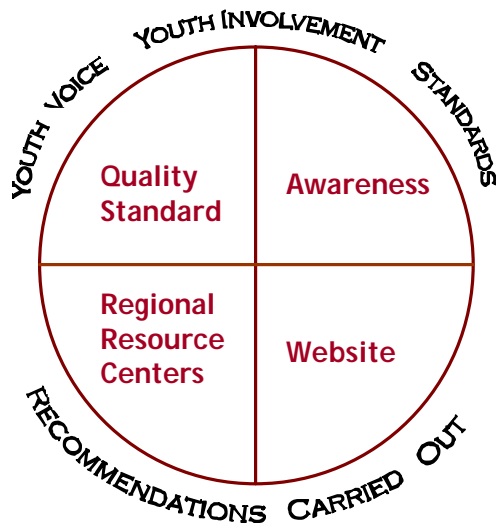
Create an independent statewide entity to support Minnesota OST programming. Include both youth and adults members who, initially, have responsibility in four primary areas: developing and promoting quality standards; marketing and public awareness; designing and maintaining a Web site; and establishing regional resource centers.

This recommendation emerged from concern about what was going to happen after the Caucus and after the Commission—Who will be accountable for the final recommendations of the Commission? Youth agreed that there ought to be an “umbrella system” that has clear accountability and will ensure that:

- the Commission recommendations are carried out;
- there is always youth voice and involvement in OST issues; and
- there are standards in the state for OST programming.

There was significant discussion about the location of this statewide entity. Caucus members strongly recommended that this umbrella system be an independent entity that is not affiliated with an existing youth development organization or department of state government.

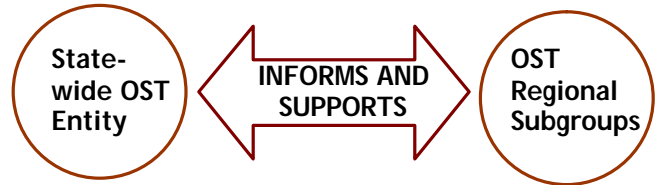
Supporting OST Programming in Minnesota



Recommendation #3:
Link the statewide OST entity with regional or county “OST sub-groups” that have youth and adult representation from community-based youth organizations, schools, business partners, and parents. These subgroups give perspective and make decisions about local OST programming, in addition to informing the statewide efforts.

While the statewide entity would be responsible for broader efforts, given the differences between communities’ needs, interests, available

activities, transportation, and so on, these subgroups would be responsible for decisions affecting regional OST issues. These groups would also provide opportunities for bridging the generation gap, allowing for youth-adult partnerships at the local level and giving youth the opportunity for their voices to be heard.



Recommendations 4-7 relate to more specific areas of responsibility for the statewide OST entity.

Recommendation #4:
Establish a statewide set of accepted quality standards for OST programming. These “quality” definitions guide future OST funding (foundation, state, federal, and private).

There was clear consensus that program opportunities across the state need to have consistent quality, OST programs should be accountable for their quality, and that OST programs should be consistently funded based on these quality standards.

Recommendation #5:
Develop statewide OST public awareness campaigns targeted at youth and at the general public. Allocate funds to support marketing and public awareness efforts by OST programs in Minnesota.

Research shows positive OST use leads to positive development. However 7 of 10 youth don’t know what exists in terms of OST opportunities in their communities. Informing young people about what is available increases access to program. Likewise, an informed public will care enough to take action. Unfortunately most programs are currently struggling to secure adequate funding to simply run programs and don’t have the resources to invest in general public awareness and marketing.

Recommendation #6:
Create a Website dedicated to supporting OST

efforts throughout the state, and include access to marketing information for youth related to programs in their communities.

While access issues emerge with this recommendation, most youth today do use the Internet as a form of communication at home or at school and it is an effective tool for reaching a wide segment of the population.

Recommendation #7:

Within every county in the state establish a resource center that collects and stores information on OST funding opportunities and provides free education about how to apply for funding.

Since many programs apply to the same funding source, and individuals typically do not know where to find or how to apply for funding, youth felt this would be a good use of resources.

Recommendations 8-10 relate to future work around access issues for the statewide entity to facilitate.

Recommendation #8:

Work for state-level changes in transportation policy including reduced fares for youth on public transportation and the relaxation of personal liability issues to promote carpooling.

Transportation is a huge access issue, particularly in large urban centers and smaller rural towns. Increased access to transportation across the state will result in increased youth participation. An example of this is the increased access that senior citizens have to public transportation as a result of discounted senior fares.

Recommendation #9:

Make more space available for youth programs.

Youth agree that the quality of a program is significantly lessened when the site is overcrowded.

Recommendation #10:

Enlist schools to play an integral role in OST access issues, both in offering programs and marketing other opportunities, including surveying students on their interests and providing information about programs that correlate with their interests.

School systems deal with a diverse and large population of youth and are an ideal place for youth to explore their interests and learn about programs that are available to them.

The Caucus, July 9-11, 2004

None of the Caucus members knew more than one other participant when they arrived at the meeting at YMCA Camp Ihduhapi. The first day was spent in team building activities designed to establish the groundwork for the rest of the weekend. On the second day, youth participants immersed themselves in reviewing the previously mentioned OST data collected by the Commission. In addition to the survey and focus group data, each Caucus participant completed her or his own research prior to the Caucus by conducting interviews with three peers who were not involved in many OST activities. Caucus members analyzed that data as well and identified general themes from the interviews. They organized their assessment of the surveys, focus groups, and interviews into five focus areas established previously by the Commission: Access, Marketing, Community Will, Quality, and Resources. The importance of youth voice in programming and of youth-adult partnerships for planning and decision making also emerged as focus areas.

In the afternoon, six commissioners joined the Caucus to engage in continued problem solving around the issues of each focus area. They identified successful OST models and best practices in each focus area. Working together, youth and adults developed action steps, building on each others' ideas collaboratively. (A supplement to this brief includes a comprehensive list of those implementation and action suggestions.) Following their work with the commissioners, youth took all of the information from the day and began to draft recommendations to move the work and ideas forward in each of the focus areas. Participants presented their draft recommendations to the entire Caucus on the last day. Discussion and clarification from the group led to consensus on which recommendations to present to the Commission.

Youth Caucus Voices

A number of the themes that emerged during the Caucus are not fully captured in the recommendations.

- **Youth are significantly concerned** with a wide range of diversity issues and challenges that impact them regularly in schools and communities. These diversity issues range from intolerance of programs for GLBT youth, to challenges with acceptance and understanding across ethnic and cultural differences, especially in rapidly changing greater Minnesota. Participants also recognized regional differences related to individual OST issues.
- **Youth gained a realization and appreciation** about the complexity of issues surrounding OST, as illustrated by these examples of their comments:
 - “I think that OST is more important than I ever thought.”
 - “I understand that there is a lot more work to be done on this subject.”
 - “I now think that OST programs really contribute to the lives of young people.”
- **Youth left the Caucus excited and passionate** about the possibilities that may emerge as a result of their work with the Commission:
 - “I will be here to see this through no matter what.”
 - “I came in knowing OST is really important, but not much more. I will leave with a true understanding and a mission for the state and my own community.”
 - “I’ve learned that I am truly passionate about youth to work so hard on this!”
 - “We have been true to what we say and recommend. We hope you are true too.”
- **Youth expressed genuine appreciation** to the Commission for creating this opportunity and to the Commissioners who participated

in the Caucus. The success of the joint session moved the youth from talking about “more youth voice” to talking about “more youth-adult partnerships” and a desire for continued work together:

“Thank you for caring enough to hear our views and thoughts.”

“The youth have more to say than you could probably have imagined. We worked hard for our cause and I hope that we can continue to work with you in the future.”

“Thanks for working with me.”

“Thank you for your time. It was awesome to spend time with the six of you who came to our Caucus.”

- **Youth gained some personal learnings** that went beyond the topic of OST and applied to life beyond the Caucus:
 - “My ideas became more complete when I had someone else’s ideas to collaborate with mine.”
 - “I learned that I need not be the leader all the time and can let others lead.”
 - “I learned that it takes time to come up with something great.”

Youth Caucus Voices

The 2004 Minnesota Youth Caucus on OST members were: Erko Abdullahi, St. Paul; Charie Gill, North Minneapolis; Shallonda Jackson, North Minneapolis; Thomas Johnson, Duluth; Madeline Jones, Minnetonka; Nicholas King, Duluth; Sarah Mattison, Thief River Falls; Ernest Mendoza, South Minneapolis; Shannon Mikrut, New Brighton; Maggie Nelson, Minnetonka; Malinn Pate, Shoreview; Mariahma Presley-Ellis, St. Paul; Jamie Torgrimson, Duluth; Mai Cha Vang, St. Paul; Brandon Walter, Lyle; Via Yang, St. Paul; Brandy Hyatt, South Minneapolis.

The Minnesota Commission on Out-of-School Time (MnCOST) is an action project of the University of Minnesota Presidential Initiative on Children, Youth and Families. The Commission convenes in January 2004 and will meet five times over the next year.

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