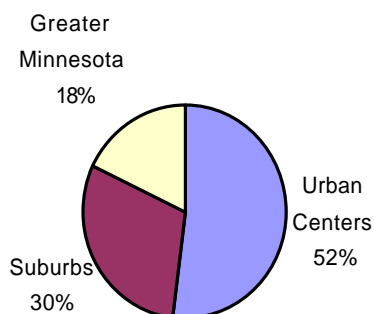


**YOUTH-ON-YOUTH:**  
**Youth-Conducted Field Interviews**  
**with non-participants in out-of-school time opportunities**  
**July 2004**

During the past year, the Minnesota Commission on Out-of-School Time staff conducted surveys and focus groups to gather input from youth regarding out-of-school time opportunities. Those surveys and focus groups were conducted primarily with youth who were currently or recently involved in programs. The Minnesota Youth Caucus on Out-of-School Time (OST) was an additional strategy of the Commission designed to hear more in-depth views from the voices of youth. The Caucus was comprised of youth leaders from around the state who came together to analyze data collected from youth about OST, discuss OST issues and create a series of recommendations to better inform the Commission's final recommendations.

Prior to the Caucus, each participant was asked to interview three peers who were **not** involved in out-of-school time programs. This document reports the findings from those interviews. During the Caucus, youth reviewed the peer interview data and identified themes and issues of this group of "non-participating" youth. Themes and findings from this peer interview data were used along with data from surveys and focus groups as the research base to develop final recommendations for the Commission.

A total of 44 interviews were conducted with youth from greater Minnesota, suburbs, and urban centers. The following summary and selected boxed quotes are a compilation of the interviews conducted by members of the Youth Caucus with peers they identified as "low or non-participants" in out-of-school time activities.



**CURRENT SNAPSHOT**

Interviewees were first asked to describe the number or amount of things their community has for young people to do during out of school times.

Perceptions about the number and amount of activities available in particular communities varied significantly from interview to interview. While there was not a consistent theme around the numbers of programs, several related issues were mentioned in multiple interviews. They included the following:

- a lack of programming during evenings and weekends
- a lack of marketing
- a mention of sports as available opportunities only in interviews outside the Minneapolis/St. Paul area

*The number of things this community has for young people to do after school is large and great. -St. Paul*

*[There is] nothing now because a lot of things have been shut down. -Minneapolis*

*There could be way more. -Duluth*

*The uninvolved youth are uninformed. -Golden Valley*

## NON-PARTICIPATORS

Interviewees were asked about the reasons youth do not get involved in programs. Responses to this question could be categorized into three areas:

- personal choices about program involvement
- barriers to programs
- fears

### *Personal Choices*

The most frequently mentioned reason for not getting involved in programs was a *lack of motivation* and/or *interest in what the programs had to offer*. Youth also stated having *other priorities* and *involvement in things aside from traditional programs*. Examples of choices youth make around non-school time included *jobs, studying, being with friends and unfortunately, drug use*.

*A lot of programs don't look fun enough. Duluth*

*They consider programs for youth unimportant, thinking they have better things to do. -Hopkins*

### *Barriers*

One third of all interviewees said *program cost* and *marketing* were barriers to participation. *Lack of peer or friend involvement* was a frequent reason for not joining programs. *Transportation* issues were mentioned as a barrier in three interviews.

### *Fears*

Finally, there were numerous responses focused around issues of *self-confidence* and *fear*.

*[Youth] think they're not equipped in mind, body and spirit for that certain activity. -Thief River Falls*

*... There is a lot of competition. There are tryouts for everything these days so people choose not to participate for fear of not being chosen. -Duluth*

*[Youth are] embarrassed to be a part of something "nerdy" or something they like but aren't talented at. -Minnetonka*

*Too scared to try something new with kids they don't know. -Thief River Falls*

## PROGRAM ENGAGEMENT

When interviewees were asked what programming would need to look like to engage youth who are not participating, two responses were prevalent:

- good staff
- program structure

### *Good Staff*

More than one-third of the interviewees talked about the importance of the program staff. They identified the following qualities and characteristics of good staff: *energetic; helpful and educated; personable and they like kids; easygoing, yet strict, funny and honest*. The *age of staff* was also important:

*Should be staffed by people close to our age group. -Golden Valley*

*... With staff that are not so old. -Duluth*

*Have people our own age help run the programs as well as adults. -Minneapolis*

## **Structure of Program**

Youth were very specific about the actual structure of programs that may engage non-participants. Comments about “loosely structured” programming were supplemented with details including the need for a variety of activities:

*[Programs should have] minimum structure but be tailored to what kids want to do. This should include multiple activities based on interests and age levels. -Shoreview*

*[There should be] some free time, some activities. -St. Paul*

*Have a period for studying and projects and stuff...time for the teens to relax. -Minneapolis*

Other responses included *providing food and transportation, offering age specific programming, and offering programs for little or no cost*. Based on the analysis of these responses, Caucus participants suggested specific program location ideas:

- In large cities, programs should be close to schools.
- In the suburbs, programs should be located in “teen-populated” areas.
- In small towns, programs should be in the central community.

## **GETTING THE WORD OUT**

Interviewers asked about ways to get the message out about things happening for young people in communities. The three most mentioned methods were:

- Posters and fliers (64%)
- Youth-to-youth word of mouth (52%)
- Radio and TV ads (32%)

*...[use] good youth like me to tell them about it and tell them that it's fun – we do a lot of cool, tight stuff! -St. Paul*

*Flyers in popular hang out places and at school. -Duluth*

*Advertise in places teens actually go. -Golden Valley*

Schools emerged as valuable places to get the word out. Their suggestions included *newsletters, bulletin boards, flyer distribution locations, and announcements*. *E-mail* was only mentioned in 3 of the interviews.

A few creative marketing ideas surfaced during the interviews.

*Walk the community and tell people. -Minneapolis*

*Create Street Teams. -Shoreview*

*Don't call it a youth program. -Minneapolis*

*[Use a] truck that goes around to advertise, “like the ice cream man.” -St. Paul*

## **COMMUNITY WILL**

Interviewers asked their peers if their community thought youth programming during non-school hours was important. Youth responses were split evenly from each community and many youth gave very clear reasons why they felt the way they did.

*No—our community refuses bond issues to fund our school programs. -Forest Lake*

*They probably think they are important just so they keep kids off the street and not doing drugs. They mainly have programs to prevent that, but probably don't care as much as they should about the amount of fun we are going to have. -Duluth*

*Not so much because it seems the general public puts its emphasis on sports. People will pass up other things to go to sporting events and the community's leaders are not different. The athletic bias may be good for some people, but other programs are sacrificed for it. -Golden Valley*

*I think a large percentage of the community feels strongly about youth activities, but their ability to express interest is limited by other obligations. -Minneapolis*

*I'm not quite sure if they do, because I don't think that many understand the importance of these programs. -Lyle*

*Yes. There is always talk about it. No action. -Roseville*

## **YOUTH RECOMMENDATIONS**

Finally, youth were asked, "If you could talk to the people who make decisions about programming for youth when they are not in school, what would you tell them?" In addition to keeping things *low cost* and *providing transportation*, here are some of their voices:

*We need more actual things to do that are more permanent (like rollerskating) especially during the winter. Not things that last for a little while. -North Oaks*

*Invest in kids because they help the world grow. -St. Paul*

*Don't be so centered on sport stuff because not everyone is athletic. -Thief River Falls*

*Relate [programs] to what kids want. -Lyle*

*[Programs don't] need to have a certain message of goal; [programs] should provide places for kids to spend time and have fun, no matter who they are. -Hopkins*

*Listen to the youth. -Roseville*

*We need more funding because a lot of programs can not...continue due to lack of funding. -St.Paul*

*The problem in our community [will] be finding the funds. -Lino Lakes*

*This document was compiled by Andrea Jasken Baker, Youth Caucus Coordinator and Facilitator and David Moen, Youth Caucus Director. It is based on interview data and the assessment of that data by Youth Caucus participants.*