

Statewide Youth Program Quality Initiative

A collaborative effort hosted by
The University of Minnesota Extension
Center for 4-H & Community Youth Development

What is the MN Statewide Youth Program Quality Initiative?

At the invitation of University of Minnesota Extension's Center for 4-H and Community Youth Development several Minnesota statewide youth serving organization leaders and funders convened during the summer of 2006 to discuss out of school time program quality. This conversation focused on challenges, opportunities and current efforts directed to improving the quality of programs during out of school time hours. The result of this meeting was a joint commitment to support a Youth Program Quality Initiative in Minnesota. Broad participation in this Initiative was seen as a primary goal of the effort with a commitment to move forward through a variety of strategies. As one of its first components, the initiative offered an opportunity for youth programs to take part in a major study about out of school time quality—High/Scope Educational Foundation's Youth Program Quality Initiative (YPQI).

YPQI

The Youth Program Quality Initiative was formed around the Center for 4-H & Community Youth Development's Quality Matters training and the High/Scope Educational Research Foundation's Youth Program Quality assessment tool. High/Scope's Youth Program Quality Initiative enlisted the participation of four states- Florida, Michigan and New York and Minnesota- in a study of quality improvement methods using a data driven continuous improvement approach:

The study is designed to provide quality improvement assistance to 60 youth program sites and to test whether study elements including training, website access, and technical assistance measurably improve the quality of programs delivered by staff and experienced by young people. In Minnesota, each site that becomes part of this study is randomly assigned to one of two intervention groups or a control group to be used as a comparison. All sites participate in observations of their programs and administer short surveys to youth and program staff. The study and intervention takes place over two years. Programs assigned to control groups will receive Quality Improvement assistance after completion of the first 18 months. All of the intervention supports are provided free to participating sites.

The Center for 4-H and Community Youth Development is providing coordination for selection and participation of Minnesota program sites in collaboration with High/Scope Youth Program Quality Initiative leaders.

Study Update - Since the summer and fall of 2006, 54 Minnesota sites have participated in Year One study interventions, including YPQI, Quality Matters and one control group. Year One activities have been primarily directed to baseline assessments by outside consultants and orientation of study participants in the use of respective intervention methodologies. Feedback questionnaires and planning processes based on baseline data results from supervisors have been completed and will provide a basis for comparison to similar questionnaires planned for Year Two.

Year two YPQI study intervention activities focus on a fall kick-off for programs in September of 2007, along with a late fall methods workshop for supervisors, and a late fall or early winter self assessment workshop and youth worker methods training for supervisors and staff. Training of Trainers opportunities are also being sponsored by High/Scope for those interested in deepening and sharing their experience gained from the High/Scope intervention methodology with others.

Participation Highlights: Initial Findings

While data are currently being analyzed for Quality Matters sites, initial Minnesota data for YPQI sites show evidence that is comparable across participating states: the majority of states scored higher on providing basic safety and a supportive environments, while scoring lower on elements of interaction with and engagement of youth. These findings will be reassessed during Year Two study activities, with results setting the stage for future initiative goals dedicated to improving youth program quality.

Year Two and Beyond

Planning for network sustainability is being addressed at the national study level and among Minnesota stakeholders, including consideration of what needs to be in place for quality interventions to continue without the High/Scope study structure. In Minnesota, momentum has continued to build in support of enhanced youth program quality. The Quality Initiative includes many partner organizations from funders such as the McKnight Foundation, to professional associations like the MNSACA and MCEA, as well as over 60 programs. These organizations are united in their commitment to build awareness of what quality is and to use intentional strategies to stimulate quality improvement at the point of service-where the program meets youth.

Increasing Support

Through investments in the use of the Youth Program Quality Assessment tool, training, educational experiences and effective communication about the importance of quality in youth programs, Statewide Quality Initiative stakeholders have underscored their intent to increase awareness and support for quality opportunities for Minnesota young people into the future.

This Initiative is currently funded by resources from the W.T. Grant Foundation (research study); the University of Minnesota Extension Center for 4-H and Community Youth Development including the Applied Research Collaborative; the Minnesota Department of Education and the McKnight Foundation.

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