

Introduction

In its 2005 report *Journeys into Community: Transforming Youth Opportunities for Learning and Development*,¹ the Minnesota Commission on Out of School Time examined the importance of community learning opportunities during the non-school hours. The Commission created a vision for Minnesota where every youth is engaged, every family has access to quality opportunities, and every community has a clear plan and adequate support for such opportunities. Since that report, new research has continued to demonstrate the value of such community learning opportunities and the impact these opportunities can have on academic performance, social and emotional development, safety, and the prevention of risk behaviors.² The accumulated weight of evidence now indicates that these types of opportunities are no longer just nice but are increasingly an essential contributor to the positive development of youth and their success in formal educational settings.

However, all families do not have equal access to quality opportunities (especially during the summer months). This creates an *opportunity gap* that significantly contributes to educational and developmental disparities across communities and across ethnic, racial, and income groups. These disparities are one of Minnesota's greatest challenges to the healthy development and education of young people. This is a challenge not just for schools but also for cities and towns across Minnesota where community learning opportunities occur.

Much remains unknown about the supply of and demand for community learning opportunities around the state. It is not evident whether there are variations in "supply" across communities or whether there are differences in "demand" for available opportunities. Do we need to increase the number and quality of opportunities available or work on improving our understanding of the motivation of parents and youth to use opportunities already present?

This report examines the nature of the opportunity gap through a survey of parents and youth across the state. It provides a first comprehensive look at the gap in terms of:

- the way youth use their time,
- perceptions of the quality of opportunities available,
- opinions of how well communities are doing in providing such opportunities,
- what parents and youth want from community learning opportunities,
- what they value about these opportunities, and
- barriers people face in finding and participating in such opportunities.

The surveys were conducted by phone with a randomly drawn sample of households in the eight regions of the state. Views of parents and youth presented here are broken down by three factors that most shaped their responses—the *type of community* in which families reside, their *ethnic background*, and their *economic status*. Appendices contain additional information with responses analyzed based on family structure, family work status, and parent education.³

This report examines data for each of the six areas above and seeks to draw simple conclusions with implications for policy-makers and others who care about the learning and development of Minnesota youth. Together with information about access to early childhood education as well as information on child and school-age care, it begins to provide a more comprehensive picture of the extent to which Minnesota is optimizing the use of non-school hours for the learning and development of its children and youth.

Study Description

Telephone surveys were conducted during the winter of 2007-2008 with a representative statewide random sample of families with youth who were in 7th to 12th grades during the last school year. A total of 1,607 parents and 808 youth from the same families were surveyed across Minnesota. The Wilder Foundation Research Center helped construct and conduct the telephone surveys. Questions were patterned after a national study, *All Work and No Play? Listening to What Kids and Parents Really Want from Out-of-School Time*, by Public Agenda for the Wallace Foundation in 2004.⁴ Many of the items in the Minnesota survey match questions from the Public Agenda survey in order to provide a comparison of Minnesota and national results. For additional information on the sample, please see Appendix B.