



Youth cooking together at Urban Roots.



**EQUITABLE  
ACCESS**

**STRONG  
PROGRAMS**

**BENEFITS  
TO YOUTH**

**PARTICIPATION**

**ACCESS**

**STRONG  
SYSTEM**

## ABOUT SPROCKETS

**Sprockets** is a network of many different afterschool and summer programs for youth in Saint Paul. It is a collaboration of community organizations, the City of Saint Paul, and Saint Paul Public Schools.

**Our vision:** All Saint Paul's youth will develop their abilities as learners, contributors, and navigators so they can recognize and achieve their greatest potential.

**Our mission:** Sprockets improves the quality, availability, equity, and effectiveness of out-of-school time learning for all youth in Saint Paul through the committed, collaborative, and innovative efforts of community organizations, government, schools, and other partners.



Youth at Mt. Airy Boys & Girls Club compete in Robotics League.

## EQUITABLE ACCESS TO AFTERSCHOOL OPPORTUNITIES

Afterschool opportunities are crucial to the healthy development of young people. According to the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, children have the right to relax and play, and to join in a wide range of cultural, artistic, and other recreational activities.<sup>1</sup>

Research shows the many benefits that afterschool programs can provide – academic and social emotional benefits, access to caring adults and mentors, and workforce skills. These opportunities keep young people safe and help working families. Afterschool programs have the power to positively impact a young person's development and help them build skills for the future.

But not everyone has access to these opportunities. A report from the Afterschool Alliance shows that demand for afterschool programs is larger than the number of openings for youth – and demand is highest among youth from low-income households.<sup>2</sup>

What keeps youth from participating? There are many barriers that may limit access. For some families, programs might just cost too much. For others, program location, lack of transportation options, and inflexible parent work schedules are a barrier to getting young people to and from programming – especially in Minnesota winters, with cold weather and fewer hours of daylight. Some families may face cultural or language barriers, especially those who don't speak English at home. Families may not know about the benefits of afterschool, or where to find information about afterschool options for their children.

These barriers disproportionately affect certain groups – youth from lower-income families, and youth of color, as well as youth from other marginalized communities.<sup>3</sup> Youth access to enrichment activities is highly dependent on family income, and highest-income families spend nearly seven times more on enrichment opportunities for their children, and that spending gap has widened over time.<sup>4</sup> The Afterschool Alliance reports that on average, programming in Minnesota costs \$91/week, and families cite costs as one of the major barriers to accessing afterschool programs.<sup>5</sup> Language and cultural barriers disproportionately affect youth of color.

These barriers create gaps in access, which matter because they lead to disparities in outcomes for youth – exacerbating wide racial and income-based disparities that already exist in Minnesota and causing short and long-term consequences for young people. The opportunity gap in expanded learning leads to unequal learning time, access to enrichment, and access to mentors.<sup>6</sup> These disparities create enormous barriers for youth, limit their potential, and vastly impact their life trajectories.

<sup>1</sup> Article 31, UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. <http://www.ohchr.org/Documents/ProfessionalInterest/crc.pdf>.

<sup>2</sup> Afterschool Alliance (2014). America after 3PM: Afterschool Programs in Demand. <http://afterschoolalliance.org/AA3PM/>.

<sup>3</sup> Youthprise (2012). Investing in the Enterprise of Youth: Youthprise & Learning Beyond the Classroom.

<sup>4</sup> McCombs, J., Whitaker, A. & Yoo, P. (2017). The Value of Out-of-School Time Programs. RAND Corporation.

<sup>5</sup> Afterschool Alliance (2014). America after 3PM: Afterschool Programs in Demand. <http://afterschoolalliance.org/AA3PM/>.

<sup>6</sup> Brackenridge, K., Gunderson, J. & Perry, M. (2017). Expanded Learning: A Powerful Strategy for Equity. PACE.



# SPROCKETS: INCREASING AFTERSCHOOL ACCESS IN SAINT PAUL

Sprockets aims to increase access to out-of-school time programming in Saint Paul, addressing these gaps to ensure that ALL youth – regardless of race or income – are able to reach their greatest potential. Sprockets network programs serve mostly youth of color (78%) and youth who are eligible for free or reduced-price lunch (72%) – groups that face greater barriers to accessing opportunities. Here’s how Sprockets increases the availability, equity and quality of afterschool programming in Saint Paul:

**Sprockets’ Program Finder.** Sprockets raises awareness of the importance of afterschool in Saint Paul, encouraging youth and families to get involved. We connect youth and families to afterschool opportunities through the Sprockets Program Finder, a searchable, online tool for identifying programming that fits youth interests and families’ needs. And we try to get this information to families and youth who most need it – by leveraging caring adults such as counselors, behavior intervention staff, librarians, and family liaisons who have existing, trusted connections with youth and families.

**Transportation.** We’ve also focused on transportation for years, because we know it’s a huge barrier for working families. We’ve supported circulator buses in Saint Paul neighborhoods and built a toolkit with transportation resources for our partners. We’ve partnered with youth to advocate for public transportation to get high schoolers to and from school, which also allows for access to jobs and afterschool opportunities. This effort led to a successful pilot at Johnson High School that Sprockets would like to see expanded across the city.

**Program Networking.** Sprockets also helps identify where there are gaps in access and where there are large numbers of youth who aren’t engaged in Sprockets programming. We bring together our network of afterschool providers and youth-serving organizations to ensure that there are opportunities for all youth to participate. Saint Paul Urban Tennis used Sprockets data to inform their decision to move their headquarters to the East Side, where there was a high percentage of lower-income youth who weren’t being served in Sprockets programs.

**Continuous Program Improvement.** Youth programs also need to be of high quality in order to benefit participants. Sprockets supports programs that offer free or low-cost programming, giving them access to free training and evaluation resources that support their work without cost. Sprockets also works to elevate the youth work field and offer leadership opportunities for youth workers of color. Sprockets resources help programs raise the bar on quality, so that ALL youth who attend programming are building positive relationships, developing social emotional skills, and getting opportunities to lead and grow.

Strategies for increasing afterschool access include supporting the growth of youth workers, helping staff develop identities as youth workers, sharing information among successful programs and supporting programs to connect with each other – all of which are key parts of Sprockets’ work building a strong network that supports Saint Paul’s youth.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>7</sup>Dawes, N. P. (2018). Access to Out-of-School Time Programs for Underserved Youth. In Malone, H. J., Donahue, T. (Eds.), The Growing Out-of-School Time Field: Past, Present, and Future (47-60). Information Age Publishing.



The Frogtown Summer Circulator picking up passengers.

## ABOUT THE DATA

**Minnesota Student Survey:** The data in this report comes from the Minnesota Student Survey, administered by the Minnesota Department of Education to youth in 5th, 8th, 9th, and 11th grades. This is a self-report survey, so the youth self-identify as being eligible for free or reduced lunch, and also choose their racial categories. They also can define “out-of-school time opportunities” as they choose – these could be jobs, church activities, in-school sports, or other activities. Responses in this report are from youth in Saint Paul Public Schools and participating charter schools within Saint Paul.

**Free and Reduced Lunch:** For purposes of this brief, students eligible for free or reduced-price lunches are considered lower-income, while those who are not eligible are considered higher-income. Households with incomes up to 185% of the federal poverty guidelines (about \$45,027 annually for a family of four in 2016 <https://www.census.gov/data/tables/time-series/demo/income-poverty/historical-poverty-thresholds.html>) may qualify for free or reduced-price lunch. All eligible children may not be enrolled.



ComMUSICation youth learn new songs together.

# AFTERSCHOOL ACCESS IN SAINT PAUL

Who is accessing afterschool programs in Saint Paul? And what opportunity gaps exist for Saint Paul youth? Are they accessing programs that will help them build social, academic, and workforce skills that will help them thrive now and in the future?

Sprockets used 2016 Minnesota Student Survey (MSS)<sup>8</sup> data to examine afterschool access in Saint Paul as reported by young people, giving us a different look at how young people experience afterschool, including youth who might not be included in Sprockets data. Although there’s a lot to celebrate, there are also troubling gaps in how groups of youth access out-of-school time opportunities, and what they’re getting out of those opportunities.

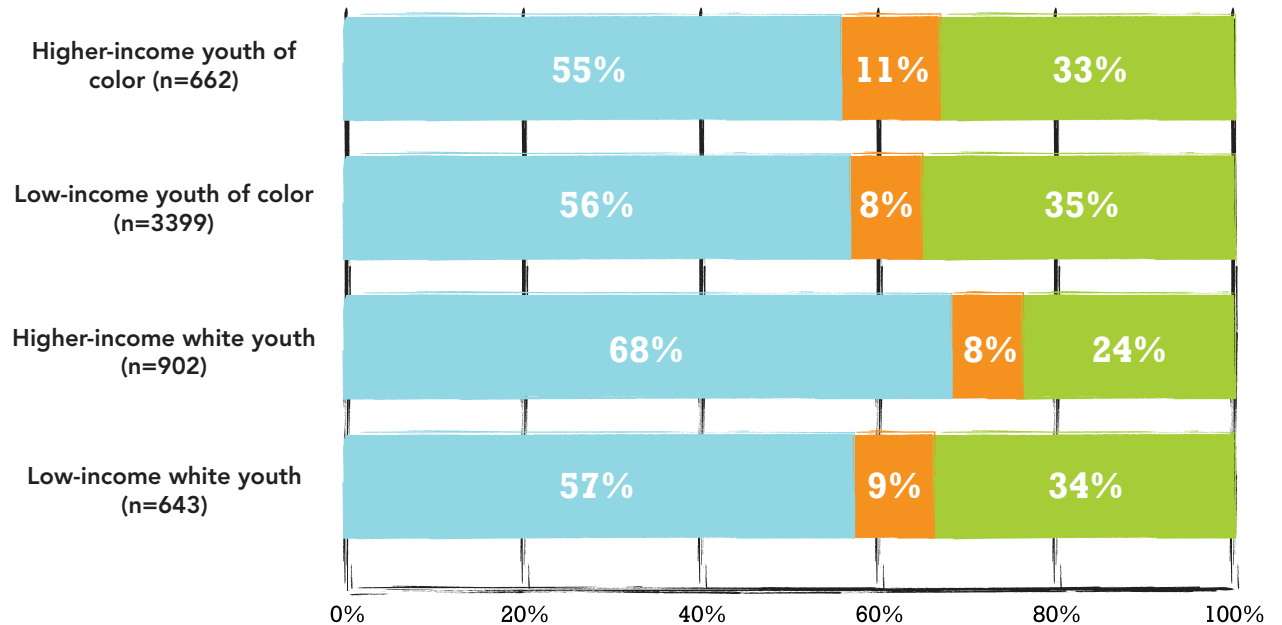
## Awareness

White youth, especially those of higher-income, are more likely than youth of color to report that their school or community offers a variety of programs to participate in outside of the school day. Youth of color and lower-income youth are more likely to report that they don’t know if a variety of programming is offered, showing a gap in awareness of opportunities.

### Saint Paul Youth Perception of Afterschool Availability:

“Does your school or community offer a variety of programs for people your age to participate in outside of the regular school day?”

Yes No I don’t know



<sup>8</sup> Minnesota Departments of Education, Health, Human Services, and Public Safety, Minnesota Student Survey. Custom data tables and cross-tabulations provided by the MN Department of Health, MN Center for Health Statistics. <http://www.health.state.mn.us/divs/chs/mss/>.



# AFTERSCHOOL ACCESS IN SAINT PAUL

## Participation

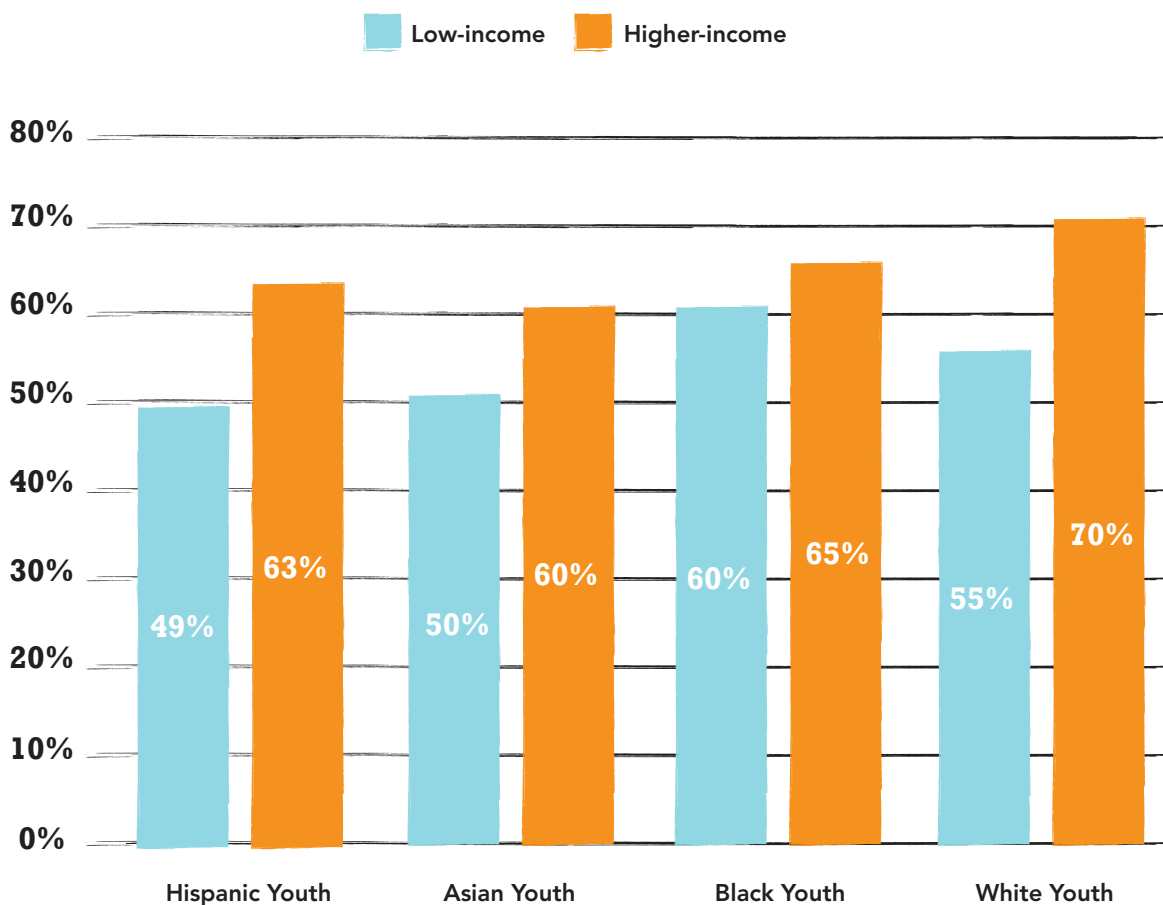
Approximately half of the youth surveyed reported that they participate in out-of-school time activities three or more times a week. However, there are large gaps in participation by income. These gaps are consistent across race, with youth from higher-income families regularly participating in out-of-school time activities at significantly higher rates than their peers of the same race and ethnicity.

Although lower-income white youth and youth of color participate at about the same rate (55% and 53%, respectively) higher-income white youth are quite a bit more likely to be involved (70%) than youth of color at the same income level (61%).



Youth using new recording technology at the Keystone Best Buy Teen Tech Center.

### Saint Paul Youth Participating in Afterschool Opportunities Three or More Times per Week





Young tennis players with Saint Paul Urban Tennis.

# AFTERSCHOOL ACCESS IN SAINT PAUL

## Effectiveness

There's more to equitable access than just who shows up – research shows that programs must be of high quality to influence outcomes for youth. In fact, research shows that it's better for youth to do nothing at all than for them to attend low-quality programs.<sup>9</sup>

High-quality out-of-school time programs provide environments that are safe and supportive, where youth feel they belong. In these environments, youth are encouraged to develop positive relationship with their peers but also with caring adults. Youth are supported in planning and leading, and reflecting on their experiences.

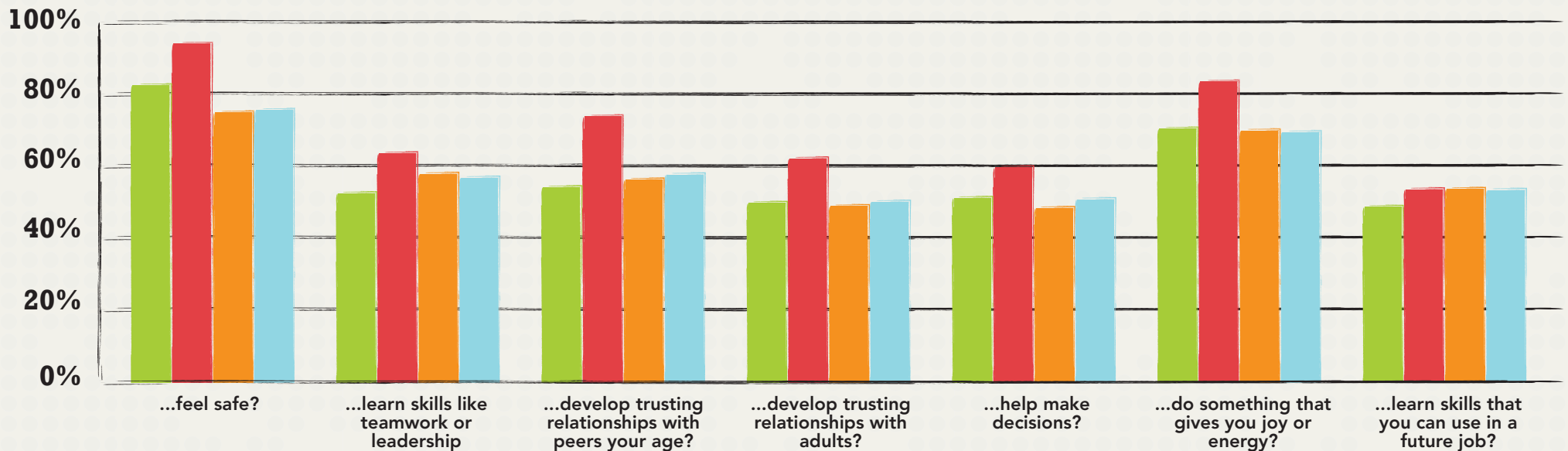
The MSS asked a question aimed at assessing these different aspects of the quality of out-of-school time experiences that youth are accessing – and the results suggest that different groups of youth are accessing programs of differing quality. These disparities seem to cut across both race and income level, with gaps in how lower-income youth and youth of color respond to these quality questions as compared to white, more affluent youth.

<sup>9</sup> Belle, D. (1999). *The Afterschool Lives of Children: Alone and With Others While Parents Work*. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Inc.

## Perceived Quality of Youth Activities:

Percentage of Saint Paul youth who responded "Often" or "Very Often" to the question: "When you spend time doing activities outside of the regular school day, how often do you..."

■ Low-income white youth     ■ Higher-income white youth  
■ Low-income youth of color     ■ Higher-income youth of color







SPNN youth advocated successfully to get a bus stop near their program.

# AFTERSCHOOL ACCESS IN SAINT PAUL

## Effectiveness continued

For example, when asked, “When you spend time doing activities outside of the regular school day, how often do you develop trusting relationship with adults?” **62%** of higher-income white youth responded “often” or “very often,” whereas only **49%** of other youth responded in the same way – showing a gap in access to mentorship and relationships with caring adults. Similar gaps appear with other questions about developing teamwork/leadership skills, building relationships with peers and adults, and making decisions in programming.

Opportunity gaps don’t just exist between higher and lower-income youth, or between white youth and youth of color. Rather, both disparities exist and are interrelated. All of this data suggests that white, more affluent youth are accessing and experiencing programming differently – and getting more out of it. Other research also backs this up: a study shows that the difference in developmental contexts between black and white youth experience may cause them to experience different effects from OST experiences.<sup>10</sup>

This data raises more questions than it answers. Are fee-based programs that are more accessible to higher-income youth truly more impactful? Are youth of different races and income levels actually attending different, higher-quality programs, or are youth experiencing the same OST opportunities differently?

**Are fee-based programs that are more accessible to higher-income youth truly more impactful?**

**Are youth of different races and income levels actually attending different, higher-quality programs, or are youth experiencing the same OST opportunities differently?**

These questions raise different possible paths of action for the Sprockets network: Are we building equitable programs that youth of all backgrounds have the ability to access? Once youth do access our programs, are they finding an environment that is culturally responsive and welcoming to all? Are we responding to behaviors equitably? Are all youth getting the same leadership opportunities?

These disparities in afterschool awareness, participation, and program effectiveness between youth of different races and income levels are troubling – and they show that our network has more work to do to address inequities in Saint Paul and ensure that all young people reach their greatest potential.

<sup>10</sup>Hynes, K. and Sanders, F. (2011). Diverging Experiences during Out-of-School Time: The Race Gap in Exposure to Afterschool Programs. *Journal of Negro Education*, 80(4). 464-476.

## WHAT'S NEXT?

# POLICIES AND PRACTICES THAT INCREASE ACCESS

Equitable access to high-quality afterschool programming is a key part of building an equitable Saint Paul and ensuring that all young people succeed – and we all need to work together to make sure that programming is accessible and of high quality. Afterschool opportunities that boost young people’s skills and passions are a crucial part of closing the opportunity and achievement gap, but only if young people can access the benefits they provide.

At the policy level, access to afterschool must be a key part of equity discussions and solutions at the city and state, with many different stakeholders investing in afterschool. In order to make afterschool opportunities equitable, programs that serve underserved youth – as well as the systems that support them – need more resources to ensure that high-quality programs are accessible to youth.

There is also a role for the youth workers and program coordinators who are on the ground designing and delivering programs. It’s important to build programs where youth feel welcomed and supported and where they can develop leadership and social skills, build positive relationships, and feel that their identity and culture is valued. To build environments where youth can thrive, programs should invest in building high-quality staff who relate to the young people they serve.

Youth and families are also central to the conversation about access. Afterschool programs are stronger when they leverage the skills and knowledge of youth and the families who support them. This year, Sprockets will offer a training around family engagement, to help our partners think through creative ways to engage parents and families to ensure that program aspects – location, cost, schedules – work for families. We’re also making a commitment to increase youth voice within our network at a variety of levels, including engaging youth from across the network to advance policies that support young people and youth voice in the city.

Sprockets is also ramping up our efforts around social emotional learning, which at its core is about relying on a young person’s strengths and assets to build their future. We’re combining lessons learned from three years of pilots to build a set of resources, trainings, and tools for our partners, to help them support individual youth in ways that support their unique identities.

Afterschool programming can be a powerful tool for impacting underserved youth and helping narrow the opportunity gap – and we need policies, resources, and practices that lower barriers to accessing high quality programs and help all youth succeed, regardless of race or income.

Thank you to our data partner, Amherst H. Wilder Foundation for their help in analyzing the Minnesota Student Survey data that informed this report.

### STRATEGIES FOR INCREASING ACCESS:

- Advocate for policies that provide resources for afterschool opportunities
- Create high-quality program environments for youth
- Engage families
- Create opportunities for youth voice
- Support SEL skill development

