21ˢᵗ Century Community Learning Centers

SPECIAL TOPIC
2022 KICK-OFF

"Youth Driven Spaces" build on three pillars:

- supporting youth's intrinsic motivation
- meeting youth's developmental needs
- building youth–adult partnerships

MAXIMIZING YOUTH LEADERSHIP IN YOUR PROGRAMS

Youth–adult partnership not only improves youth outcomes but also helps out-of-school time programs engage participants. The challenges center around the ability of adult staff to share power.

Starting in summer 2018, MSU researchers collaborated with The Neutral Zone, a community-based youth-serving organization in Ann Arbor, Michigan, to study its nationally recognized **Youth Driven Spaces** model. The research includes a series of observations and interviews of how several Southeast Michigan programs received intensive coaching and adopted the practices. This brief summarizes six common strategies emerged from the study that help develop youth leaders.

MAXIMIZING YOUTH LEADERSHIP: SIX BEST PRACTICES

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1. Engage youth in meetings

When adults dominate meetings, youth participants zone out. Best practices include involving youth in setting an agenda and leading discussions, and instituting no-adult-talk time.

2. Create opportunities for youth to learn how to be leaders

To gradually enhance young people's leadership capacity, youth programs can explicitly teach leadership basics and clearly designate roles among participants.

3. Recognize resistance to incorporating youth voice

Even with the best intentions, adults and youth can revert to adult leader and youth follower roles. Coaches helped staff acknowledge youth–adult power dynamics and recognize youths' contributions.

4. Encourage youth and adults to share constructive feedback

Youth respondents said that they want feedback from adults. Coaches recommended mutual, reflective practices such as reciprocal feedback.

5. Navigate youth-adult boundaries

Creating opportunities for youth leadership redefines youth–adult boundaries. Developing group norms and balancing personal and professional boundaries can help.

6. Practice intentional strategies to retain youth and to onboard new youth and staff

Embracing youth leadership in the organization's culture and developing a "crash course" for new youth and staff to learn about it will promote youth engagement.
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