

MINNESOTA YOUTH COUNCIL



An Initiative of Minnesota Alliance With Youth



Minnesota Youth Council Committee

Annual Report

92nd Legislature

2018

INTRODUCTION

The 2018 Minnesota State Legislative Session was the fifth session in which the Minnesota Youth Council Committee represented the voices and interests of youth from across the state. The Minnesota Youth Council Committee grew out of an interest by the Minnesota Youth Council [MYC], a diverse group of 36 youth and adults representing each congressional district of Minnesota, plus one at-large district. The MYC's mission is to "work together to mobilize the 325,000+ middle and high school aged people to work towards a Minnesota where no decision is made about them without them!"

The MYC is an initiative of Minnesota Alliance With Youth, a statewide nonprofit that serves as a leading youth development capacity-builder, convener, and collaborator in Minnesota. Legislation in 2013 formalized the relationship between the Minnesota Youth Council youth members and the Minnesota Legislature, putting youth voice into law with the formation of the Minnesota Youth Council Committee [MYCC]. Representatives from each party within the House and Senate act as liaisons to the Minnesota Youth Council Committee. This year one of our liaisons, Representative JoAnn Ward, retired from the Minnesota Legislature. We want to thank Rep. Ward for her time and efforts to champion youth causes at the state level and provide guidance to the Minnesota Youth Council. We wish her the best in retirement!

COMMITTEE MEMBERS

- Munira Alimire, Rochester STEM Academy
- Alyssa DeGrand, Rochester Century High School
- Lul Sharif, Rochester STEM Academy
- Weston Loughmiller, Fairmont High School
- ZamZam Mohamed, Burnsville High School
- Rayanah Richmond, Northfield High School
- Catherine McComas-Bussa, Shakopee High School
- Angelo Perez, Northfield High School
- Nuurasuu Tufaa, Breck High School [Golden Valley]
- Cole Hartman, Wayzata High School
- Jack Prince, The Blake School [Minneapolis]
- Shreya Ram, Wayzata High School
- Fatima Menawa, Stillwater High School
- Elena Medeiros, St. Paul Central High School
- Ava Kalenze, St. Anthony Village High School
- Suhani Garg, Woodbury High School
- Bryan Forsman, Minneapolis Washburn High School
- Dontae Holland, Minneapolis Edison High School
- Avia Kaner-Roth, St. Louis Park High School
- Marvin Lopez-Rosas, Linwood Monroe Arts Plus [Saint Paul]
- Annie Omer, Andover High School
- Brandon Wolinski, Rogers High School
- Kenya Becerra-Balbuena, Eden Prairie High School
- Jacob Just, Morris Area High School

- Amy Haney, Dream Technical Academy [Willmar]
- Noah Ouren, Montevideo ALC
- Baylie Norris, Greenway High School [Coleraine]
- Ria Edberg, Mora High School
- Hannah Erickson, Greenway High School [Coleraine]
- Addie Ness, Mora High School
- Raina Meyer, Minnesota Online High School [Edina]
- Mimi Le, Eastview High School [Apple Valley]
- Colin McConkey, The Blake School [Minneapolis]
- Harita Duggirala, Eastview High School [Apple Valley]

BILL SELECTION

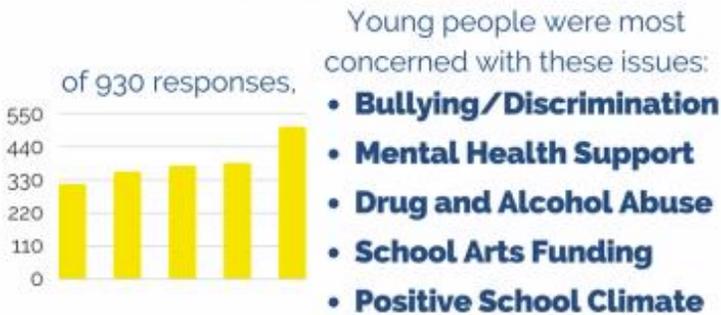
Bill selection began with the Minnesota Youth Council's Policy Committee. The Policy Committee began the year by determining issues areas to focus on. The youth members created a survey and received approximately 930 responses from students in grades 8-12 all across the state. We also looked at the Minnesota Student Survey. Top issues, according to the young people surveyed, include:

- [Student Survey Report 2018](#) [full poster below]

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STUDENT SURVEY REPORT 2018

34 different languages are spoken among 20% of multi-lingual students



“It matters that all students feel safe and cared for.

Because they not only directly affect me but also people i care about and even people i don't even know. i believe everybody deserves opportunity. no matter what race, gender, sexuality, or political party.

Because i believe school should be safe for everyone and if anyone is struggling outside of school they should be able to get help.



Being involved in the arts, our schools programs are very underfunded compared to the money spent on sports.

73.9% of students surveyed felt that the adults in their life influenced their opinions and beliefs

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These themes became the basis for the legislation youth members decided to hear during session. The MYCC co-chairs led the process and youth members were the only members who had voting rights. All decisions ultimately came down to the youth members who were participating in the legislative session.

COMMITTEE MEETINGS

Youth Day at the Capitol Feedback Letters [March 27, 2018]

- [HF960 School Linked Mental Health Programs \(Rep. Backer\)](#)
- [SF3279 Criminal background checks for firearm transfers requirement \(Sen. Little\)](#)
- [SF1386 Children 10 years and over right to counsel disclosure \(Sen. Relph\)](#)

MYC Funding Bill Hearing [April 13, 2018]

- [Senate E-12 Finance Committee \(SF1579, testimony begins at 8:08\)](#)

Spring Retreat Feedback Letters [April 20, 2018]

- [HF 1027 Appropriation for AmeriCorps Promise Fellows \(presented by Kori Redepenning, CEO of MN Alliance With Youth\)](#)
- [HF 3594- Increase Teachers of Color Act strengthened, \(Rep. Mariani\)](#)
- [SF 1691 – Homeless families support services system redesign authorization and appropriation \(Sen. Clausen\)](#)
- [HF 2768 – Child sexual abuse, trafficking prevention \(Rep. Jessup\)](#)

HIGHLIGHTS

- Instagram and Twitter
 - [@mnyouthcouncil](#) and [mnyouthcouncil](#)
- Partnered with [For Jake's Sake Foundation](#)
 - Many students and staff testified including: Jacob Just, Noah Ouren, Tiaryn Daniels, Clayton Byrd and Bailey Boelter.
- [MYC Statement on School Safety](#)
 - The Minnesota Youth Council (MYC) is a collaboration of youth and adults working together to empower and mobilize young people across the state to exercise their voices, opinions and ideas and take action on issues affecting youth. In 2013, the Minnesota Legislature formally recognized the work of the Minnesota Youth Council, passing into law the Minnesota Youth Council Committee Bill, which established the council as the “voice of youth” to the state legislature and the Governor- the only legislatively mandated youth council of its kind in the country. The following is a statement from the student members of the Minnesota Youth Council:
 - *“The Minnesota Youth Council is the legislatively mandated voice of the youth of Minnesota, and as such, it has varied, unique and partisan individual voices.*”

However, regardless of party lines, MYC members are in agreement that student safety and advocacy have always been and will remain non-partisan and massively important values. It is for this reason that the MYC would like to officially voice its support of the students rallying together, demanding that senseless acts of gun violence should never be a source of fear in public settings, most notably, in schools. Furthermore, the MYC recognizes its unique platform to promote change, which supplies it with the means to address legislators directly. We call on our policymakers to further increase safety within schools. As students, our education is something that should not be threatened by violence in any form, especially gun-based. Many members of the MYC are supporters of the second amendment, however, those of us who are will not sit-out from this important discussion. Many factors contribute to gun violence ranging from mental health issues, to flaws in our investigative system and the nuance should not be left out of this discussion. We have stood by the sidelines for far too long, watching preventable massacres occur, hoping that elected officials would take some course of action to protect our schools, concerts, festivals, and places of worship. This is unacceptable, and we now demand that those who represent us, with the power to establish laws, will finally act.”

- [Youth Education Leadership Summit](#)
 - Across the state, young people are in positions of leadership in their schools and communities, working within the same system and towards similar goals regarding education and equity. However, we rarely have the opportunity to meet and collaborate directly. We know that strong youth voice, representation, and partnership is necessary in order to create a Minnesota that empowers ALL students
 - To move us towards this goal, the Minnesota Youth Council will be hosting the very first Youth in Education Leadership Summit (YELS). Students across Minnesota grades 8 – 12 are invited to join us this September for an exciting day full of training and workshops designed and facilitated by their peers. They will learn from one another on critical topics – such as working with local school boards, writing bills, and the creation of a Student Bill of Rights. We are also inviting parents, teachers, and community members to participate in our Adult Partner sessions track, where they will be able to learn directly from students how to best support them as they work to shape their experience in education. Lastly, we will be sharing the power of student voice with the broader community by closing the day with a student moderated Governor’s Forum on education, hosted in partnership with EdAllies
- Alyssa DeGrand and Jacob Just served as state delegates for the 2018 Governor’s race
- Annie Omer chosen as US Youth Senate representative, Munira Alimire served as an alternate
- MYC grad Tiaryn returned as a UST freshman to serve as Noah’s Adult Partner. Also interned at Alliance
- Capitol Pathways Intern, Clayton Byrd supported MYC during legislative session
- Summer internship with MYC alum Anna Phearman
- Alum created a campaign management organization
- [MYC Monthly Newsletters](#)
 - [August 2018 MYC Monthly Newsletter](#)
 - [April 2018 MYC Monthly Newsletter](#)
 - [March 2018 MYC Monthly Newsletter](#)
 - [February 2018 MYC Monthly Newsletter](#)

- [January 2018 MYC Monthly Newsletter](#)
- [November 2017 MYC Monthly Newsletter](#)

- MYC WikiWisdom Forum
 - [Report](#)
 - Meeting with Senator Tina Smith
 - [Press Release](#)

MEDIA HITS

- Jacob Schimetz's piece on America's Promise, "[Youth Voice: The Difference Between Empowering Youth and Emboldening Them.](#)"
- Hannah Erickson [EdVoices posts](#)
 - What Broadband Infrastructure's Got to Do with Educational Equity
 - Bullying is Complex. How We Talk About it Needs to be, Too.
- Hannah Erickson testifying on broadband
 - [High Speed Internet as necessary to my education as a pen and paper, advocates of broadband expansion tell lawmakers](#)
 - *Having access to high-speed broadband internet isn't just about people's ability to binge-watch the latest Netflix show. For Hannah Erickson, a student at Greenway High School in Coleraine, it's about being able to keep up in school.*

"An internet connection ... is as necessary to my education as a pen and paper," Erickson told the House Job Growth and Energy Affordability and Policy Finance Committee Thursday, later adding, "Every student should have an equal opportunity to pursue their education to their fullest and all students should be equipped with the tools necessary to do so."



Hannah Erickson, a student at Greenway High School, testifies before the House Job Growth and Energy Affordability Policy and Finance Committee April 12 in support of a bill that would provide broadband grant program funding. Photo by Andrew VonBank

Not having reliable internet put her at a disadvantage because many classes are online or use online-only textbooks. She said the problem was quickly solved when her house got broadband.

Erickson was one of several people who testified in support of a bill that would help connect more of the roughly 256,000 Minnesota households still without access to high-speed internet, which is defined as 25 Mbps download/3 Mbps upload speeds.

[HF3527](#), sponsored by [Rep. Sandy Layman](#) (R-Cohasset), would appropriate \$51.48 million to the [Border-to-Border Broadband Development Grant Program](#). The program helps supplement the cost to build wire-line broadband infrastructure in areas that providers may not service otherwise due to being difficult or expensive to reach.

The committee laid the bill over for possible omnibus bill inclusion. Its companion, [SF2787](#), sponsored by [Sen. Mark Koran](#) (R-North Branch), is awaiting action by the Senate Jobs and Economic Growth Finance and Policy Committee.

“Our schools, our businesses, our health care providers, our communities – we know we’ll fall behind if we don’t have those connections,” Layman said.

“But now, more than ever, broadband is a primary driver for economic development,” said Gary Johnson, CEO of Paul Bunyan Communications. He mentioned a key factor in Delta Dental’s decision to open a center in Bemidji was because the region has fiber optic broadband access.

The bill would also help the state get closer to meeting its goal of having high-speed broadband available everywhere in the state by 2022. Margaret Anderson-Kelliher, chair of the [Governor’s Broadband Task Force](#), says it will take \$71.48 million in every biennium for the next four to six years to meet that goal. Last year, the Legislature appropriated \$20 million to the broadband fund, so the \$51.48 million appropriation the bill calls for would meet [the task force’s recommendations](#).

- [For Jake's Sake Foundation / MN House Public Information Services](#)

- *Jake Schmaus had everything going for him. He was an athlete, wrote for his school paper, was well liked and loved to fish. "Jake could have been anything he wanted to be until he fell into this awful addiction of opiates," said his mom, Sheri Schmaus. It all came to an end in May 2013, when at the age of 21, Jake lost his battle with addiction and died of a heroin overdose at his home in Cedar, Minn. His family and friends were left grappling with his loss. Schmaus said that had Jake been better informed about the effects of opioids, it's possible it all could have been avoided. "He had told me once that if he would have known how addictive and how opiates change the chemistry of your brain, that he never would've tried it, but he did not have any idea," she said.*

According to Bailey Boelter, youth policy manager for the Minnesota Youth Council, the students she works with reiterated that sentiment, saying they feel uninformed about the effects of various opioids. "Our students had no idea that just one hit could take your life and they didn't know that it was so much more potent than other drugs," she said. "Most had never talked about it in school or to the level of detail that is needed." With that in mind, Schmaus created For Jake's Sake Foundation in 2013 with a mission to spread awareness about the dangers of opioids and to help those who are struggling with addiction find help and create a fresh start. Since then, foundation members have tirelessly advocated for legislation to advance their mission.

Jake's Bill

Introduced in March 2017 by [Rep. Mary Kunesh-Podein](#) (DFL-New Brighton) and [Sen. Carolyn Laine](#) (DFL-Columbia Heights), [HF2470/SF2259](#), aims to stop the cycle of opioid misuse and addiction through education. Despite not receiving a hearing last session, the foundation continued the legwork to develop curriculum and Kunesh-Podein kept the so-called "Jake's Bill" on her radar.



[Rep. Mary Kunesh-Podein](#)

"I started shopping it around again and reconnected with Republicans who had signed on to refresh them," she said. "I have to attribute a lot of the work to the foundation. They have been working so hard, and have made it easy for me by providing all the resources that I needed."

With their added efforts and a growing awareness of opioid addiction, the bill began getting more attention and gained widespread bipartisan support. It received hearings in both the House and Senate education committees and a \$350,000 appropriation has been included in [HF4328](#), the omnibus education finance bill, [which the House passed](#) April 26.

"I'm a teacher myself, and so one of my promises when I came to the Legislature is that I would not have unfunded mandates," Kunesh-Podein said. "Not only did we have a financial request, but the foundation is also willing to put in a bunch of their resources. It's really a good partnership, rather than a legislative mandate."

If signed into law, the funding would go to the foundation to continue to collaborate with school districts throughout Minnesota to integrate evidence-based opioid misuse prevention into their curriculum.

Once implemented, the curriculum would be taught in grades 5, 6, 8, 10 and 12. The goal is to interweave it into a variety of disciplines, such as social studies, biology and chemistry, with the intent to lighten the burden for health teachers, and also to contextualize the societal, biological, chemical and mental impacts of drug addiction.

Student input

Possibly now more than ever students are finding their voice and using it to influence lawmakers, both through grassroots activism and formal legislative efforts.

The Minnesota Youth Council is a youth-adult partnership that works to empower and organize young people across the state. It has formally been recognized by the Legislature as the official youth voice to the government, making it the only legislatively mandated youth council of its kind in the country.

“Young people want change and are willing to let us know despite some pretty uneven power dynamics,” Boelter said. “It’s our job now as adults in positions of power to decide if we want to put a stop to preventable deaths that effect so many communities and ultimately our young people in the state.” She added that several council members are strong supporters of the bill, many having known someone with—or lost a loved one to—an opioid addiction.

With the bill getting plenty of buzz and support, Kunesh-Podein said she is feeling confident that it’ll make the final cut and be included in the omnibus bill that’s delivered to [Gov. Mark Dayton](#).

“For me, it’s really my first bill that I’ve taken from inception to inclusion and I’m really proud that it’s this kind of bill, that it’s so relevant, so timely and so important,” she said.