



# Minneapolis Beacons

## Building students' foundational skills and competencies that will help them in the workforce and in life

The private sector spends more than \$164 billion every year on employee education and training to close workforce skill gaps and more than 1 in 3 workers agree that they do not have the education and training they need to get ahead. These issues beg the question: how do we sufficiently prepare youth to enter the future labor market as adults? Afterschool and summer learning programs are integral partners in this effort, providing students a ladder of supports that offer a step up for future success and help them reach their career aspirations.

### Overview

Close to 4,000 K-12 students participate in *Minneapolis Beacons (Beacons)*, which focuses on reaching underserved youth and providing a mix of activities that emphasize youth voice, celebrate students' cultures, and help raise students' self-awareness. Beacons is a collaborative model, comprised of a partnership between the Minneapolis Public School District and three of Minnesota's largest youth serving organizations—YMCA of the Greater Twin Cities, Boys & Girls Clubs of the Twin Cities, and YWCA of Minneapolis—who in turn partner with more than 60 community organizations.

### A typical day for students

The typical day for students is dependent on their age and interest. Elementary and middle school students begin their day at Beacons with a snack and time to connect with their friends before breaking up into activity groups that they select. Beacons embeds academics into the enrichment activities offered, which range from cooking to chess. Older students are able to take a more formalized role in the program, such as leading a group or club offered.

### Outcomes

A 2016 longitudinal evaluation found that Beacons participants were 1.2 times more likely to attend school at least 95 percent of the time and 2.2 times more likely to graduate in four years relative to their peers. Their Survey of Academic and Youth Outcomes Youth (SAYO Y) survey found that more than 9 in 10 Beacons youth agreed the attending the program has helped them do better in school, as well as find out what they are good at and what they like to do.

## Minneapolis Beacons

Minneapolis, Minn.

**3,950** Average number of students served during the school year

**86%** Students from low-income families

### Main funding sources:

- ▶ 21<sup>st</sup> Century Community Learning Centers
- ▶ Private grants
- ▶ Corporate foundations
- ▶ Training and capacity building contracts

## Challenges

### ***Employees are missing critical foundational skills that employers desire.***

The ability to work in teams, problem solve, and communicate effectively are among the principal skills that employers consistently report desiring in their future hires, yet employers report difficulties finding potential and current employees possessing these set of skills.

### ***Employers find it challenging to hire a workforce with the technical skills needed for open positions.***

In a 2017 survey of 500 leadership and human resource staff, 3 in 5 agreed that it was “common for job applicants to lack the technology skills important for success in their career.” Additionally, although more than half of the current U.S. labor market is comprised of middle-skills jobs, only 43 percent of workers are trained for these jobs.

### ***Employers struggle to find candidates with job experience when looking to fill open positions.***

A survey of 400 employers found that candidate’s lack of experience was one of the top reasons reported by employers when asked why it was hard to fill positions and that 9 in 10 employers were more likely to consider hiring a recent college graduate if they had an internship or apprenticeship with the company.

Read [Building Workforce Skills in Afterschool](#) to learn more.



## Program characteristics

Beacons provides scaffolded leadership development opportunities to “engage youth as leaders and learners from kindergarten through high school graduation to prepare them for success in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century.” Elementary school Beacons students build their foundational skills collaborating, listening and learning about different perspectives, and practicing building group consensus. Beacons’ middle schoolers set future goals, explore their personal identities, and have the chance to become program assistants and youth advisory members. High school Beacons students work on their communication, facilitation, and critical thinking skills as they plan, manage, and lead program activities. During the summer, high schoolers have the opportunity to take part in paid work internships.

The program’s evolution for students in different grade levels can be seen through a service project example. Elementary schoolers cover an issue, such as homelessness, and hold group discussions on the issue to reach a consensus and create team posters on the topic. In middle school, students identify challenges in their community or their school, analyze the situation to develop a solution, create a presentation, and plan and coordinate an event to present their findings, which has included a general school assembly. High school students take what middle schoolers do to a policy level, determining what policy levers will activate change and which decision-makers they need to reach.

## Program history

As a part of an adaptation grant from the George C. Wallace Foundation to replicate the New York City Beacons model, Minneapolis Beacons was established in 1998, and has grown from five centers serving 500 students to 12 centers serving close to 4,000 students in some of Minneapolis’ most low-income neighborhoods and academically challenged schools.

## Recommendations

### ***for building students’ foundational skills and competencies:***

- ▶ Talk to your students, parents, and community members to find out how your program can best meet the needs of those you are serving.
- ▶ Value quality over quantity. When starting a formalized workforce development program, it is okay to start small and build up your program as you learn how to provide quality experiences for your students.



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