



## Guiding our young people into the adult community

By Ima Teacher, Forest Lake High School

As a teacher I've watched hundreds of children move through junior and senior high school. It's not an easy journey, as we all know. As they grow up, the older students not only look and act differently than the younger ones, they actually think differently.

What I've observed as a teacher is now being explained by science and research on how the human brain develops from birth through adolescence to adulthood. Through that whole period, the architecture of the brain is a work in progress. Just as we know that children from a very early age need learning opportunities well before they start school, this brain research helps us recognize that maturing adolescents need a variety of experiences within the community to stimulate the full brain development required of engaged and well-rounded adults.

The completion of adolescent brain development requires that youth have a variety of opportunities to put into practice what they've learned in their family, and in school. Interaction with people from many walks of life builds new relationships across the larger community, and allows the young person to see themselves in relation to others. Every time a young person is mentored in some way by a coach, a neighbor, or an elder, or gains positive experience participating in a group activity with a range of people in the community, they are building and strengthening the brain architecture for life.

"Brain architecture" is established as a model for thinking about adolescent development. Draws connection to Early Childhood Education.

Role of adults as mentors, etc. established.

Every parent knows that children are learning, growing and changing all the time. We understand that long before kindergarten, our children need stimulation designed to help them learn, to help their young brain complete its early development and be ready for later stages. And we know that our schools must give kids the lessons and nurturing they need so that young people gain the fundamental information and problem solving skills required to succeed in today's society.

Honors the importance of parental influence.

Builds on what people already know and believe.

Parents and teachers alike recognize a third force at work in the lives of children and that is community. The experiences adolescents have outside of the classroom are no less important for their development than early childhood and school. Just as the family is the foundation for a child's values, and schools provide formal learning and reasoning skills, the opportunities we provide for quality interaction in the community are a vital part of the journey to full membership in society.

It's time to improve our public policies and supports for youth development, to recognize this full picture of what young people need. We can't ignore any part of the process and expect to have the results we all want. Nor can we afford to look at these stages of development apart from one another – pitting one vital aspect of child development against another through short-sighted budget and policy decisions.

Establishes idea of exchange . What we give to children they give back to future society.

It's in everyone's interest that parents and young people get the support they need. Minnesota educates and provides for our children so that they will grow-up and take their place as solid and productive members of the community. Just as these young people need us to provide for them early in life, we need them to eventually take over and keep the community alive.

Until recently, the State of Minnesota allocated \$4 million a year to a wide variety of after school programs, money that leveraged additional matching Federal dollars. During the current administration, those funds have been zeroed out, causing programs such as the YMCA's after school activities to reduce hours and choices available, and closing others. The predictable result is that whole segments of our young population are missing out. We need to provide our active support, as citizens, leaders, and volunteers, to those programs such as 4H and Boys and Girls Clubs that help parents provide young people with good community experiences.

Recalls existing knowledge of school cuts.

Cuts to existing programs are specified.

Through YMCA and other quality youth development programs, young people are guided to take on responsibilities, work with adults of many ages, learn to get along together, set and accomplish goals. These are experiences and relationships young people will carry forward into adulthood as members of our community. We must work to restore and create more of these programs.

Call for community investment in its own future.

We have the evidence and science of adolescent development before us. But it does not belong to parents and teachers alone. It is our privilege and our obligation as a community to use this information to create the experiences and opportunities that will bring forward the next generation of young adults.