

Summary Report – K.E.Y. Zone Program

Lake Superior YMCA (Formerly Duluth Area Family YMCA)
Community Services Branch
A Program of the Duluth Community Education
Reporting Date: January 6, 2026

Mission

K.E.Y. Zone provides a safe, supportive, and engaging environment where youth in grades K-5 can learn, grow, and thrive. The program offers educational support along with enrichment in STEM, environmental education, arts and crafts, cultural activities, youth leadership, and community collaboration. Programming is available during the school year, summer, and school breaks, including day camp opportunities. The focus remains on promoting learning, building life skills, and ensuring year-round fun and support for all participants.

History

Beginnings: 1991 – The Start of School's Out Programs

The YMCA launched before and after-school programming in 1991 through partnerships with Homecroft, Lakewood, and Lester Park Schools called School's Out. Initially supported by grant funding, the program transitioned to a fee-based model with scholarship support. From its inception, the program emphasized affordable, safe, and enriching opportunities for youth. ISD709 provides a school aged care called Kid Connection in the other elementary schools.

Expanding Through Partnership: 2004 – 21st CCLC Grant

In 2004, the YMCA secured a 21st Century Community Learning Centers (CCLC), strengthening partnerships with ISD 709, local colleges, and the Grant Community School Collaborative. Programming operated at Nettleton, Lowell, and Grant Schools, focusing on developing 21st-century skills, improving academic achievement, and building school and community connectedness.

Growth and Collaboration: 2012 – Second 21st CCLC Grant

A second 21st CCLC grant in 2012 further strengthened collaboration between Duluth Public Schools and the YMCA. Programs served students at Stowe, Laura MacArthur, Piedmont, Myers Wilkins, Lowell, and Lincoln Middle School through Kid Connection, Schools' Out, and Excel Targeted Services. Strategic planning efforts between ISD 709 and the YMCA led to the launch of K.E.Y. Zone.

K.E.Y. Zone Structure:

2012 – Spring 2024: The District and the YMCA operated under a shared staffing model, with the District overseeing billing and registration functions and the YMCA providing program staff and supplies. Net revenues were shared between both organizations.

Summer 2024 – Present: The YMCA assumed full responsibility for staffing, billing, and registration, while maintaining a revenue-sharing arrangement with the District.

School Year Programming: Programming includes academic support and enrichment experiences, offering youth opportunities to engage in structured activities from 2:15 p.m. – 6:00 p.m.

Summer and Break Days: Programs operate from 7:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m., offering full day, engaging experiences for youth when school is not in session.

Enrollment

School Year Enrollment

- Total enrolled: **934**
- Waitlist: 9
- Site totals:
 - Congdon: 190
 - Homecroft: 115
 - Lakewood: 46
 - Laura MacArthur: 28
 - Lester Park: 177 (WL 1)
 - Lowell: 160
 - Myers Wilkins: 110 (WL 6)
 - Piedmont: 78 (WL 2)
 - Stowe: 30

Summer Enrollment (3 locations)

- Average enrollment: **450** youth

Staffing

The program is supported by a strong team of youth-focused staff:

- 12 leadership staff
- 150 frontline staff
- Workforce composition: 90% college/high school-aged and 10% older adults

The program complies with Minnesota Department of Children, Youth, and Families (DCYF) requirements, including fingerprint-based background checks, strict ratios (1:15 or fewer), maximum group size of 30, and no combining with other programs—ensuring eligibility for CCAP. Staff maintain CPR/First Aid certification, complete 6 hours of pre-service training before working independently with youth, and 32 hours of annual training.

School District Partnership

YMCA Provides:

- Staffing and training
- Billing, registration, and financial assistance
- Budget and HR management
- DCYF certification oversight including Childcare County Assistance
- Program structure and goals
- Grant funding

District Provides:

- Space
- Maintenance
- Printing and device services
- Badge access
- Wi-Fi access
- Building Safety

Impact / Highlights

- **Run Club (September- October):** An inclusive, high-energy enrichment activity designed to help youth build healthy habits, develop confidence, and stay active through fun running-based challenge
- **Lights On Afterschool (October):** Celebrated as part of a national recognition of afterschool programming.
- **Guest Reading Month (February):** Community members served as guest readers.
- **Career Week (March):** Professionals shared insights on careers and life skills.

- **Cooking Club:** Hands-on learning experience promoting healthy habits, supported by local businesses.
- **Grant Funding:** Secured multiple grants to support outdoor education, STEM, cultural enrichment, youth philanthropy, and food access initiatives.

Thank You

Thank you for the ongoing partnership and collaboration in support of youth and families in our community. Together, we provide high-quality programming that ensures positive outcomes for those we serve.

