

YOUTH-NEX

The University of Virginia
Center to Promote Effective
Youth Development





Letter from the Director

Great forward movement in our society around issues of race, gender and sexuality have been driven by the activism of youth. From the Black Panthers to the Young Americans for Freedom, youth activists have long shaped our national conversations, both ideologically and

politically. Today more than ever, with the rise and impact of social media, the power of youth to make their voices heard and shape political debates is great.

Inherent in the founding of the University of Virginia, was the conviction that our youth's education is critical to sustaining our democratic nation. It is our mission to harness the opportunities in schools and communities to fulfill the potential of our youth to become, healthy, productive citizens.

Through science, Youth-Nex enhances the strengths of children and adolescents and prevents developmental risk. Our vision is that our nation's youth, a rich, often untapped resource, may flourish.

Youth development issues are social justice issues.

Only through engaging and ensuring supportive developmental opportunities for all youth equitably can society truly advance. Youth-Nex is dedicated to both conducting and translating high quality developmental science to help ensure the advancement of that goal.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Nancy L. Deutsch".

NANCY L. DEUTSCH

Director, Youth-Nex:
The UVA Center to Promote Effective Youth Development;
Professor, Curry School of Education

Mission

Youth-Nex aims to expand and apply the science of positive youth development to address fundamental challenges facing societies around the world.

Youth-Nex **ENGAGES** Around Three Goals:

1. To provide rigorous, timely, evidence-based research that informs and is informed by practice and policy,
2. To realize the synergies of an interdisciplinary research center situated in a university with distinguished educational scholars and able students,
3. To provide a community of scholarship where faculty, researchers, and students are supported in their scholarly efforts.

Youth-Nex **ACTS** Around These Values:

1. The assets of youth (capabilities, talent, and motivation) are foundational resources for innovation and problem-solving that societies often overlook at their peril,
2. Policies, programs, and settings pertinent to youth must be informed by sound science that guides how youth assets are understood, applied, and promoted,
3. Optimizing the advancement and use of asset-based knowledge about youth requires multidisciplinary, cross-sector partnerships, and
4. To assure relevance and applicability, youth have a role to play in efforts to develop and apply new knowledge.

“The young do not know enough to be prudent, and therefore they attempt the impossible, and achieve it, generation after generation.”

- PEARL S. BUCK
Author, social justice advocate

TRANSLATING RESEARCH TO PRACTICE

Areas of Focus

Youth-Nex is currently focusing on three areas of critical importance, which when viewed through the lens of “youth as assets,” become transformative opportunities.

OUT-OF-SCHOOL TIME

When engaged in positive and prosocial activities and relationships during out-of-school hours, youth can flourish. Yet high quality out-of-school opportunities are not evenly distributed, with greater unmet need for youth from economically disadvantaged and/or racial minority backgrounds. Further, there is need to bolster program quality and training, professionalism, and reach of youth workers. Elevating the capacity of organizations requires sound training approaches, empirically based programming, and evaluation for decision making and impact tracking.

EDUCATIONAL SYSTEMS: MIDDLE SCHOOL

Looking at middle school through the lens of positive youth development reveals the disconnect between what we know about youth and the ways schooling is designed and delivered. The confluence of new knowledge on youth assets with the shortcomings of middle school education in the U.S. suggests this is the time for redesign, innovation, and evaluation of new models. Youth-Nex seeks to transform middle schools into developmentally-informed settings that provide supportive relationships and learning contexts which foster the capacity of early adolescents.

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT: CIVIC AND POLITICAL

The engagement of youth in communities, through both formal and informal civic and political activity, is critical to the continuation of civil society and to values of social justice and equity. Understanding the ways in which young people are engaging in this manner is crucial for informing both schools and out-of-school settings, and for drawing on the capacities of our youth to help engage us in solving the issues that they will be facing in the coming decades.

For Youth-Nex events, research, and more about the center visit: curry.virginia.edu/youth-nex

A Note from Founding Director: Patrick Tolan

Since its inception in 2009, Youth-Nex has, as its name represents, served as a nexus for cross-disciplinary and research-to-practice efforts to advance science and societal benefits with a focus on how effective development occurs. We have since been able to widen our scope to apply our work to divergent activities for multiple purposes and societal benefits. It has been my honor to be involved in that beginning and to witness and contribute to the even more exciting next phase with the dynamic leadership of Professor Deutsch.



“I raise my voice not so that I can shout, but so that those without a voice can be heard.”

- MALALA YOUSAFZAI

Activist for girls’ education and the youngest-ever Nobel Prize laureate

University of Virginia

YOUTH-NEX

Curry School of Education

405 Emmet Street South

P. O. Box 400281

Charlottesville, VA 22904-4281

Email: youth-nex@virginia.edu

Website: curry.virginia.edu/youth-nex

Phone: 434.924.7640



CURRY SCHOOL
of EDUCATION
YOUTH-NEX



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On the Cover:

Nathaniel McLean-Nichols, Associate Program Coordinator at the Center for Teen Empowerment, participating in the Youth-Nex conference *Youth Act: Social justice, Civic, and Political Engagement*, at the University of Virginia.