WE REALIZE THE TEENAGE YEARS ARE CRITICAL ONES FOR EVERY YOUNG PERSON. That is why our program is designed to serve each student for up to seven years — from middle school through high school. This program is comprised of three components: Goal-Setting Workshops in the Classroom, Theater Experiences, One-on-One Assistance, College Tours and Special Programming. All components work within the Project SUCCESS philosophy, which is to provide a non-judgmental, supportive setting where students can speak out and be heard, and where they learn to assess themselves and their options regarding their future. All program components are designed to help students gain confidence in creative thinking, decision making, goal setting and resourcefulness while developing the skills to plan their future.

SCHOOL-BASED WORKSHOPS For staff of professional facilitators lead workshops based on specifically-designed curricula developed for each grade level. Last year, we delivered 2,444 workshops to more than 19,500 young people in 18 Minnesota/Great North middle and high schools. Working together with teachers and school administrators, our curriculum has become an integral part of English/Language Arts classes, ensuring that our program reaches each child in every school. Students participate in a workshop once a month for a total of eight workshop experiences per student, per year. The curriculum guides young people through a variety of unique exercises, experiences and discussions to help them look at their interests, their strengths and desires for the future. We then work with them to set specific goals and take particular steps towards those goals. We call this process “dreaming with your eyes open,” and 90% of participating students report taking a positive step toward achieving their goals.

THEATER EXPERIENCES We believe in the power of theater to illuminate the world. We use professional theater as a springboard to inspire students to do the same and to help them look at the real issues they face. With the help of our generous professional theater partners, we offer students and their families the opportunity to attend between six and twelve theater experiences a year. These are not school field trips, but tickets to evening and weekend performances. We work with the schools and theaters to choose the appropriate plays, so we coordinate every element of the experience including providing free transportation and childcare, and we facilitate post-play discussions with the performers and directors.

ONE-ON-ONE ASSISTANCE, COLLEGE TOURS AND SPECIAL PROGRAMMING Career development is an integral component of our approach and every student receives one-on-one counseling. Each student also receives assistance with preparing for and attending college. Our staff of professional facilitators work closely with over 90% of participating students on college tours in Minnesota, Illinois, Iowa and Wisconsin. Other specialized programming we offer for middle school includes 1) annual Project SUCCESS-produced musicals and performances; 2) summer trips to the BWCA and 3) all school field trips to the theater. Over the course of a year students are afforded the following services: 4) 1-2 free professional theater performances — including free transportation to and from the performances and free child care 5) goal setting, in-class workshops with a Project SUCCESS facilitator 6) after-school counseling and support sessions 7) 1 or more college or community tours 8) phone calls or after conversations from Project SUCCESS staff 9) 3 other experiences, such as participating in an all school play production or a trip to the Boundary Waters Canoe Area

Project SUCCESS is a youth-development organization that works with students over a seven-year period, from middle school through high school, to help them develop life skills that can transform their lives. Through in-school goal-setting workshops, an innovative theater program, and after-school individual services, students learn to make informed choices and plan for meaningful futures. In borrowing from this year’s Olympics motto, it is with glowing hearts that we gratefully reflect upon this past year in the life of Project SUCCESS. As always, the place to start is by extending our most sincere gratitude to all of our extraordinary partners. Our families, schools, theaters, donors, volunteers, and community partners — it is because of you that we are able to carry out our mission of empowering young people to dream with their eyes open and work towards positive, productive futures. If the Olympic awards committee were judging the commitment and generosity of our partners, you would all receive shining gold medals!

In 1994 we began by serving 200 students, in one school. Our first ever theater outing with students was to see Macbeth at the Guthrie Theater. The whole thing was a risk. Who would come? What would they get out of the experience? But our gut said, “Do it!” And we did. And they came. And the amazing discussion about life choices that followed the performance showed us that it was worth the risk. Fast-forward seventeen years, and the Guthrie is once again staging Macbeth. This time, instead of serving 200 students and families, we’re serving more than 10,000. Instead of one theater partner, we have 29. Instead of one school, we serve 17. But our original mission remains strong. We still believe that with the encouragement of loving, committed, non-judgmental adults, young people are capable of nearly anything.

The initial risks described above have led to hundreds of other risks we’ve taken along the way — all in the name of serving young people in a way that they may live their best possible lives. We are always wanting and willing to learn and grow in order to successfully carry out our mission. This year we’ve expanded our programming to include more theater experiences, more college tours, more Boundary Waters Canoe trips, a strengthened classroom workshop curriculum, and Camp 2014, a week long empowerment experience for all Minneapolis incoming freshmen. We have a staff of 18 passionate, committed individuals, three of whom are Project SUCCESS alumni.

We walk into each day believing that all young people are champions in their own unique ways. Thank you for being our partner. We have found that every dream, big and small, is worth the risk. Thank you for risking with us. We look forward to our ongoing partnership.

— Adrienne Diercks and Julie Zelle
A 2009 U OF MN EVALUATION OF PROJECT SUCCESS, INCLUDING RESPONSES FROM OVER 5,000 STUDENTS AND TEACHERS, CONCLUDED THAT:

51% of high school students reported that Project SUCCESS helped them create a plan for after high school;

when asked who assisted them in planning for their future 95% of high school students rated Project SUCCESS ahead of friends, counselors and teachers and second only to parents or guardians.

71% of middle and 65% of high school students said they made a special effort to attend school when Project SUCCESS was in the classroom, and nearly 40% of English teachers perceived Project SUCCESS as having a positive impact on students’ overall grades and attendance.

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