

Issue Brief | Santa Clara County Children's Agenda

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Santa Clara County Children's Agenda Overview – Moving from Data to Action

Every child safe, healthy, successful in learning, successful in life.

Overview: *The goal of the Santa Clara County Children's Agenda is to improve the lives of children by focusing on improving thirteen indicators of child well-being. The Children's Agenda is a focused, integrated initiative that engages all segments of our community and provides a common vision for our community's children. It forces us, as a community, to move from data to action and to be accountable for how our children are faring. By working together with common goals, we are acting intentionally rather than reactively to current demands and problems. These outcomes guide our work.*

The Santa Clara County Children's Agenda

Each year our community invests hundreds of millions of dollars to improve the lives of children and families. Even with all this investment, we are not making the progress we would like in order to improve the lives of Santa Clara County's children. Despite the fact that Santa Clara County is one of the most affluent communities in the world, our most vulnerable children still suffer:

- More than 1 in 4 children have significant developmental needs in either self-regulation, language development or both when they enter kindergarten¹
- Overall, only 50% of our third grade students perform at the advanced or proficient levels on third grade reading tests. When we look closer at the data, we find the situation is worse for our economically disadvantaged students: only 24% of our economically disadvantaged students are proficient or better.²
- 24.7% of fifth, seventh and ninth graders in the county are overweight or at risk of being overweight based on calculations of the body mass index (BMI).³
- Only 8% of our middle and high school students have the developmental assets needed to thrive.⁴
- The misdemeanor juvenile arrest rate in Santa Clara County is nearly 43% higher than that statewide average.⁵

There is a need for a focused, integrated, cohesive, research-based effort that engages all segments of our community to improve the lives of children.

How the Children's Agenda Works:

In his book "Trying Hard Is Not Good Enough," Mark Friedman writes that many people working to improve the lives of children and families have an attitude that goes like this:

"These problems are so big and complicated, there's no way my program is going to make more than a small dent. . . . I will work in my little corner of the world and try hard. And if I try hard, at least I can sleep at night knowing I made a small difference."

People doing this work, care deeply about children, they want to see children's lives improve, and they may see the individual lives of **some** children and families improve. But most of the time these small improvements, if not linked, do not add up to making a difference for the broader community. On a community level, things do not change and the stream of children seeking help from our agencies remain constant, or even grows.

1. How to Support School Readiness and Success of Children, Families and Schools pp. 6-9 found at: www.appliedsurveyresearch.org/www/products/Study%20Circle%20White%20Paper%20FINAL.pdf
2. Santa Clara County Children's Report: Key Indicators of Well-being 2007, p.14; www.kidsdata.org/santaclarareport.
3. Ibid., p. 9
4. Developmental Assets 2005 Survey Results, Project Cornerstone; www.projectcornerstone.org/pdfs/exec_summary05.pdf
5. State of California Dept. of Justice, California Criminal Justice Profile 2005.

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The Children's Agenda tries to step outside of the programs and agencies providing services and look at what the overall conditions for children and families are. It demonstrates that the work we are all doing on behalf of children and families cannot be divided into silos such as health care, education, juvenile justice, social services, mental health and public safety. It shows us that we need to see the connections of our work and how our work influences overall child health and well-being.

By using community-level indicators, the Children's Agenda helps support a system of thought and action that allows population well-being and the performance of programs and agencies to be treated as separate but connected enterprises. By measuring our progress on specific data indicators, we create a way to focus our effort and we can forecast what is likely to happen if we don't do anything differently. The indicators allow us to:

- Develop a hypothesis about what actions we think may impact the indicator.
- Implement our hypothesis.
- Evaluate our impact.

Anecdotes and stories cannot really tell us if conditions are improving, but community level data can. If we are working really hard, and conditions are not improving, then something more or different is needed. If conditions are improving, then we know we can do more of what we are doing and be successful at improving children's lives. By working together with common goals, we are acting intentionally rather than reactively to current demands and problems. We can identify the "levers" that may have the most impact at improving the outcome. These outcomes will guide our work and will compel us to ask, "**Is it good for children?**"

The Theory of Change Behind the Children's Agenda

The Problem:

- Many families do not have the social networks and support to help build their capacity to meet the challenges and opportunities they face each day.
- Funding streams, the complexity of our systems and historical practices have prevented agencies and community organizations from providing seamless services and have created barriers for families in need of help and support.

The Children's Agenda can:

- Help us as a community, take responsibility for improving outcomes for children and to always ask, "Is it good for our children?"
- Provide the structure to creatively address the complex challenges facing children and families.
- Provide a means to collectively seek resources to support community level change.
- Measure whether or not we are actually improving lives.

Policymakers, funders and practitioners will:

- Understand how their decisions impact children and families.
- Forge and sustain meaningful partnerships.
- Dedicate resources to improve lives.

Our community will:

- Have systems that are more flexible and coordinated responses of the highest quality.
- Attract more resources to improve children's lives.
- Have families that have the resources they need and, **Every child will be safe, healthy successful in learning, successful in life.**

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The Thirteen Indicators of the Children's Agenda are:

- **Routine Access to Health Care**
Measures: Childhood Immunization Rates, Dental Care Visits, First Trimester Prenatal Care, Rates of Insured Children
- **Healthy Lifestyle**
Measures: State Physical Fitness Rates, Self-reported dietary habits and exercise rates
- **Early Social-Emotional Development**
Measures: School Readiness Assessment Ratings of Social Expression and Self-Regulation
- **Developmental Assets**
Measures: Developmental Assets Survey from Project Cornerstone, CA Healthy Kids Survey
- **Readiness for Kindergarten (New!)**
Measures: School Readiness Assessment
- **Third Grade Reading Scores**
Measures: California Standards Test
- **Eighth Grade Math Scores (New!)**
Measures: California Standards Test
- **Children Fluent in at Least Two Languages (New!)**
Measures: To be determined
- **High School Graduation Rates**
Measures: State Dept. Measures of Graduation and Drop-Out Rates
- **Child Abuse and Neglect**
Measures: State Child Welfare Data on Substantiated Cases, Removals, Cases of Neglect
- **Childhood Hunger**
Measures: BRFS: Parents Reporting they have run out of food and don't have money to buy more.
- **Juvenile Arrests**
Measures: State Dept. of Justice – Misdemeanor and Felony Arrest rates
- **Community Values Youth**
Measures: Developmental Assets Survey from Project Cornerstone, CA Healthy Kids Survey

The Interconnectedness of the Indicators:

A child who is hungry or whose teeth hurt is not likely to perform well in school. A child who does not feel safe in her local park, will not get the health and fitness benefit of play to avoid obesity. A child who becomes disconnected from school is more likely to become involved in the juvenile justice system. The work we need to do on behalf of children and families needs to be interconnected and cannot be divided into silos such as health care, education, juvenile justice, social services, mental health and public safety. We must see the connections and work together to improve children's lives.

We are tied together in the single garment of destiny, caught in an inescapable network of mutuality. And whatever affects one directly affects us all. For some strange reason I can never be what I ought to be until you are what you ought to be. And you can never be what you ought to be until I am what I ought to be.

–Rev. Martin Luther King, Jr.

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What will it take to succeed?

One example of great success is the Santa Clara County Children's Health Initiative. Santa Clara County residents were committed to the goal that all children should have health insurance. New partnerships were forged and Tobacco Settlement funds were dedicated to a new insurance product for children and extensive outreach to uninsured children. The power of this idea brought additional dollars to the County to support the new insurance product as well as the outreach effort. Governmental agencies changed their processes to simplify enrollment procedures and to go to the children rather than making the children come to them. Community based organizations, union organizations, faith-based organizations and schools all assisted in the outreach and sought out children who were not insured. The result is that 140,000 children have been enrolled for health insurance since the inception of the program and studies conducted by a noted researcher shows that children are not only insured, but are healthier too.

The Children's Agenda can provide the foundation for other successes. If as a community, we are willing to forge new partnerships and summon up the ambition to achieve our goals, to embrace systems change and to hold ourselves accountable, we will be able to stop kids from dropping out of high school, eliminate hunger, end child abuse, and have physically fit children with the developmental assets they need to thrive.

To Become Involved with the Children's Agenda . . .

Kids in Common has or will publish issue briefs that will highlight each of the indicators of the Children's Agenda. These issue briefs will help us move from data to action by discussing the current data and its implications and describe actions that are being taken to "turn the curve" on the data – that is, actions being taken to make a difference in how children are faring. When appropriate, Kids in Common will also hold issue forums on data indicators. These issue forums will provide emerging information on the indicator and provide opportunities to forge new partnerships. Kids in Common will also be asking local officials to support the outcomes of the Children's Agenda as they consider policy and budget decisions that may impact children and families.

Policymakers, funders, practitioners and community members are encouraged to join the Children's Agenda Action Network in order to receive updates on work around the indicators and other work to support the implementation of the Children's Agenda. (Go to www.kidsincommon.org for information on joining the Children's Agenda Network and for our issue briefs and other updates.)

Sources:

Common Purpose: Sharing Responsibility for Child and Family Outcomes, Keynote presentation given by Lisbeth B. Schorr, September 2006. Available at www.nccp.org

Santa Clara County Children's Report: Key Indicators of Well-being 2007. Available at www.kidsdata.org/santaclarareport

Trying Hard is Not Good Enough, Mark Friedman, Trafford Publishing, 2005.

The Children's Agenda is being led by Kids in Common, a 501(c) (3) non-profit organization.

Kids in Common advocates for policies, partnerships and investments that improve children's lives in Santa Clara County. Children need a strong public voice – a voice that promotes and protects their best interests. Kids in Common is that voice and challenges leaders and decision-makers in our community to act on behalf of children.

As the only organization that focuses on systemic change to improve children's lives in Santa Clara County, we convene agencies that care about children's well-being. We advocate for effective investment and policies for children and support the mobilization of public and private resources to meet those needs. We inform decision makers on best practices and champion local implementation. Kids in Common is steadfast in speaking and acting on behalf of children and brings a uniquely qualified perspective that is grounded in research and data. Our work is driven by the question, "Is it good for our children?"



For the most current data on how Santa Clara County children are faring, go to:

www.kidsdata.org