



# THE STATE OF CHILD & YOUTH WELL-BEING

in the  
CITY OF SANTA CRUZ



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**Prepared by**  
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## CITY OF SANTA CRUZ CHILDREN & YOUTH BILL OF RIGHTS

Adopted by the Santa Cruz City Council, December 2021

### All children and youth have the right to:

1. Have a healthy mind, body, and spirit that enables them to maximize their potential.
2. Develop a healthy attachment to a parent, guardian, or caregiver and an ongoing relationship with a caring and supporting adult.
3. Have a safe and healthy environment, including homes, schools, neighborhoods, and communities.
4. Have access to quality education that promotes future success in school, career, and life.
5. Have training in life skills that will prepare them to live independently, be self-sufficient, and positively contribute to their community.
6. Have employment opportunities with protections from unfair labor practices.
7. Have freedom from mistreatment, abuse, and neglect.
8. Voice opinions in matters of interest to them, develop their leadership capacity, and engage in their community.
9. Feel supported by the larger community and maintain a sense of hope for the future.
10. Be encouraged to explore and express their innate curiosity and creativity.

“The true measure of a nation’s standing is how well it attends its children — their health and safety, their material security, their education and socialization, and their sense of being loved, valued, and included in the families and societies to which they were born.”

UNICEF REPORT CARD 7

## QUICK LIST: OPPORTUNITIES FOR ACTION

This report identifies several **Opportunities for Action** by the City of Santa Cruz to advance the Bill of Rights for children and youth. The Opportunities are embedded throughout the report — identified by the gears icon — after the Rights they are associated with. They are listed below for quick reference.

-  Use the **Children & Youth Bill of Rights and State of Child & Youth Well-being Reports** for budget and programmatic decision making.
-  Conduct outreach to **promote the availability of the City’s existing Teen and Youth programs.**
-  Explore reinstating the **PRIDE Program for youth** facing the greatest barriers to well-being.
-  Maintain a commitment to **accessible and safe parks and other spaces** for children and youth to gather.
-  Continue and expand on **partnerships with educational institutions**, including the County Office of Education, Santa Cruz City Schools, Cabrillo College, and UC Santa Cruz.
-  Maintain the **Public Safety Teen Academy/Explorer Program**, a collaboration with the Fire and Police Departments during the summer.
-  Expand **internship, vocational, and pre-apprenticeship opportunities** in city departments.
-  Address **Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children (CSEC)** through law enforcement and city homeless service providers trainings.
-  Appoint Council and staff representatives to **child/youth-focused initiatives.**
-  Formalize the **Youth Liaison position (with a stipend)** to support youth participation and leadership development.
-  Integrate **Youth Liaison and other youth as key stakeholders** to be consulted on City policy issues.
-  Integrate **Youth Liaison and other opportunities for youth voice and involvement** in implementation of the City’s climate action plan.
-  Analyze and make continuous improvements to **accessibility of City committees and commissions** for youth and young adults.
-  Conduct bi-annual presentation to the City Council on **“The State of Child & Youth Well-being in Santa Cruz.”**

## THE CITY OF SANTA CRUZ'S COMMITMENT TO THE RIGHTS OF CHILDREN & YOUTH

**All children and youth have the right to live happy, healthy, fulfilling lives**, no matter who they are, what they look like, where they were born, where they live, what language they speak, or what they believe. No young person should be treated unfairly for any reason.

**Children and youth deserve to be loved unconditionally and feel a sense of belonging in their families and communities.** Parents/caregivers — which includes birth parents, stepparents, grandparents or other relatives, foster or adoptive parents, and other caring adults in a parenting role — are children's first and most important teachers. They hold the important job of providing safe, nurturing relationships and environments that are essential for healthy brain development, particularly in the first five years of life. This lays the foundation for health and well-being at every stage of life. Parents/caregivers also have the right to not just survive, but to thrive.

**Children and youth need to have the resources, opportunities, and experiences that promote optimal health, education, economic, and social outcomes.** They deserve to live, learn, and play in communities that are intentionally designed for belonging and inclusion and foster the well-being of the “whole child, whole family, whole community.” Differences in access to resources, opportunities, and outcomes should not be predictable by race, class, gender, sexual orientation, disability, religion, language, culture, or other aspects of their identities.

While many people and institutions share these beliefs about what children and youth deserve, **our society still has a long way to go before these words are a reality for all children and youth** (defined by the City as children under age 18 and young adults ages 18-24). Minor children do not have the power to vote, but their everyday lives are affected by programs, policies, rules, laws, and budget decisions made at all levels of government. Many times, these decisions benefit some groups of children and youth more than others because they provide greater, easier, or guaranteed access to the resources and opportunities that children and youth (and their families) need to thrive. Those same decisions may simultaneously disadvantage other groups of children and youth because they reduce or block access to the resources and opportunities needed to survive, let alone thrive.

This dynamic creates, maintains, and exacerbates **structural inequities** — i.e., the systematic and ingrained differences in access to resources, opportunities, and fair treatment that contribute to predictable, but preventable, differences in well-being

outcomes. Structural inequities exist in both the public and private sectors and across all systems that touch the lives of children, youth, and families: education, health, housing, employment, criminal justice, child care, philanthropy, and more. The inequities are typically a result of historical and ongoing patterns of discrimination based on race, gender, socioeconomic status, religion, sexual orientation, and other characteristics. They are "structural" because they are deeply embedded in society's institutions, laws, regulations, and norms, making them persistent and difficult to eliminate without systemic change.

To create the systemic change needed, our society needs to guarantee all children and youth the right to live happy, healthy, fulfilling lives. However, the United States is the only United Nations member not to ratify the **Convention on the Rights of the Child**,<sup>i</sup> a globally recognized and respected framework for children's rights anchored in four core principles: 1) nondiscrimination, 2) the best interests of the child, 3) survival and development, and 4) participation and inclusion.<sup>ii</sup>

**“In the absence of an overarching and coherent framework and system of accountability to ensure every child achieves their optimal health and well-being, children in the United States face increasing inequalities and health outcomes.”**

– Reimagining Children's Rights in the United States

This statement is true not only across the nation, but in our own community. For this reason, the Santa Cruz City Council adopted the **Children & Youth Bill of Rights** (Bill of Rights) in December 2021, becoming the first body of electeds in the county to do so. The Santa Cruz County Board of Supervisors followed suit in May 2022, as well as the City of Capitola, in July 2023.

The Bill of Rights serves as both a compass and an accountability tool to ensure that City leaders keep the needs of young people at the forefront of decisions about budgets and government policies. It complements other policies and initiatives the City has adopted and supported, including but not limited to:

- **City of Santa Cruz Children's Fund** — The Children's Fund was initially created in 2017 through a City Council policy, then later enshrined in the City Charter when voters approved Measure A. Twenty percent of revenue generated by the Cannabis Business Tax is allocated to the dedicated Children's Fund to support

enhancement and expansion of evidenced-based programs and to prioritize access to early childhood development, prevention, and vulnerable youth programs.

Since its creation, the Children's Fund has provided scholarships for youth and children to access Santa Cruz City Parks and Recreation programs, early learning support and, during the pandemic, childcare scholarships for essential workers. A Children's Fund Oversight Committee has been established to oversee the distribution of funds, consistent with the intent of Measure A. The Oversight Committee is in the process of developing a new application and criteria for selecting who will receive funds each year.

- **Health in All Policies (HiAP)** — In November 2018, the City Council adopted a Health in All Policies (HiAP) ordinance and a set of community-informed implementation recommendations developed by a subcommittee of Councilmembers and Department Heads. Staff in the City Manager's Office have continued to support the Council in developing and implementing an annual HiAP workplan and evaluating and reporting on progress.

The three pillars of the HiAP approach are reflected throughout the Bill of Rights. **Equity** is brought to the forefront by prioritizing youth, who traditionally are not prioritized or given a voice in government budgeting and programmatic decisions. **Sustainability** is woven into the Bill of Rights by addressing healthy environments and healthy living. **Health** and well-being are the overarching purpose and ultimate goal of each of the 10 Rights.

- **Youth Action Network (YAN)** — YAN is a community impact initiative (formerly known as the Youth Violence Prevention Network) composed of youth and adults working together to identify emerging needs in our community and to increase overall youth-wellbeing through youth voice and youth leadership. The City has committed to participate in the YAN, in support of YAN's goals:
  1. **Youth-Adults Partnerships:** Increase youth supported by caring adults and relationships with local decision-makers.
  2. **Youth Voice:** Increase meaningful participation and opportunities for youth to share their voices, ideas, and leadership for youth within Santa Cruz County.
  3. **Youth Leadership Development:** Increase knowledge of youth leadership development and capacity for creating change in the community.

## ABOUT THE STATE OF CHILD & YOUTH WELL-BEING REPORT

This inaugural report on **The State of Child & Youth Well-being** (Well-being Report) is a companion to the Bill of Rights that highlights how children and youth in the City of Santa Cruz are faring in multiple dimensions — or CORE Conditions — of health and well-being. The Well-being Report provides context and data to help inform the City’s priorities, decisions, and actions to advance well-being in each of the 10 Rights. The report is organized by these sections:

### 1. CORE Conditions for Health and Well-being (pp. 9-10)

A framework for aligning community-level well-being indicators with the Bill of Rights

### 2. Who Are the Children and Youth in Santa Cruz?

Key demographic characteristics of children and youth (ages 0-24) in the City of Santa Cruz

### 3. How Are Children and Youth in Santa Cruz Faring?

This section includes:

- **Data Snapshots** featuring a select number of community-level indicators of health and well-being for each Right, aligned with the CORE Conditions
- **Community Insights** shared by youth, parents/caregivers, and community partners during a Community Meeting held on May 8, 2023
- **Current City Programs** that support efforts to increase opportunities and improve outcomes in each Right
- **Opportunities for Action** by the City Council and staff to advance each Right. The Opportunities were identified by the Council subcommittee that developed the Bill of Rights. Additional Opportunities may be identified and added by Councilmembers and staff.

### 4. Appendices

- **Appendix A** contains additional context and technical notes about the data (including limitations to consider)
- **Appendix B** provides a description and more detailed summary of the Community Meeting held on May 8
- **Appendix C** provides a description of the California Strong Start Index

### 5. References



## CORE CONDITIONS FOR HEALTH & WELL-BEING

Each item in the Children & Youth Bill of Rights is related to one or more of the **CORE Conditions for Health and Well-being** — eight vital, interconnected conditions, with **equity at the center**, that every person needs to experience in order to have optimal health and well-being across the lifespan.



### 1. Health & Wellness

Optimal physical, mental, social-emotional, behavioral, and spiritual health across the life span



### 2. Lifelong Learning & Education

High-quality education and learning opportunities from birth through the end of life



### 3. Economic Security & Social Mobility

Stable employment, livable wages, food security, ability to afford basic needs, wealth accumulation, and prosperity



### 4. Thriving Families

Safe, nurturing relationships and environments that promote optimal health and well-being of all family members across generations



### 5. Community Connectedness

A sense of belonging, diverse and inclusive neighborhoods and institutions, vibrant arts and cultural life, and the power of civic engagement



### 6. Healthy Environments

A clean, safe, sustainable natural environment and a built environment and infrastructure that supports health and well-being



### 7. Safe, Just Communities



Fair, humane approaches to ensuring personal, public, and workplace safety that foster trust, respect, and dignity.



### 8. Stable, Affordable Housing & Shelter

An adequate supply of housing and shelter that is safe, healthy, affordable, and accessible

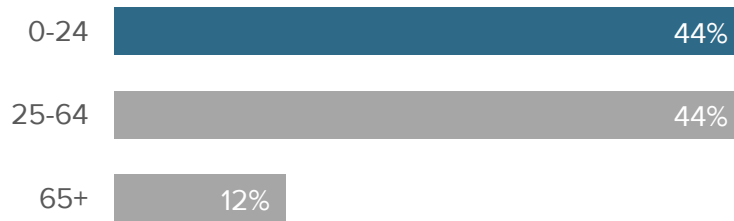
The CORE Conditions provide a common language and framework for people and organizations across all sectors to identify community strengths and challenges, prioritize actions to improve conditions of well-being, and measure progress and collective impact over time. The City plays an important role in fostering the CORE Conditions through its programs, policies, initiatives, and budget decisions. The City has already aligned some elements of its work with the CORE Conditions, including the HiAP evaluation framework and the CORE Investments contracts for community-based services, co-funded with the County of Santa Cruz. The table below summarizes the indicators included in this report.

Right	Indicator		CORE Condition	Page
1	Strong Start Score		Health & Wellness	15
	Physical Health: Health Status			
	Emotional Wellness: Positive Feelings & Thoughts of Suicide			
	Behavioral Health: Substance Use			
	Psychological Distress			
2	Home Supports: High Expectations		Community Connectedness	18
	Caring Relationships with Adults at School			
3	Rent Spending	  	Stable, Affordable Housing & Shelter Safe, Just Communities Healthy Environments	)20
	Unhoused Children, Youth & Young Adults			
	Safety at School			
	Park Access			
4	Subsidized Child Care		Lifelong Learning & Education	22
	English Language Arts/Literacy			
	Mathematics			
	High School Graduation			
	Enrollment in Higher Education			
5, 6	Employment		Economic Security & Mobility	24
	Children Living in Poverty			
	Internet Access			
7	Family Reading		Thriving Families	26
	Positive Childhood Experiences (PCEs) – Teens			
	Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) – Teens			
	Child Maltreatment			
8	Ever Volunteered in the Community	 	Community Connectedness Healthy Environments	27-28
	Belief in Ability to Make a Difference			
	Confidence to Contact Someone in Government			
	Voting Empowers Community Members			
	Voter Turnout			
	Concern about Climate Change			
9, 10	Social and Emotional Health: Optimism		Community Connectedness	29
	School Supports: High Expectations			
	Connected to Others Making a Difference			

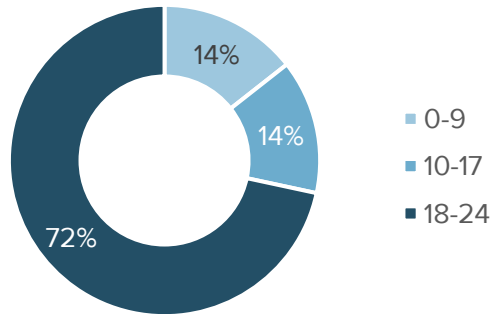
## WHO ARE THE CHILDREN & YOUTH IN SANTA CRUZ?

### AGE

The City of Santa Cruz has a population of 62,714 people. **Children and youth under the age of 25** make up **nearly half** of the City’s population.<sup>iii</sup>

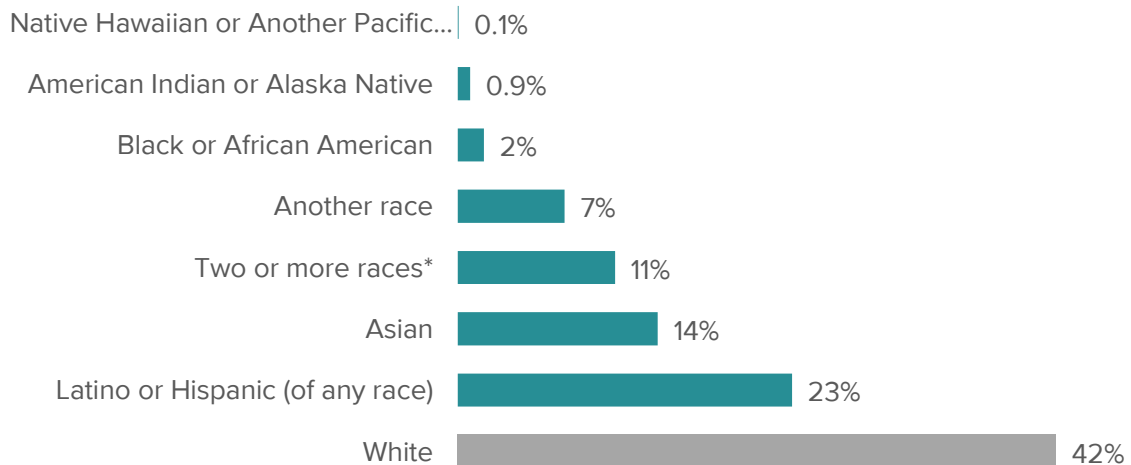


The majority of children and youth in this age range are **young adults, ages 18-24**.<sup>iv</sup>



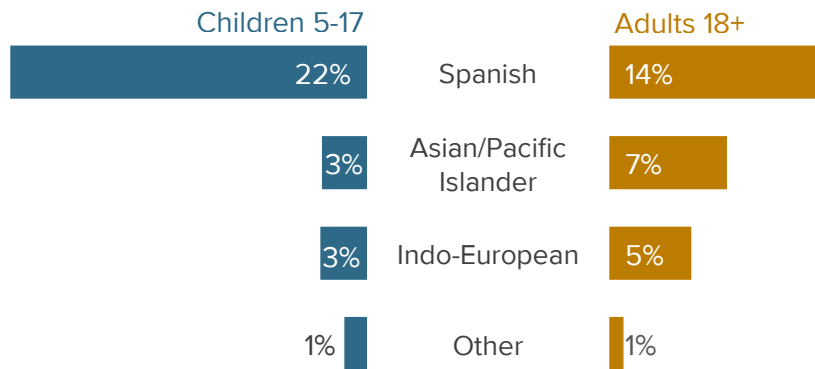
### RACE AND ETHNICITY

Although there are small numbers of individuals within specific racial or ethnic groups, collectively the majority of children and youth under age 25 in the City are **Black, Indigenous, People of Color (BIPOC)**.<sup>v</sup>



## LANGUAGE

Nearly 30% of children (ages 5 – 17) in the City of Santa Cruz **speak a language other than English at home**. A similar percentage of adults ages 18 and older speaks a language other than English at home. Spanish is the most common language, followed by Indo-European and Asian/Islander languages, and “Other” languages.<sup>vi</sup>

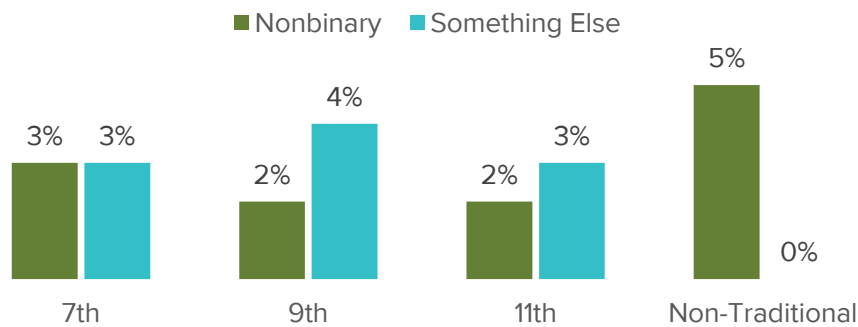


## GENDER IDENTITY AND SEXUAL ORIENTATION

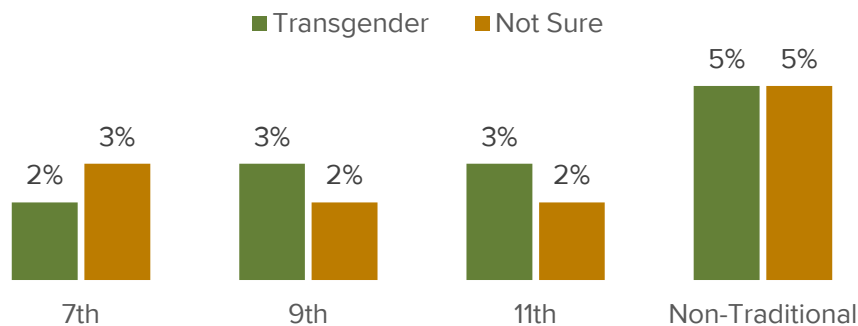
According to the U.S. Census Bureau’s American Community Survey (ACS), 52% of children and youth in the City of Santa Cruz are female, and 48% are male.<sup>vii</sup> However, data on other gender identities and sexual orientation are not yet available through the ACS.

The California Healthy Kids Survey (CHKS), completed by a sample of students in grades 5, 7, 9, 11 and Non-Traditional schools (including alternative education), provides a more nuanced understanding of how students in the Santa Cruz City Schools (SCCS) District define their gender and sexual orientation.

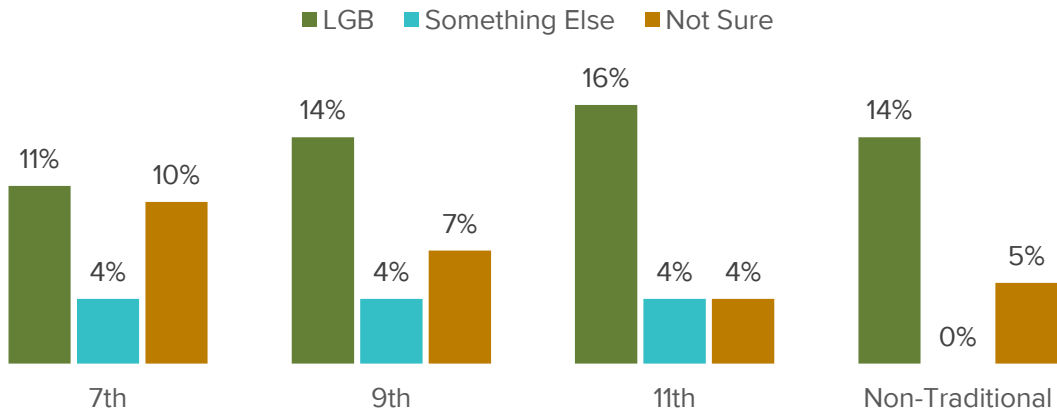
In School Year (SY) 2022-23, between 2–5% of students in grades 7-9 and Non-Traditional schools who completed the CHKS (n = 1,570) identified their gender as **nonbinary** or **“something else.”**<sup>viii</sup>



When asked whether their gender is different from the sex they were assigned at birth, 2–5% of student respondents said they are **transgender**, and another 2–5% said they are not sure.<sup>ix</sup> The remaining students either did not answer this question (3–5%) or said they are not transgender (86–92%).



In the same survey, 15–20% of student respondents identified their **sexual orientation** as Lesbian, Gay, or Bisexual (LGB) or “Something Else,” while 4–10% were not sure.



### FAMILY ECONOMICS

All students can participate in school nutrition programs. However, students with family incomes under 130% of the federal poverty line are eligible for free meals, and those with incomes between 130–185% of the poverty line are eligible for reduced-price meals. This is one indicator of families’ economic security.

In SCCS, one-third or more of students are **eligible for free or reduced price school meals**.<sup>x</sup> This means that many students may be living in families experiencing food insecurity or unable to meet other basic needs, which can affect the ability of children and youth to learn and be healthy. Additional data on family economics are included in a later section of this report.



of Santa Cruz City Schools  
Elementary students are eligible for  
free or reduced price school meals



of Santa Cruz City Schools High  
School students are eligible for free  
or reduced price school meals

## HOW ARE CHILDREN & YOUTH IN SANTA CRUZ FARING?

The **Data Snapshots** presented on the following pages include several indicators, using the most current, publicly available data available at the time this report was produced. Quantitative data can paint a useful, clear picture of strengths, gaps, and differences in well-being that may warrant further exploration or action by the City. But quantitative data only tell part of the story and should be considered carefully, in the right context, particularly given these important details (described further in **Appendix A**):

- The data are inclusive but not exhaustive. While this report is thorough, it still contains a relatively small subset of data related to child and youth well-being.
- The effects of the pandemic are reflected in the data, not only in terms of the status of well-being (or areas of concern), but the consistency and reliability of trend data, which makes it difficult to accurately assess or interpret changes over time.
- Some data represent small numbers of children and youth, which means percentages may not be representative of all children and youth. The data are suppressed (S) by the original sources if the numbers or percentages are too small, to preserve confidentiality. This makes it very difficult to identify indicators where City-level data can be disaggregated by age (up to age 24), race and ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, and other demographic characteristics.
- Data are collected at different times and frequencies, depending on the sources. In some cases, City of Santa Cruz data are from a more recent year than the countywide and California data. In these instances, the county and state data were provided as a point of reference (or omitted if too old) but should not be compared to the City data.

The following symbols are used when multiple years of data were available from the original, cited source. The absence of a symbol means there was not enough (or any) data from previous years.

- + Indicates a positive (desired) change of at least 2 points since the prior measurement period
- × Indicates a negative (unwanted) change of at least 2 points since the prior measurement period
- Indicates no change or an increase/decrease of 1 point since the prior measurement period

**RIGHT #1: CHILDREN AND YOUTH HAVE A HEALTHY MIND, BODY, AND SPIRIT THAT ENABLES THEM TO MAXIMIZE THEIR POTENTIAL.**

**Data Snapshot**



**CORE Condition: Health & Wellness**

Optimal physical, mental, social-emotional, behavioral, and spiritual health

		City SC	Countywide	CA
<b>Strong Start Score</b>		<b>2021</b>	<b>2021</b>	<b>2021</b>
Average number of birth assets (out of 12) that promote resilience (See <a href="#">Appendix C</a> for a description of the Strong Start Index) <sup>xi</sup>		10.2 +	9.6 +	9.2 ○
<b>Physical Health: Health Status</b>		<b>2021</b>	<b>2021</b>	<b>2021</b>
Children and youth who are in Excellent or Very Good health <sup>xii</sup> S = Suppressed due to small number	Ages 0-11	City-level data not available	95% +	88% ✗
	Ages 12-17		60% ✗	60% ✗
	Ages 18-24		S	56% ✗
<b>Emotional Wellness: Positive Feelings</b>		<b>2022</b>	<b>2021</b>	
Students who <u>did not</u> experience frequent or chronic sadness or hopeless feelings (most or all of the time) in the past 12 months* <sup>xiii</sup> NT = Non-Traditional schools (alternative education)	Grade 5	91%	Unknown	Current data not available
	Grade 7	77% +	64% ✗	
	Grade 9	69% +	56% ✗	
	Grade 11	70% +	50% ✗	
	NT	76% +	45% ✗	
<b>Emotional Wellness: No Thoughts of Suicide</b>		<b>2022</b>	<b>2021</b>	
Students who <u>did not</u> seriously consider attempting suicide in the past 12 months* <sup>xiv</sup>	Grade 7	92% ○	88% ○	Current data not available
	Grade 9	86% ○	85% ✗	
	Grade 11	88% ○	85% ○	
	NT	86%	78% ○	
<b>Behavioral Health: Substance Use</b>		<b>2022</b>	<b>2021</b>	
Students who <u>did not</u> have one or more drinks of alcohol in the past 30 days* <sup>xv</sup>	Grade 7	96% ✗	97% +	Current data not available
	Grade 9	89% ✗	95% +	
	Grade 11	73% +	85% +	
	NT	76% ✗	82% +	
<b>Psychological Distress</b>			<b>2021</b>	<b>2021</b>
Youth or young adult is likely to have had serious psychological distress during the past year <sup>xvi</sup>	Male: 10-17	City-level data not available	64% ✗	29% ✗
	Female: 10-17		64% ✗	39% ○
	Male & Female: 18-24		46% ✗	30% ○

\*See technical notes in Appendix A



## Community Insights

The Community Insights throughout the report come from a May 2023 community meeting in which adults and youth discussed issues related to early childhood and school-aged youth, adolescents, and young adults.

- Mental health remains an ongoing area of need. Poor mental health was a concern prior to the pandemic, but the pandemic’s disruption and isolation amplified these issues. Private therapy is extremely expensive, especially if the service is not covered by insurance, which makes it inaccessible for many who need it.
- Youth who attended the community meeting expressed concern about mental health struggles among their peers and the lack of support, especially in the period after the COVID-19 lockdowns. During the pandemic, students’ physical health also suffered. One student shared that they stayed active by getting into surfing. This led to learning about issues like coastal erosion and ocean safety. Ocean safety has been a top issue lately, especially after the recent drowning of a local student at Its Beach.
- Other concerns raised included, “Youth [are] not taught how to respond to mental health behaviors,” and “Kids don’t know that they have a learning disability (comes out in different ways, i.e., behavior).”
- Child care providers have expressed concerns that young children are not exhibiting typical social-emotional development for their age. Their overall ability to self-regulate emotions and interact with peers has been negatively impacted by pandemic-related isolation.
- School counselors in Santa Cruz City Schools (SCCS) district are seeing more diagnoses of depression, anxiety, and eating disorders. They are providing more counselors on campus and holding mental health pop-up days to destigmatize help-seeking behaviors. They are offering suicide awareness for all middle and high school students and expanding the K-8 social-emotional learning curriculum. School staff and counselors are also working to address social media use and its effects on mental health.
- One participant noted the need to have “Better access to diagnosis of children to better meet their academic and psychological needs → validating kids’ experiences with difficult teachers and adults, allowing conversations to be two-sided, with two stories, and understanding that just because kids struggle to express emotions, that the roots of those emotions are still valid.”

While the increased demand for mental health services is concerning, it also could be a positive indication that there is less stigma about seeking mental health care.

One community meeting participant asked, *“Are the increasing mental health services demands partially driven by new awareness of and ownership over mental health in our youth and young adults? In short, are our youth demanding more from us?”*

- The mental health needs of community college and university students have grown, too, with demands for services at an all-time high — approximately double pre-pandemic levels at Cabrillo College, which sees about 100 students a month with mental health appointments. The increased need is related to the impact of isolation and less connection during COVID, as well as the role of social media. In the small-group discussion, one participant raised the concern about, “Young adults dealing with anxiety, leaning into drugs and then destroy their lives going down that path.”
- The good news is that California adopted a Master Plan for Kids’ Mental Health and is investing in initiatives like the Children’s Youth and Behavioral Health Initiative, CalAIM, Community Schools, and other reforms. This should bring enhanced resources to our county for training and vital services.

### Current City Programs

The City operates several programs and services in support of this Right, including:

- Santa Cruz Teen Center: A free, drop-in recreational facility dedicated to creating a safe and diverse environment for teens. In addition to daily activities, the Teen Center offers homework help, special events, day and overnight trips, sports and outdoor events, young men’s and women’s circle groups, and healthy cooking activities.
- Aquatics: Junior Guards builds confidence in the beach and ocean environment. Recreation Swim is offered at Harvey West Pool for pool play.
- Recreation Classes: A variety of classes for youth are offered three seasons a year (Fall, Winter-Spring, and Summer) including STEAM classes, soccer, skateboarding, martial arts, basketball, beach volleyball, art, theater, and after-school enrichment.
- Parks: Provides essential recreational resources used by children and youth, including 21 playgrounds, 3 skate parks, 3 bicycle pump tracks, 1 BMX park, 3 beaches, the Harvey West Pool, athletic fields used by Santa Cruz Little League, Santa Cruz Youth Soccer, and Pop Warner football.
- DeLaveaga Golf Course: Offers free golf and tee times to the Santa Cruz, Harbor, and Soquel High School teams; discounted golf rates to players 18 years and under, including \$5 rounds to participants in the Youth on Course program.



#### OPPORTUNITY FOR ACTION

- ✓ **Use the Children & Youth Bill of Rights and State of Child & Youth Well-being Reports** for budget and programmatic decision making.

**RIGHT #2: THEY DEVELOP A HEALTHY ATTACHMENT TO A PARENT, GUARDIAN, OR CAREGIVER AND AN ONGOING RELATIONSHIP WITH A CARING AND SUPPORTING ADULT.**

**Data Snapshot**



**CORE Condition: Community Connectedness**

A sense of belonging, diverse and inclusive neighborhoods and institutions, vibrant arts and cultural life, and the power of civic engagement.

		City SC	County SC	CA
<b>Home Supports: High Expectations</b> Students who have a parent or other grown-up at home who has high expectations of them (wants them to do their best) * xvii		<b>2022</b>		NA
	Grade 5	96%	NA	
<b>Caring Relationships with Adults at School</b> Students who have a caring relationship with a teacher/adult at school* xviii		<b>2022</b>	<b>2021</b>	Current data not available
	Grade 5	78%	NA	
	Grade 7	59% +	60% ○	
	Grade 9	62% +	56% ✗	
	Grade 11	60% +	62% +	
	NT	48% +	76% ✗	

\*See technical notes in Appendix A

**Community Insights**

- In the discussion on early childhood and school-aged children, one concern was, “parents who feel disconnected and overwhelmed.” Multiple participants in that group suggested ideas to expand access to the Triple P – Positive Parenting Program. They would like to see more Triple P classes led or co-led by parents, in other community settings and spaces, and for additional age groups. (Note: Triple P is currently available for free to families with children ages 0-17+. First 5 Santa Cruz County oversees the countywide implementation, and services are provided by various community-based organizations.)
- One of the panelists noted that it is encouraging to see parent-centered approaches being supported by the County, City of Santa Cruz, and schools partners — e.g., City of Santa Cruz Children’s Fund; CORE Investments funding for the countywide Cradle to Career (C2C) initiative (which includes parent-led efforts and participation from families at Bayview and Gault elementary schools, among others); and the Thrive by 5 initiative (parent leaders serve on the Advisory Committee).

In the discussion focused on adolescents, one participant shared their view that, “[The] City should be more present at the schools (reach out and be there).” Multiple

students who attended the community meeting said they didn't know about the City's Teen Center.

- Other suggestions about policies and programs that would make life better for adolescents and their families included, “More spaces for youth to hang out at (like Circle Church)” and “Have schools be a true hub, a place to receive information and feel connected.”

## Current City Programs

- Teen and Youth programs: The Santa Cruz Teen Center, Summer Camps, Classes, and Junior Guards are programs that have participants return year after year and develop positive, supportive relationships with staff, the Teen Center being the most consistent and daily touch point. The City's Junior Guard instructors provide key mentorship for participants as they move through the program.
- Field rentals: Parks and Recreation provides discounted rentals to youth sports organizations (Little League, Pony League, Youth Soccer). These programs foster positive relationships with adult coaches and teachers.



### OPPORTUNITY FOR ACTION

- ✓ Conduct outreach to **promote the availability of the City's existing Teen and Youth programs.**
- ✓ **Explore reinstating the PRIDE Program for youth** facing the greatest barriers to well-being. The program focused on relationships inside the home and provided participants with a supportive mentor. It was previously coordinated by the Santa Cruz Police Department in collaboration with Santa Cruz City Schools.



**RIGHT #3: THEY HAVE A SAFE AND HEALTHY ENVIRONMENT, INCLUDING HOMES, SCHOOLS, NEIGHBORHOODS, AND COMMUNITIES.**

**Data Snapshot**



**CORE Condition: Stable, Affordable Housing & Shelter**

An adequate supply of housing and shelter that is safe, healthy, affordable, and accessible.

		City SC	County SC	CA
<b>Rent Spending</b>		<b>2017-2021</b>	<b>2017-2021</b>	<b>2017-2021</b>
Renters who spend 30% or more of their household income on rent <sup>xxix</sup>	Ages 15-24	Data not available	76% +	Data not available
	Overall	56% +	54% +	54% +
<b>Unhoused</b>			<b>2022</b>	<b>2022</b>
Percentages of unhoused population that are children and youth <sup>xx</sup>	< Age 18	City-level data by age not available	4% +	9% +
	Ages 18-24		10% +	6% ○
Unhoused, unaccompanied young adults (18-24), sheltered and unsheltered <sup>xxi</sup>	Total Number		222 +	9,046 ×
	Sheltered		3% ×	29% ×
	Unsheltered		97% ×	71% ×



**CORE Condition: Safe & Just Community**

Fair, humane approaches to ensuring personal, public, and workplace safety that foster trust, respect, and dignity.

		City SC	County SC	CA
<b>Safety at School</b>		<b>2022</b>	<b>2021</b>	
Students who felt safe at school most or all of the time* <sup>xxii</sup>	Grade 5	84%**	NA	Current data not available
	Grade 7	65% ×	68% +	
	Grade 9	61% ×	68% +	
	Grade 11	62% ×	74% +	
	NT	57% ×	78% +	

\*See technical notes in Appendix A



**CORE Condition: Healthy Environments**

A clean, safe, sustainable natural environment and a built environment and infrastructure that supports health and well-being.

		City SC	County SC	CA
<b>Park Access</b>		<b>2020</b>	<b>2020</b>	<b>2020</b>
Residents who live within a half mile from a park <sup>xxiii</sup>		100%	86%	79%
Residents who live in areas with less than 3 acres of parks or open space per 1,000 residents <sup>xxiv</sup>		26%	32%	39%

## Community Insights

- Youth who attended the Community Meeting said they don't feel like there is a venue for youth to gather to share ideas. Several of them didn't know about the City's Teen Center. They expressed a desire for more safe, accessible spaces for youth to hang out (like Circle Church).
- Other participant suggestions for policies and programs that would make life better for children, youth, and families included: Access to Harvey West Pool for youth of all ages and community (swim lessons, ocean safety, summer camps); surfing for all; equitable access to surf for all youth (transportation, lessons, equipment, scholarship/low cost, diverse mentors); and ocean safety for all.
- Participants also expressed safety concerns related to the prevalence of substance abuse in the community, particularly downtown Santa Cruz. One participant suggested providing resources and tools for youth to learn how to navigate aggressive or violent behaviors of people who are unhoused.
- City staff work directly with schools on initiatives like Safe Spaces and the Teen Center, addressing community need by creating programs that the Parks and Recreation team can offer. Looking ahead, Parks and Recreation staff are trying to expand their outreach so that more people use spaces and programs, especially with an equity lens. One way to address equity is to offer scholarships for those who might not be able to afford activities, but the demand for scholarships for programs has been "through the roof," and they are unable to meet the demand. Support from the Children's Fund could allow the City to expand Harvey West Pool hours this summer.

Participants in the discussion focused on young adults said,

"We need housing, higher wages, better transit. **Students' interests are everyone's interests.**"

## Current City Programs

- The Santa Cruz Teen Center: A free, drop-in recreational facility dedicated to creating a safe and diverse environment for the teen community in order to empower youth, foster creativity and promote alternate forms of education. Currently open Monday - Friday, 3:00 - 8:00 pm.
- Parks: Essential, free recreational resources used by children and youth, including 21 playgrounds, 3 skate parks, 3 bicycle pump tracks, 1 BMX park, 3 beaches



### OPPORTUNITY FOR ACTION

- ✓ Maintain a commitment to **accessible and safe parks and other spaces** for children and youth to gather.

**RIGHT #4: THEY HAVE ACCESS TO QUALITY EDUCATION THAT PROMOTES FUTURE SUCCESS IN SCHOOL, CAREER AND LIFE.**

**Data Snapshot**



**CORE Condition: Lifelong Learning & Education**

High-quality education and learning opportunities from birth through the end of life.

		City SC	County SC	CA
<b>Subsidized Child Care</b>		<b>2020</b>	<b>2020</b>	<b>2020</b>
Unmet need for subsidized child care for children who are income-eligible (95060, 95062, 95064, 95065 zip codes) <sup>xxv</sup>	0-2 yrs	97% ✗	87% ✗	87% +
	3-5 yrs	85% ✗	47% ✗	64% ✗
<b>English Language Arts/Literacy</b>		<b>2022</b>	<b>2022</b>	<b>2022</b>
3 <sup>rd</sup> grade students meeting or exceeding grade-level English Language Arts/Literacy standards* <sup>xxvi</sup>	All 3 <sup>rd</sup>	47%	37%	42%
	Economic Disadv.	16%	20%	29%
	Ever-English Learner	14%	15%	28%
	Latino	27%	21%	31%
<b>Mathematics</b>		<b>2022</b>	<b>2022</b>	<b>2022</b>
8 <sup>th</sup> grade students meeting or exceeding grade-level math standards* <sup>xxvii</sup>	All 8 <sup>th</sup>	36%	39%	44%
	Economic Disadv.	19%	21%	30%
	Ever-English Learner	15%	17%	31%
	Latino	19%	22%	31%
<b>High School Graduation</b>		<b>2022</b>	<b>2022</b>	<b>2022</b>
Students who graduate high school within four years of their first enrollment in 9 <sup>th</sup> grade <sup>xxviii</sup>	All Students	94% +	87% +	87% +
	Asian	100%	96% +	95% ○
	Black	S	92% +	79% +
	Latino	92% +	84% +	85% +
	White	95% +	90% ○	91% +
	2+ Races	91% +	90% +	89% +
S = Suppressed due to small number				
<b>Enrollment in Higher Education</b>		<b>2021</b>	<b>2021</b>	<b>2021</b>
High school graduates who are enrolled in a 2-year or 4-year college one year after graduation <sup>xxix</sup>		73% ○	67% ✗	64% ○

\*See technical notes in Appendix A



## Community Insights

- Participants in the group discussion on early childhood and school-aged children raised issues such as, “All children have the right to early education,” “What can we do to expand quality affordable child care and the Early Childhood Education (ECE) workforce, with good wages and benefits?” and a desire for “Infant and toddler care during non-traditional hours.”
- During the panel presentation, both of the Cradle to Career Parent Leaders (whose children attend Bayview Elementary and Mission Hill) spoke about their difficulties finding affordable child care, despite working full-time or multiple jobs. Their biggest concern is housing. One Parent Leader and her partner have been trying to find a two-bedroom house or apartment, but the minimum rent is \$3,600/month — completely unaffordable and unrealistic for their situation, even with multiple incomes.
- The panelists underscored that there are broader, deeply entrenched challenges in the ECE system that were not caused by the pandemic, but they have been greatly exacerbated by it. Child care is just too expensive for many parents, while also not providing adequate compensation to the workforce. This is an ongoing, systemic issue that would require massive public financing.
- Youth said students often feel overwhelmed by homework and seem to lack motivation. Students could use more academic support and real-life skills that make learning more relevant, especially for youth who work to support their families.
- SCCS made progress in closing the digital divide during the pandemic. More SCCS students than ever qualify for 4-year college; graduation rates are above the state average; and many scholarships for Career Technical Education (CTE) and college have been earned.
- In the group discussion focused on young adults, concerns and suggestions included a “Big need for student peer mentors/tutors that can work at high schools while attending college,” and “Better teacher understanding of students and their differences — what they react to and motivates them.”

## Current City Programs

- London Nelson Community Center: Offers a significantly discounted rental agreement (and exclusive use of a room) with the County Office of Education (COE) for their Alternative High School program. Students often use the Teen Center after school.
- Parks and Recreation: Hosts the Museum of Natural History in Tyrell Park (\$1/year lease of City facility); partners with the Museum on their Garden Learning Center in Tyrell Park, school field trip programs at Neary Lagoon and Pogonip, and the Earth Stewards Program that provides service learning opportunities in open spaces for high school students.





**OPPORTUNITY FOR ACTION**

- ✓ **Continue and expand on partnerships with educational institutions,** including the County Office of Education, Santa Cruz City Schools, Cabrillo College, and UC Santa Cruz.

**RIGHT #5: THEY HAVE TRAINING IN LIFE SKILLS THAT WILL PREPARE THEM TO LIVE INDEPENDENTLY, BE SELF-SUFFICIENT AND POSITIVELY CONTRIBUTE TO THEIR COMMUNITY.**

**RIGHT #6: THEY HAVE EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITIES WITH PROTECTIONS FROM UNFAIR LABOR PRACTICES.**

**Data Snapshot**



**CORE Condition: Economic Security & Social Mobility**

Stable employment, livable wages, food security, ability to afford basic needs, wealth accumulation, and prosperity.

		City SC	County SC	CA
<b>Employment</b>		<b>2022</b>	<b>2022</b>	<b>2022</b>
Annual average rate of unemployed workers in the civilian workforce <sup>xxx</sup>		3.1 +	4.8 +	4.2 +
<b>Children Living in Poverty</b>		<b>2017-21</b>	<b>2017-21</b>	<b>2017-21</b>
Children under age 18 living below the federal poverty level <sup>xxxi</sup>		11% ○	11% ○	16% ○
<b>Internet Access</b>		<b>2017-21</b>	<b>2017-21</b>	<b>2017-21</b>
Households with a broadband internet subscription <sup>xxxii</sup>		94% +	92% +	91% +

**Community Insights**

- Some youth and their parents/caregivers shared their positive experiences with the AVID (Advancement Via Individual Determination) program that teaches life skills, offered through SCCS. One parent suggested, “There should be a required class to help with college applications, essays, and decisions for everyone (like AVID)” and that it should be mandatory.
- Other concerns and suggestions raised were related to basic needs (“Access to food for all”), parking challenges at Santa Cruz High.

- A participant in the group discussion focused on young adults noted they “Would like to know about services for Transitional Age Youth and job opportunities for work for students without Social Security cards.”
- For Cabrillo students, many also face challenges with housing costs and food insecurity, which are the most acute problems for Cabrillo students. More students are experiencing homelessness, leading to efforts to build housing on both the UCSC and Cabrillo campuses so that there can be more affordable options for students.
- Another participant in the group discussing early childhood and school-aged children said (in Spanish), “Work with the different organizations to provide all resources from early childhood onwards.”

### Current City Programs

- Teen Job Fair: Provides job opportunities for teens as well as training on interview skills and filling out a job application.
- Teen Intern Program: Places teens in paid job positions in City departments.
- Junior Leader volunteer program: Places teen volunteers (ages 13-15) in our Summer Camps programs. This provides them with first job interview and working experiences to list on a future resume.
- Junior Guard Captain Corps program: Captain Corp volunteers (ages 15-17) function as role models for Junior and Little Guard participants and assist instructors with marine safety through participation, education and creating a positive learning environment. This provides them with first job interview and work experiences to list on a future resume.
- Summer Youth Trails program: Provides paid employment and job training in parks and trail maintenance.



#### OPPORTUNITY FOR ACTION

- ✓ **Maintain the Public Safety Teen Academy/Explorer Program**, a collaboration with the Fire and Police Departments during the summer. The program helps establish healthy relationships with public safety staff and exposes youth to the concepts and potential of civic/public service. The program has been well-received by parents and youth.
- ✓ **Expand internship, vocational and pre-apprenticeship opportunities** in city departments.

**RIGHT #7: THEY HAVE FREEDOM FROM MISTREATMENT, ABUSE AND NEGLECT.**

**Data Snapshot**



**CORE Condition: Thriving Families**

Safe, nurturing relationships and environments that promote optimal health and well-being of all family members across generations.

		City SC	County SC	CA
<b>Family Reading</b>			<b>2021</b>	<b>2021</b>
Days per week parent/caregiver reads books with child (0-5 years) <sup>xxxiii</sup>	Every day	City-level data not available	75% <b>+</b>	54% <b>×</b>
	3-6 days		11%	26% <b>+</b>
<b>Positive Childhood Experiences (PCEs) – Teens only</b>			<b>2021</b>	<b>2021</b>
Number of Positive Childhood Experiences (PCEs) <sup>xxxiv</sup>	0-2	City-level data not available	46%	22%
	3-5		15%	43%
	6-7		39%	35%
<b>Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) – Teens only</b>			<b>2021</b>	<b>2021</b>
Has ever had Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) <sup>xxxv</sup>	Yes	City-level data not available	27%	44%
	No		73%	56%
<b>Child Maltreatment</b>			<b>2022</b>	<b>2022</b>
Substantiated child abuse rate (cases per 1,000 children) <sup>xxxvi</sup>	< age 1	City-level data not available	10.4 <b>×</b>	18.6 <b>+</b>
	Age 1-2		2.9	7.4 <b>+</b>
	All Ages 0-17		2.2 <b>×</b>	6.1 <b>+</b>

**Community Insights**

- Many of the comments and suggestions described in Right #1, related to mental health and parenting supports, are applicable to Right #7, too.
- One participant noted that, “LGBTQ+ support feels very forced” — although it’s unclear whether that refers to supports offered through schools or other resources.

**Current City Programs**

- Police Department: Teaches a class in the schools about Cyberbullying and Social Media Awareness. Additionally, data on Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children (CSEC) are hard to find, but this is a grave concern in the City and beyond. SCPD is participating in training on CSEC to better understand and address this issue.



**OPPORTUNITY FOR ACTION**

- ✓ **Address Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children (CSEC)** through law enforcement and city homeless service providers trainings.

**RIGHT #8: THEY VOICE OPINIONS IN MATTERS OF INTEREST TO THEM, DEVELOP THEIR LEADERSHIP CAPACITY, AND ENGAGE IN THEIR COMMUNITY.**

**Data Snapshot**



**CORE Condition: Community Connectedness**

A sense of belonging, diverse and inclusive neighborhoods and institutions, vibrant arts and cultural life, and the power of civic engagement.

		City SC	County SC	CA
<b>Volunteerism</b>			<b>2021</b>	<b>2021</b>
Youth who have ever volunteered to solve a problem in the community <sup>xxxvii</sup>	Has volunteered	City-level data not available	S	20%
	Has not volunteered		93%	81%
<b>Belief in Ability to Make a Difference</b>			<b>2021</b>	<b>2021</b>
Youth who believe they can make a difference in the community <sup>xxxviii</sup>	Strongly Agree	City-level data not available	S	14%
	Somewhat Agree		88%	57%
	Somewhat Disagree		8%	27%
	Strongly Disagree		S	3%
<b>Confidence to Contact Someone in Government</b>			<b>2021</b>	<b>2021</b>
Youth who have confidence to contact someone in the government who represents the community <sup>xxxix</sup>	Definitely Could Not	City-level data not available	S	15%
	Probably Could Not		16%	25%
	Maybe Could		30%	29%
	Probably Could		32%	21%
	Definitely Could		21%	11%
<b>Voting Empowers Community Members</b>			<b>2021</b>	<b>2021</b>
Youth who agree that voting empowers community members to influence change <sup>xi</sup>	Strongly agree	City-level data not available	39%	29%
	Somewhat agree		37%	42%
	Neither agree nor disagree		19%	22%
	Somewhat disagree		S	6%
	Strongly disagree		S	1%
<b>Voter Turnout</b>		<b>2022</b>	<b>2022</b>	<b>2022</b>
Percentage of registered voters who voted in the last election <sup>xii</sup>		69%	64%	64%



**CORE Condition: Healthy Environments**

A clean, safe, sustainable natural environment and a built environment and infrastructure that supports health and well-being.

	City SC	County SC	CA
<b>Concern About Climate Change</b>	<b>2020</b>	<b>2020</b>	<b>2020</b>
Youth who say climate change makes them nervous, depressed, or stressed <sup>xliii</sup>	100%	86%	79%

**Community Insights**

- Reactions to the pandemic revealed incredible resilience among SCCS students, which continues. Students stepped up and played leadership roles in different ways e.g., in clubs, for causes such as racial equity, and other commitments to bettering the community. There’s strong student representation as trustees on the School Board.
- The UCSC student on the panel noted a lot of uncertainty and anxiety among her classmates, but also is seeing strong leadership and engagement with things they care about. She and her friends see opportunities to join together across age groups to help the community, making sure policies are informed, and taking advantage of opportunities to connect like mentoring.

**Current City Programs**

- Council: Mayor appoints a Councilmember to the Youth Action Network.
- Sister Cities: Has a standing subcommittee focused on youth involvement.
- Children’s Fund: Oversight Committee voted to add a Youth Liaison position.



**OPPORTUNITIES FOR ACTION**

- ✓ Appoint Council and staff representatives to **child- and youth-focused initiatives** (e.g., Youth Action Network).
- ✓ Formalize the **Youth Liaison position (with a stipend)** to support youth participation and leadership development.
- ✓ Integrate **Youth Liaison and other youth as key stakeholders** to be consulted on City policy issues.
- ✓ Integrate **Youth Liaison and other opportunities for youth voice and involvement** in implementation of the City’s Climate Action Plan.
- ✓ Analyze and make continuous improvements to the **accessibility of City committees and commissions for youth and young adults**.
- ✓ **Conduct bi-annual presentation** to the City Council on “The State of Child & Youth Well-being in Santa Cruz.”

**RIGHT #9: THEY FEEL SUPPORTED BY THE LARGER COMMUNITY AND MAINTAIN A SENSE OF HOPE FOR THE FUTURE.**

**RIGHT #10: THEY ARE ENCOURAGED TO EXPLORE AND EXPRESS THEIR INNATE CURIOSITY AND CREATIVITY.**

**Data Snapshot**



**CORE Condition: Community Connectedness**

A sense of belonging, diverse and inclusive neighborhoods and institutions, vibrant arts and cultural life, and the power of civic engagement.

		City SC	County SC	CA
<b>Social and Emotional Health: Optimism</b> Students who have a high level of optimism* xliii		<b>2022</b>		Current data not available
	Grade 7	59% +	NA	
	Grade 9	52% +		
	Grade 11	45% +		
	NT	30% +		
<b>School Supports: High Expectations</b> Students who have a teacher/adult at school who has high expectations of them (wants them to do their best) * xliiv		<b>2022</b>	<b>2021</b>	Current data not available
	Grade 5	78%**	NA	
	Grade 7	73% x	85% +	
	Grade 9	72% x	79% ●	
	Grade 11	71% x	75% x	
	NT	71% x	85% x	
<b>Connected to Others Making a Difference – Teens only</b> Youth who feel connected to others making a difference in the community xlv		City-level data not available	<b>2021</b>	<b>2021</b>
	Strongly Agree		S	8%
	Somewhat Agree		32%	56%
	Somewhat Disagree		40%	33%
	Strongly Disagree		S	3%

\*See technical notes in Appendix A

**Community Insights**

- Participation in school athletics and sports programs is at a high level — half of students in Santa Cruz City Schools participate in one or more sports.
- Youth had several comments and suggestions about school clubs, which the City doesn't have control over, but the feedback is still informative.
  - They see a need for more student involvement in creating what the school clubs are, planning extra-curricular activities and club events

- Others feel there's very little school spirit, and they don't feel connected. Students join clubs as a "last resort."

## Current City Programs

- Santa Cruz Teen Center: Staff provide daily connection and direct support to youth.
- Recreation Classes: sports, arts, and STEAM classes including soccer, skateboarding, martial arts, basketball, beach volleyball, art, theater, after school enrichment
- Parks: Provides essential, free recreational resources used by children and youth, including 21 playgrounds, 3 skate parks, 3 bicycle pump tracks, 1 BMX park, 3 beaches
- London Nelson Community Center: Available for rentals; the Auditorium is the primary facility for youth theater performances in Santa Cruz.



### OPPORTUNITIES FOR ACTION

- ✓ **Allocate Children's Fund resources** to children and youth.
- ✓ **Appoint Council and staff representatives** to child- and youth-focused initiatives (e.g., Youth Action Network).
- ✓ Formalize the **Youth Liaison position (with a stipend)** to support youth participation and leadership development.
- ✓ Integrate **Youth Liaison and other youth as key stakeholders** to be consulted on City policy issues.
- ✓ Integrate **Youth Liaison and other opportunities for youth voice and involvement** in implementation of the City's Climate Action Plan.
- ✓ Analyze and make continuous improvements to **accessibility of City committees and commissions for youth and young adults**.



## APPENDIX A: CONTEXT & TECHNICAL NOTES FOR DATA

The Data Snapshots presented in this report include many indicators, using the most current data that could be found. Quantitative data can paint a useful, clear picture of strengths, gaps, and differences in well-being that may warrant further exploration or action by the City. But quantitative data only tell part of the story and should be considered carefully, in the right context, particularly given these important details:

- The data are inclusive but not exhaustive. This report contains a small subset of data related to child and youth well-being. In most cases, the indicators were included in this report if data were available at a city level, which ruled out certain indicators that are only available at a countywide or statewide level. There are a few exceptions to this for indicators where only the countywide data were available (e.g., California Health Interview Survey) and omitting those indicators would have left significant gaps in the Data Snapshots.

Other data on community-level indicators can be found in the [CORE Results Menu](#) on the [DataShare Santa Cruz County](#) website. Note that not all data of interest are available on DataShare, and not all data on DataShare are available at a city level.

- The effects of the pandemic are reflected in the data, not only in terms of the status of child and youth well-being (or areas of concern), but the consistency and reliability of trend data. Some local, state, and federal data collection processes were paused or affected dramatically during the pandemic. This makes it difficult to accurately assess or interpret changes over time.
- Some data represent small numbers of children and youth, which means percentages may not be representative of all children and youth. The data are suppressed (S) by the original sources if the numbers or percentages are too small, to preserve confidentiality. This makes it very difficult to identify indicators where City-level data can be disaggregated by age (up to age 24), race and ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, and other demographic characteristics.
- Data are collected at different times and frequencies, depending on the sources. There is often a significant gap between the time surveys are administered and when results become publicly available. This is especially true for large amounts of data collected or analyzed by the state. By the time reports become available locally, the data may already seem outdated, but still serves a useful purpose.
- All California Healthy Kids Survey (CHKS) data for City of Santa Cruz are from the 2022-23 school year (survey administered in the fall of 2022). Countywide CHKS data are from the 2021-22 school year, as 2022-23 Countywide are not yet publicly



available. The 2021-22 data are provided as a point of reference but should not be compared to the City of Santa Cruz's 2022-23 data. California's CHKS data were excluded, as the most recent data were from 2019.

- Some CHKS data for Grade 5 are only available for City of Santa Cruz in 2022-23, or the arrow indicating year-over-year change is not included due to the large gap between the most recent measurement year (2022) and the prior measurement year (2018-19).
- Arrows are included next to data when multiple years of data were available from the original, cited source.
  - + Indicates a positive (desired) change of at least 2 percentage points since the prior measurement period
  - × Indicates a negative (unwanted) change of at least 2 percentage points since the prior measurement period
  - Indicates no change or an increase/decrease of only 1 percentage point since the prior measurement period

## APPENDIX B: COMMUNITY MEETING SUMMARY

On May 8, 2023, the City held a **Community Meeting** to discuss the **State of the Youth in the City of Santa Cruz**. The meeting was held at Bayview Elementary School, hosted by members of the Santa Cruz City Council, and facilitated by Nicole Lezin of Cole Communications. The purpose of the community meeting was to help Council members hear directly from youth and families about current issues they are facing and to give residents an opportunity to provide input that will inform the City's priorities, policies, and programs.

The Community Meeting featured a panel of seven community leaders (listed below) who were invited to share their observations about strengths and challenges faced by children, youth, and families in different age groups. After the panelists' remarks, participants had an opportunity to move to smaller groups organized by age group. With panelists and City Council members guiding the discussion, they focused on two discussion questions:

1. What is your **biggest question or concern** about the well-being of children and youth in this age group?
2. What **policies and programs** would make life better for children and youth in this age group and their families?

### THEMES FROM THE PANEL PRESENTATIONS

#### Early Childhood and School-Aged

*David Brody, Executive Director, First 5 Santa Cruz County*

David noted two ongoing challenges:

- The impact of COVID pandemic (not unique to young children); these impacts are lasting (kids are not getting over it quickly). He hears from child care providers and caregivers that kids are not exhibiting typical social-emotional development for their age. Their overall ability to self-regulate emotions and interact with peers has been negatively impacted by pandemic-related isolation.
- Broader dysfunction in the early childhood and education (ECE) system. This was not caused by the pandemic but has been greatly exacerbated by COVID-related challenges. Child care is just too expensive for many parents, while also not providing adequate compensation to the workforce. This is an ongoing, systemic issue that requires massive public financing (like other industrialized countries).
- On the plus side, David noted that state and local investments are moving in the right direction. Examples include Transitional Kindergarten expansion and new funding

streams that are bringing us closer to a publicly funded, high-quality, universal Pre-K system.

- He also is seeing increased investment by the state in initiatives like the Children's Youth and Behavioral Health Initiative, which should bring enhanced resources to our county for trauma-informed training and services, home-based services for young children and families, and parenting support. Examples of local investments include the City of Santa Cruz Children's Fund, CORE funding for United Way and the countywide Cradle to Career (C2C) initiative (including parent-led efforts and participation from families at Bayview and Gault elementary schools, among others); and the Thrive by 5 initiative. David is encouraged to see these efforts unfolding and supported by the focus of City and school partners on parent-centered approaches.

*Julia Baltazar, Cradle to Career (C2C) Santa Cruz County Parent Leader and parent of Bayview Elementary*

- Julia is a Spanish-speaking parent whose daughter is a third-grade student at Bayview Elementary. She and her partner work full-time but are having difficulties finding child care. Their biggest concern is housing, which is just not affordable for their family.

*Rosario Chavez, C2C Parent Leader and parent of Mission Hill students*

- Rosario's children are in the seventh and eighth grades at Mission Hill. She and her partner each work two jobs, making the minimum wage of \$15-16/hour. They do not have affordable, accessible afterschool care, which is stressful for them and the children, too. Rosario and her partner have been trying to find a two-bedroom house or apartment, but the minimum rent is \$3,600/month—completely unaffordable and unrealistic for their situation, despite working four jobs between them.

## **Adolescents**

*Jonah Chizinsky, Santa Cruz High School student*

- Jonah shared several issues that are of concern to him and his friends. The main one was mental health struggles and the lack of support, especially coming out of COVID-19 lockdowns. During the pandemic, students' physical health also suffered. He was able to stay active by getting into surfing. This also led to learning about issues like coastal erosion and ocean safety. Ocean safety has been a top issue lately, especially after the recent drowning at Its Beach.
- Another issue affecting students is the lack of parking at Santa Cruz High School. Jonah also shared that many students feel overwhelmed by homework and lack motivation. They could use better access to academic support and real-life skills that make learning more relevant, especially for youth supporting their families

*Kris Munro, Superintendent, Santa Cruz City Schools*

- Kris echoed others in noting the huge impact of the pandemic, noting that it had affected students and staff differently. In terms of strengths, reactions to the pandemic revealed incredible resilience among students, which continues. Progress was made in closing the digital divide, and funding from state and federal sources helped with these and other initiatives. Students stepped up and played leadership roles in different ways (in clubs, for causes such as racial equity, and other commitments to bettering the community). There's strong student representation as trustees on the School Board. Participation in athletics and sports is at a high level – half of students participate in one or more sports. More students than ever qualify for 4-year college; graduation rates are above the state average; and lots of scholarships for CTE and college have been earned.
- In terms of challenges, mental health remains an ongoing issue. It was also an issue prior to the pandemic, but the pandemic's disruption and isolation really amplified these issues. School counselors are seeing more diagnoses of depression, anxiety, and eating disorders. To respond to the uptick in need, they are providing more counselors on campus (but there are still not enough) and holding mental health pop-up days to destigmatize help-seeking behaviors. They also are offering suicide awareness for all middle school and high school students and expanding the K-8 social-emotional learning curriculum (with some in later grades, too). School staff and counselors are also working to address social media use and its effects on mental health.

*DC Lawson-Thomas, City of Santa Cruz Parks & Recreation*

- DC works directly with City schools on initiatives like Safe Spaces and the Teen Center, addressing community need by creating programs that the Parks and Recreation team can offer. Looking ahead, they are trying to expand their outreach so that more people use spaces and programs, especially with an equity lens. One way to address equity is to offer scholarships for those who might not be able to afford activities, but the demand for scholarships for programs has been “through the roof,” and they are unable to meet the demand.

## Young Adults

### *Grace Casteel, UCSC Student*

- Echoing what others have said, Grace noted a lot of uncertainty and anxiety among her classmates, but also is seeing strong leadership and engagement with things they care about. She and her friends see opportunities to join together across age groups to help the community, making sure policies are informed, and taking advantage of opportunities to connect like mentoring.

### *Matt Wetstein, President, Cabrillo College*

- Matt sees promising signs of how more students have access to higher education through programs like dual enrollment in high school and Cabrillo; students can take courses at no cost and currently have between 900-1,000 high school students enrolled each semester. Expanding online offerings also has helped increase access. Partnerships (e.g., with Pájaro Valley USD and County Office of Education) has helped Cabrillo pursue funding opportunities together for arts education, adult education, and more.
- The mental health needs of students have grown, as others have said, with demands for services at an all-time high (approximately double pre-pandemic levels, seeing about 100 students a month with mental health appointments). Some is the impact of COVID, including more isolation, less connection. Some is the role of social media. For Cabrillo students, many also face challenges with housing costs and food insecurity, which are the most acute problems for Cabrillo students. More students are experiencing homelessness, leading to efforts to build housing on both the UCSC and Cabrillo campuses so that there can be more affordable options for students.
- Connecting back to the child care conversation that David started with, the Cabrillo College Early Childhood Education (ECE) program meets the demand for quality child care for students and staff, while also educating providers. The mental health needs of students have grown, with demands for services at an all-time high (approximately double pre-pandemic levels, seeing about 100 students a month with mental health appointments). Some of the increased demand is related to the impact of COVID (more isolation, less connection), and some is related to the role of social media.

## THEMES AND IDEAS FROM SMALL GROUP DISCUSSIONS

### 1. What is your biggest question or concern about the well-being of children and youth in this age group?

#### Early Childhood and School-Aged

- Que todos los niños tengan derecho a una educación temprana (That all children have the right to early education)
- Parents who feel disconnected and overwhelmed
- How can we expand access to Triple P (Positive Parenting Program)? More integration in other spaces, more parent-led Triple P classes ...
- What can we do to expand quality affordable child care and ECE workforce (with good wages and benefits)?
- How can we provide more affordable recreational activities for this age group?
- Demand for mental health is also a positive indication of destigmatizing mental health care; Are increasing mental health services demands partially driven by new awareness of and ownership over mental health in our youth and young adults? In short, are our youth demanding more from us?

#### Adolescents

- More spaces for youth to hang out at (like Circle Church); Students said they didn't know about the City's Teen Center
- Don't feel like there is a venue to share ideas for all youth
- Mental health – lack of support, out-of-school care (therapy) is extremely expensive, especially if not covered by insurance
- Youth are not taught how to respond to mental health behaviors
- Kids not knowing that they have a learning disability (comes out in different ways, i.e., behavior)
- Prevalence of substance abuse in the community, particularly downtown
- LGBTQ+ support feels very forced
- Need more student involvement in creating what the school clubs are, planning extra-curricular activities and club events
- Very little school spirit; Don't feel connected; Join clubs as a “last resort”
- Need for diversity in student leadership bodies
- More diverse youth representatives at student union (survey, backgrounds are different, selection process) to create a more equitable youth representation
- Santa Cruz High parking issue (parking permits available free or low cost)

### **Young Adults**

- Young adults dealing with anxiety, leaning into drugs and then they destroy their lives going down that path
- Would like to know about services for Transitional Age Youth and job opportunities for work for students without social security cards.

## **2. What policies and programs would make life better for children and youth in this age group and their families?**

### **Early Childhood and School-Aged**

- Más actividades desde TK preescolar como cuidado de niños y más actividades (More activities from Transitional Kindergarten preschool, like child care and more activities)
- Trabajar con las diferentes organizaciones para brindar todos los recursos desde la primera infancia (Work with the different organizations to provide all resources from early childhood onwards)
- Infant and toddler care during non-traditional hours
- Increase access to hybrid summer school / summer camp (make it fun)
- Triple P (Positive Parenting Program) co-led by parents!
- More Triple P and Triple P-like support in community settings, and for new age groups (e.g., teens)

### **Adolescents**

- Access to food for all (free lunches)
- Harvey West Pool – access for youth of all ages and community (swim lessons, ocean safety, summer camps) – need funding to maintain
- Surfing for all; equitable access to surf for all youth (transportation, lessons, equipment, scholarship/low cost, diverse mentors)
- Ocean safety for all
- Resources/tools for youth to learn how to navigate aggressive or violent people who are houseless
- There should be a required class to help with college applications / essays / decisions for everyone (like AVID), make it mandatory
- City should be more present at the schools (reach out and be there)
- Have schools be a true hub → receive information and feel connected
- “Center for Human Technology” → social responsibility within tech

### **Young Adults**

- We need housing, higher wages, better transit. Students' interests are everyone's interests.
- Better access to diagnosis of children to better fit their academic and psychological needs → validating kids experiences with difficult teachers and adults, allowing confrontations to be two-sided, with two stories, and understanding that just because kids struggle to express emotions, that the root of those emotions are still valid.
- Big need for student peer mentors/tutors that can work at high schools while attending college.
- Better teacher understanding of students and their differences – what they react to and motivates them.

### **NEXT STEPS**

Councilmember Shebreh Kalantari-Johnson thanked everyone for attending and noted some common themes across the different age groups, such as mental health challenges. As City Council members, she said, she and others would ask themselves about their role in responding to the issues raised during the community meeting, including specific programs and resources for youth, and looking at all their decisions through the lens of how they affect youth.

Participants were informed that later in the summer, a State of the Youth report (including ideas from the meeting as well as other data) will help inform the City Council's decision-making and Children's Fund allocations.



## APPENDIX C: CALIFORNIA STRONG START INDEX

The **California Strong Start Index** (<https://strongstartindex.org/>) was developed by the First 5 Center for Children’s Policy, First 5 Association of California, and the Children’s Data Network. Using data from birth records, the Index produces a standardized score of the conditions into which children are born. The 12 “birth assets” included in the Index were selected based on research indicating their robust relationship between child health and well-being outcomes.

The Strong Start score is calculated by counting the number of birth assets (0-12) in these domains:

Family	Health	Service	Financial
1) Legal parentage established at birth	4) Healthy birthweight	7) Access to and receipt of timely prenatal care	10) Ability to afford and access healthcare
2) Born to non-teen parents	5) Absence of congenital anomalies, abnormalities, or complications at birth	8) Receipt of nutritional services (WIC) if eligible	11) Born to a parent with a college degree
3) Born to parents with at least a high school diploma	6) Absence of transmissible (mother-to-child) infections	9) Hospital with high percentage of births with timely prenatal care	12) Born to parents with employment history

The Strong Start Index can be used to understand the number of assets children have at birth, including identifying areas of the community in which children have fewer assets at birth and where additional services and supports may be important to promote equity.

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