

# Issue Brief | Santa Clara County Children's Agenda

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## Creating a Community Where the Young People Feel Valued

**Overview:** It is important that we create a community where young people feel valued. However, the 2005 Project Cornerstone survey of Santa Clara County youth indicated only 35% of 4<sup>th</sup>–6<sup>th</sup> graders and 18% of middle and high school students perceive that adults in the community value children and youth. This issue brief provides a list of simple things adults can do to help young people feel valued.

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

**The Santa Clara County Children's Agenda**, is a focused, integrated initiative that **utilizes data and research to inform decision-making, guide program improvement, and drive results.** The Children's Agenda has identified community goals for our children and thirteen data outcomes to track our progress in achieving those goals. The Children's Agenda provides basis for action, and allows our stakeholders to develop powerful strategies for change. It provides a framework to build meaningful and deep partnerships, provides a common language that helps us to align public and private investments, assess and improve quality, seek and allocate resources, and increase reach and impact across sectors. The thirteen indicators of the Children's Agenda are:

- Routine Access to Health Care
- Healthy Lifestyle
- Early Social Emotional Health
- Developmental Assets
- Readiness for Kindergarten
- Third Grade Reading Scores
- Eighth Grade Math Scores
- High School Graduation Rates
- Children Fluent in at Least Two Languages
- Child Abuse and Neglect
- Childhood Hunger
- Juvenile Arrests
- Youth Feel Valued by the Community

**For more information on the Children's Agenda and to read previous Issue Briefs, go to:**  
[www.kidsincommon.org](http://www.kidsincommon.org)

### Do the Youth of Santa Clara County Feel Valued by the Community?

Developmental assets are the positive relationships, opportunities, values and skills that young people need to grow up daring, caring and responsible. These assets include dimensions such as whether youth feel supported, have good boundaries, use their time constructively, possess positive values, are committed to learning, feel socially competent and have a positive identity. The Search Institute ([www.searchinstitute.org](http://www.searchinstitute.org)) has demonstrated that the more of these assets youth have, the less likely they are to engage in high-risk activities

**One of these important assets is "Community Values Youth" – whether young people perceive that adults in the community value children and youth.**

In 2005, Project Cornerstone ([www.projectcornerstone.org](http://www.projectcornerstone.org)) surveyed nearly 14,000 4<sup>th</sup>–12<sup>th</sup> graders at 95 schools across Santa Clara County to measure their developmental assets. The results from this survey provided a report card for Santa Clara County, showing us how well our community supports the healthy development of our children and youth. Among other important information, the report revealed youth's perception about whether they are valued by adults in the community. There is room for improvement in how youth perceive the degree to which adults in the community value children and youth:

- Only 35% of the 4<sup>th</sup>–6<sup>th</sup> graders perceive that adults in the community value children and youth.
- Even worse, only 18% of the middle and high school students perceive that adults value children and youth.

Many factors impact this perception: How do adults treat young people? Do youth have a voice in decisions that impact them? Are there opportunities for children and youth to make the community better?

At the 2009 Children's Summit, a young man on the youth panel spoke about how degrading it felt to wear old basketball uniforms that didn't fit right. While this may seem like a small issue, it speaks to the ways that youth decide whether they are valued in the community. Youth notice whether they have clean, safe schools and up-to-date textbooks; whether they're treated respectfully by merchants and police officers; whether there are recreational opportunities and safe public spaces where they can meet with friends; and whether the community supports their activities—such as basketball—enough to make sure that they have uniforms that they can be proud of wearing.

Simply put, youth know when their community values and invests in them. By working to ensure that youth feel valued, respected, and appreciated, we can create a community where all young people are best able to thrive.

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## Communicating to Youth That They are Valued:

In their book *What Kids Need to Succeed*, Peter Benson, Judy Galbraith and Pamela Espeland provide a list of things adults can do to convey to youth that they are valued:

- Take time to be with and listen to young people. Seek them out and solicit their feedback.
- Role-play positive and appropriate ways to respond when community members don't treat young people with respect.
- At home, hold regular family meetings to plan, solve problems and encourage each other. Rotate who leads the meeting.
- Talk with and support your children's friends. Make sure they know you value them.
- Create volunteer opportunities for youth in your non-profit organization or service club. At school, form partnerships with community organizations in order to help students volunteer and develop mentoring relationships with adults.
- Provide leadership opportunities for young people at school and in after-school programs and community affairs. Make sure youth are included in decision-making bodies.
- Give positive feedback to youth you encounter in stores and coffee shops. Ask them about their day and commend them when they do a good job.
- Write letters to the editor and challenge negative stereotypes of youth in the media. Conversely, encourage the media to publish stories celebrating youth who are "doing good."
- Demand that policymakers invest in services and programs that support youth development.

The ideas below are from Project Cornerstone. To read more about ways to show youth they are valued, visit <http://www.projectcornerstone.org/html/assetamonth.htm> and click the link for Community Values Youth.

- Remember to treat all young people—regardless of their age or appearance—with respect, and take their ideas and suggestions seriously.
- If you work in a business where youth may be customers or clients, train your staff to treat young people respectfully make sure that your policies are youth-friendly. If your business serves adults who may have children with them, make sure the space is inviting and provides age-appropriate diversions.
- Publicly celebrate youth contributions to your organization, and recognize individual contributions daily.

**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.

Every day, our elected officials make policy and fiscal decisions that impact the more than 450,000 children who live in Santa Clara County. Kids in Common is the only organization that focuses on systemic change to improve children's lives in Santa Clara County. We advocate for effective investment and policies for children and support the mobilization of public and private resources to meet children's needs. We inform decision makers on best practices and champion local implementation. We convene agencies that care about children's well-being to address systems issues and speak out for needed change. 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. Because we don't receive government funding, we do not have to worry about being perceived as acting in our own self-interest. **Policymakers know our only agenda is children.**



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

[www.kidsdata.org](http://www.kidsdata.org)