

San Jose Mercury News

Editorial: Children's bill of rights, sadly, is needed

Mercury News Editorial

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Santa Clara County shouldn't need a children's bill of rights. The document adopted by the board of supervisors last week looks like such a no-brainer. A safe and healthy environment, a decent education, freedom from abuse and neglect — do we really need to be told these things are important?

In a word, yes. That's why groups such as Kids in Common and the San Jose Youth Commission have been compiling the document, adapted from an international effort. It's not surprising that other parts of the world fall short, but it's worth a reminder that Silicon Valley does, too, on many counts.

Kids in Common hosted a Children's Summit earlier this month in San Jose to introduce the bill of rights. It was an uplifting convergence of youth advocates and young people, but some disturbing themes surfaced. One was children's safety — or the lack thereof.

John Porter, superintendent of the Franklin-McKinley School District, told the crowd that many of his students worry each day about how they're going to get home from school safely. Dr. Fernando Mendoza of Stanford University noted that childhood obesity is a problem partly because in many neighborhoods, kids can't just go out and run and play; it's not safe. Eloquent teenagers echoed similar themes.

Policymakers are supposed to use the bill of rights as a touchstone when they make decisions on services and budgets. It can make a difference; awareness always does. Check out the document at www.kidsincommon.org — and reflect on how sad it is that we need it.