

THE COMMUNITY
ASSESSMENT
PROJECT
OF SANTA CRUZ COUNTY
PRESENTS:

2018

Children and Youth Well-being

SANTA CRUZ COUNTY SPOTLIGHT





What is well-being?

Well-being is a state of existence rooted in the social determinants of health, and is addressed across an individual's physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual needs.

**"I see myself succeeding in life.
The most important [thing] is for me to not give up.
When it gets harder,
I just have to get a little stronger.
And when it gets darker,
I need to get brighter."**

—Guadalupe, Senior at Watsonville High School

It starts with Children and Youth.

When our children and youth thrive, communities thrive.

By ensuring that every child has the opportunity to reach their greatest potential, we are building a thriving future for Santa Cruz County. That's why this year's Community Assessment Project (CAP) is proud to present the inaugural **2018 Children and Youth Well-Being Spotlight for Santa Cruz County.**

The well-being of our children and youth should matter to everyone who lives and works in Santa Cruz County. This is about quality of life not just for our young people, but for *all* of us.

This spotlight provides baseline information and trends about the quality of life for children and youth in Santa Cruz County. We expect that this data will inspire engagement and fuel effective action to improve the well-being of children and youth – and everyone in our communities.

We are grateful to the Children and Youth Well-Being design team who contributed to the development and writing of this spotlight, as well as to Applied Survey Research for their data support. This team developed a set of measures that the community can use to assess how our children, their families who support them, and the community that surrounds them, are doing. Those measures are organized into four domains to track well-being: economics, education, family & community connection, and health.

Acknowledgements

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Be inspired to action.

Together, we can ensure Santa Cruz County is a community where everyone will thrive. No one person or organization can do it alone – we invite you to join us as we bring people like you together to develop specific and practical strategies to improve the quality of life for children and youth.



In Community Partnership,

Keisha

Keisha Frost

Chief Executive Officer, United Way of Santa Cruz County

“Being able to advocate and have my voice heard gives me a sense of community connectedness in Santa Cruz County.”

– Maria, Senior at Watsonville High School



SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS

In 2015, the United Nations Member States adopted 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) to motivate action at the global, national, and local levels for a better world by 2030. This report aligns with ten SDGs, connecting our local efforts to achieve real and tangible results for children and youth from our neighborhoods to the world stage.



The 2018 Children and Youth Well-being Spotlight illuminates priority indicators across four domains¹ for Santa Cruz County children and youth to achieve a bright future.

Economic Well-being | page 7

Access to affordable housing, enough food, and adequate parental employment are important to providing the necessary circumstances for children to thrive at school and in the future.² Experiencing these conditions in childhood are associated with better long-term outcomes and breaking the cycle of poverty.³

Education | page 10

A quality education lays the foundation for children and youth to become productive, contributing adults. Engagement in early education and proficiency in reading and math are both tied to positive educational outcomes.⁴ High school graduation serves as a strong predictor of employment and adult earning potential.⁵

Health | page 13

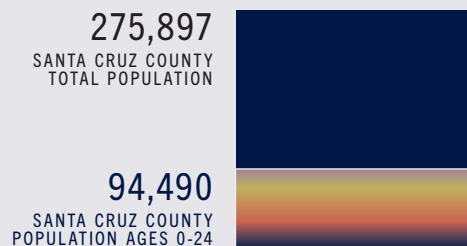
Addressing the physical and mental health care needs of children and youth is paramount to ensuring their overall development.⁶ Poor childhood health affects negatively school attendance and performance and increases the likelihood of chronic health problems as adults.⁷ Children and youth exposed to maltreatment and trauma are more likely to suffer life-long emotional and behavioral health concerns.⁸

Family and Community | page 16

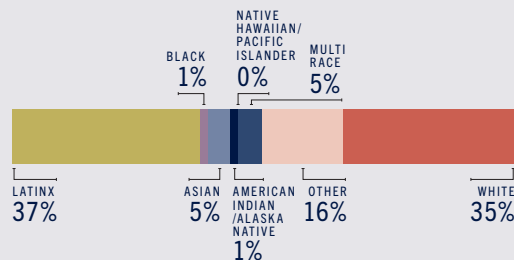
Children and youth in supportive communities and caring families are best positioned for future success.⁹ Two-generation approaches recognize that the well-being of children and youth is intrinsically connected to the well-being of their parents and caregivers. Recognizing and addressing these needs in tandem offers a stronger chance to break the cycle of poverty.¹⁰

Children and Youth Demographics

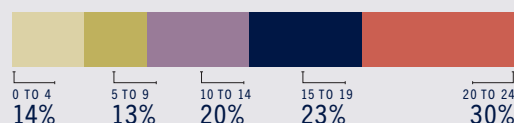
One in three (34%) Santa Cruz County residents are children or youth ages 0-24.¹¹



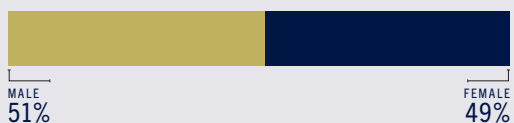
Breakdown by race/ethnicity¹³



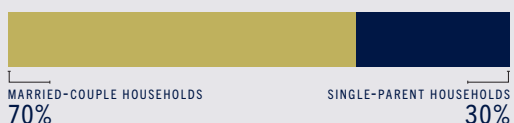
Breakdown by age¹²



Breakdown by sex¹⁴



Breakdown by household type for children under age 18¹⁵



Data Dashboard

This summary dashboard presents key statistics highlighted in this report for Santa Cruz County and California, where appropriate.

2018 Children and Youth Well-being SANTA CRUZ COUNTY SPOTLIGHT

Economic Well-being	Affordability and Housing Access		
	Children living in crowded households	32%	28%
	Households with a high housing cost burden	42%	42% CALIFORNIA
	Homeless children (under 18) and transition-age youth (18-24)	165 UNDER 18	423 18-24
	Students eligible for homeless services*	3,438	
	Employment		
	Children whose parents lack secure employment	5%	8% CALIFORNIA
	Youth in the labor force	35%	29% CALIFORNIA
	Children in Poverty		
	Children in poverty	13%	18% CALIFORNIA
Children in food insecure households	23%	23% CALIFORNIA	

Education	School Readiness		
	Children ages 3 and 4 <i>not</i> enrolled in preschool	50%	50% CALIFORNIA
	Achievement		
	Third-grade students <i>not</i> proficient in English language arts/literacy	59%	51% CALIFORNIA
	Eighth-grade students <i>not</i> proficient in math	67%	63% CALIFORNIA
	College and Career Ready		
High school graduates who met all A-G requirements	58%	47% CALIFORNIA	
High school students who did <i>not</i> receive a high school diploma	15%	17% CALIFORNIA	

Health	Access to Care		
	Children and youth (0-24) <i>without</i> a usual source of medical care	16%^	14% CALIFORNIA
	Children and youth (1-17) utilizing dental benefits through Medi-Cal	35%	46% CALIFORNIA
	Mental Health		
	Hospitalization rate for mental health issues among children (5-19)	4.9	5.0 CALIFORNIA
	Suicidal ideation among eleventh-grade students	11%	16% CALIFORNIA
Child Abuse and Neglect			
Rate per 1,000 of substantiated cases of child abuse / maltreatment	4.6	7.7 CALIFORNIA	
Children with a recurrence of maltreatment within 12-months of the initial report	8%	9% CALIFORNIA	

Family and Community	Parental Education		
	Children in families where head of household <i>lacks</i> a high school diploma	N/A ~	22% CALIFORNIA
	Community Safety		
	Seventh-grade students who experienced bias-related harassment	22%	25% CALIFORNIA
Misdemeanor arrest rate per 1,000 youth ages 10-19	19.1	11.1 CALIFORNIA	
Connectedness			
Ninth-grade students who reported high levels of school connectedness	56%	46% CALIFORNIA	
Youth ages 16-24 who are not in school and not working	4%	12% CALIFORNIA	

Note: Most recent available data are highlighted.

*This number refers to students designated under the McKinney-Vento Act which authorizes federal legislation relating to the education of children and youth experiencing homelessness. A full definition of the act can be found at <https://nche.ed.gov/legis/mv.php>

^Statistically unstable data.

~These data are currently unavailable at the county level.

Affordability and Housing Access

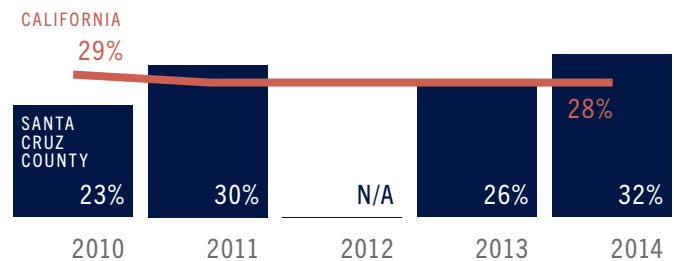
There is no doubt that Santa Cruz County is experiencing a housing crisis. As housing costs continue to increase, the increased burden on households also rises. In 2017, four in ten (43%) county households had a high housing cost burden wherein 30% or more of their income was spent on housing costs. Increased spending on housing costs limits resources and opportunities for children. The resulting housing instability can adversely affect youth well-being.¹⁶

Child and youth well-being is additionally negatively affected in crowded living arrangements, which are linked to infectious disease, stress and aggression, and poor educational outcomes.¹⁷ These impacts are also noted in homelessness research, as the loss of housing can have life-altering effects on children and youth. Furthermore, in both situations of crowding and homelessness, there is increased risk that key emotional relationships between parents and children will weaken.¹⁸

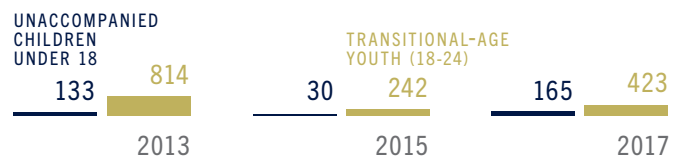
Why do these numbers for homeless children and youth look so different?

The simple answer is that at the federal level, there are multiple definitions of homelessness. The number of children and youth included in Point-in-Time counts are only those who meet the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) definition of literal homelessness. However, the criteria used by the U.S. Department of Education for the McKinney-Vento numbers is much broader in scope and includes those who are living with others due to economic hardship or housing loss (doubled-up).¹⁹

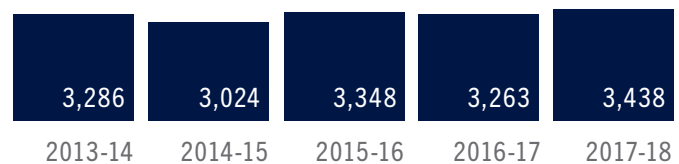
Between 2010 and 2014, over one in four children under age 18 in Santa Cruz County were living in crowded households.²⁰



In 2017, 588 unaccompanied homeless children and transition-age youth were enumerated in Santa Cruz County.²¹



Since 2013-14, more than 3,000 Santa Cruz County students annually have been designated eligible for services under the McKinney-Vento Act.^{22,*}



*See definition on page 6

Employment

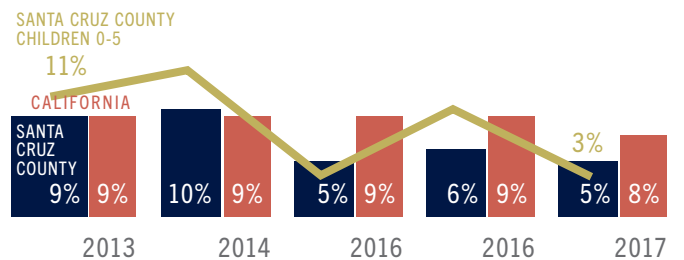
Children in families wherein parents lack secure employment, meaning both parents were not employed full-time, year-round in the labor force, are more likely to experience poverty, have poor school attendance, and academic achievement. Additional research supports that these children have a heightened likelihood of lower incomes as adults, highlighting related future impacts.²³

Beyond income, youth employment can offer community connectedness, provide meaningful experiences, and positively influence graduation rates and career preparedness.²⁴ Youth employment is particularly key for young adults who are not in school as it reduces their likelihood of involvement with the criminal justice system, and to increase their opportunities to gain skills and resources necessary for financial stability in adulthood.²⁵

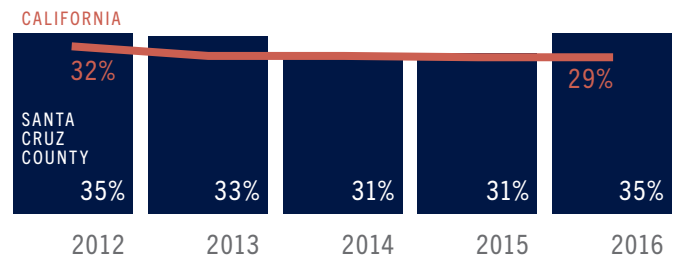
"Having the ability to work in a community in which I was raised in has given me self gratification to be able to work with people who have had similar experiences as I [did] when I was growing up."

– Daniel, Alcance (Street Outreach Case Manager)

Since 2013, the percentage of Santa Cruz County children under age 18 living with parents who *lack* secure employment has declined. That said, children ages 0 to 5 are more likely to live in these circumstances.²⁶



On average, just over one in three Santa Cruz County youth ages 15-19 were in the labor force between 2012 and 2016.²⁷

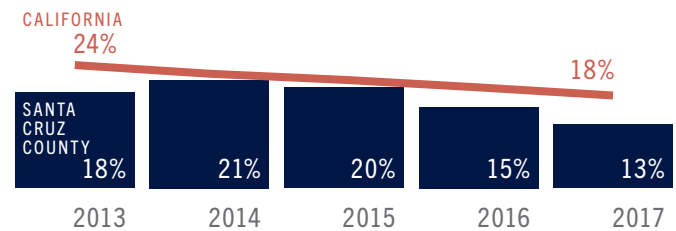


Children in Poverty

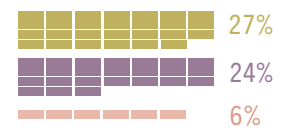
The ramifications of poverty in childhood can be long-lasting with radiating effects that persist into adulthood. Research suggests that poverty is a cycle, and children that grow up in circumstances of poverty, where basic needs such as food and shelter are lacking or nonexistent, are more likely to experience these circumstances as adults. Health impacts, including chronic illnesses, accidental injury risk, and anxiety, are higher among children in poverty.²⁸ For children of color, the problem of poverty is more acute. In Santa Cruz County, approximately one in four children of color were in poverty in 2018, in contrast to less than one in ten of their white peers.

Food insecurity among infants and children is additionally linked to adverse health outcomes that include developmental, cognitive, social, and behavioral issues. While hunger affects nearly all racial and ethnic groups, state-level research supports that low-income families of color are disproportionately impacted.²⁹

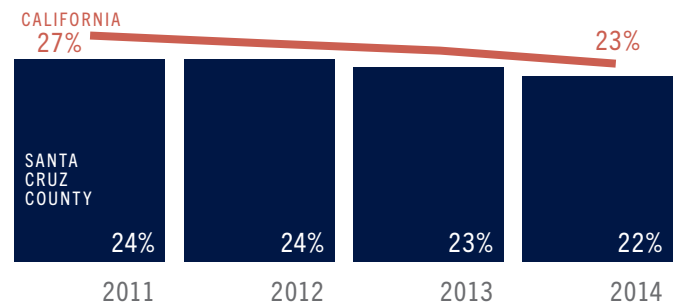
Despite a consistent decline since 2014, just over one in ten children under age 18 in Santa Cruz County were living in poverty in 2017.³⁰



In 2018, Hispanic and Black children under age 18 experienced poverty at disproportionate rates relative to their White peers.³¹



Between 2011 and 2014, one in four Santa Cruz County children under age 18 on average were living in households that have limited or uncertain access to adequate food.³²



School Readiness

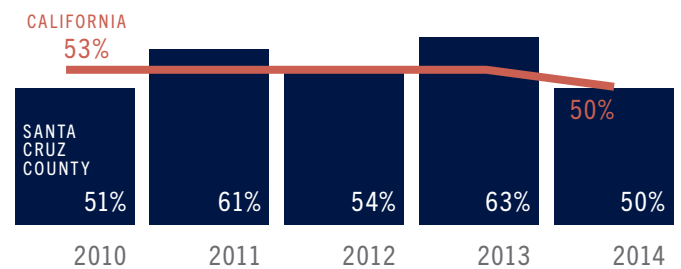
Enrollment in a quality preschool lays the foundation for future learning and success. Despite federal and state efforts to increase participation in pre-kindergarten programs, the percentages at the state and local levels have remained relatively flat, with just over half of children ages 3-4 enrolled in preschool.³³ Those children that are unenrolled are at a disadvantage for higher levels of educational attainment, career advancement, and potential earnings.³⁴

Research supports that while all children are able to benefit from preschool, larger gains are seen among children who are in, or come from, economically vulnerable circumstances, as well as dual-language learners.³⁵

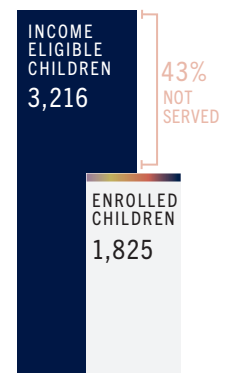
“...to thrive and become caring, competent and productive adults, [children] need access to well-coordinated health care that begins before birth ... strong, positive and responsive relationships in their lives ... [and] access to high-quality education from their earliest years, to and throughout adulthood.”

– David Brody, Executive Director
First 5 of Santa Cruz County

In 2014, one in two (50%) Santa Cruz County children ages 3-4 were *not* enrolled in preschool, similar to the state overall.³⁶



In 2014-15, 43% of low-income, eligible Santa Cruz County children ages 3 to 4 were *unserved* in subsidized child care, highlighting a tremendous unmet demand in our county.³⁷



Achievement

Proficiency in third grade reading and eighth grade math, are key education milestones that not only inform a child's trajectory towards remaining in school and on track to graduate, but also indicate their future earning potential and career success as adults.³⁸

If children are deficient in reading in third grade, research suggests they are at increased risk of falling further behind in their studies as subjects will necessitate these lagging skills. Inability to keep up in classes can lead to motivation issues and ultimately contribute to dropping out of school.³⁹

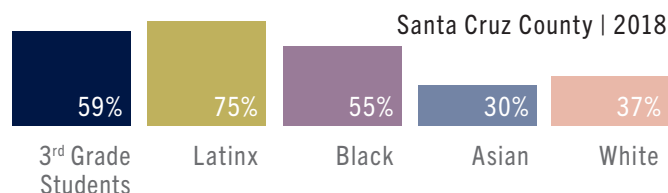
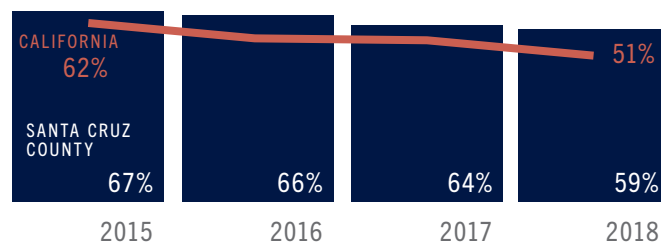
Similarly, eighth grade mathematics increase in rigor, and those students who do not meet minimum standards are far more likely to struggle in high school and graduate unprepared for high-skilled careers and college.⁴⁰

Both statewide and locally, over half of all students are *not* proficient in English language arts/literacy and mathematics. In Santa Cruz County, inequities are apparent for Latinx and Black students relative to their White and Asian peers across both English language arts/literacy and math achievement levels.

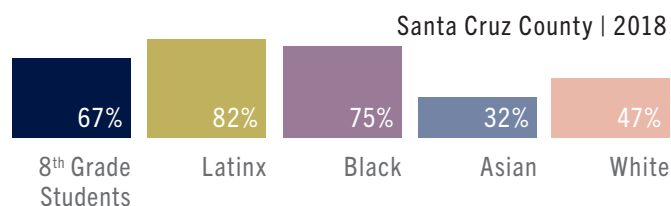
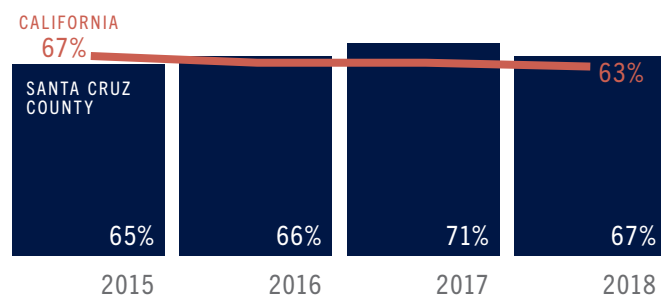
*How is proficiency defined?

Proficiency is defined as having met or exceeded grade-level standards, reflecting that the student has made progress toward acquiring the required knowledge to likely be successful in future schooling. Therefore, data for those *not* proficient reflects students that *nearly met* and those that *did not meet* these standards.

Since 2015, the percentage of 3rd grade students in Santa Cruz County that were *not* proficient* in English language arts/literacy has declined.⁴¹



Nearly 7 in ten 8th grade students in Santa Cruz County were *not* proficient* in mathematics 2018.⁴²



College and Career Ready

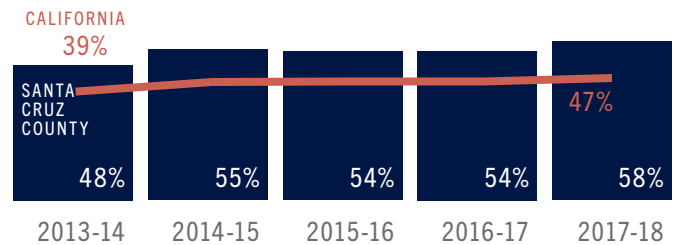
High school students seeking admission to the University of California (UC) or California State University (CSU) systems are required to successfully complete A-G subject requirements in order to be deemed minimally eligible for entrance. The intent of this subject list is to confirm that incoming students have the general knowledge and academic preparedness to be successful in these educational environments.⁴³

High school completion is both a pre-requisite for college as well an important indicator for future career readiness. Youth who do not complete high school are more likely to have fewer choices and opportunities while in young adulthood, experience poorer physical and mental health, engage in criminal activity, live in poverty, have lower levels of self-esteem, and are ultimately less prepared for future success.⁴⁴

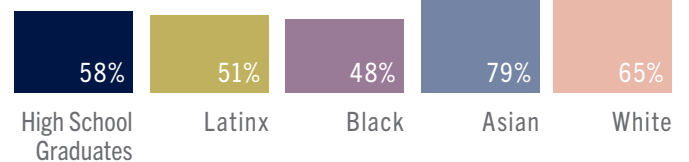
“My school and community can help me become more successful by supporting me. Improved support will definitely boost my confidence – from tutoring to help with the process to get to college.”

– Angel, High School Sophomore

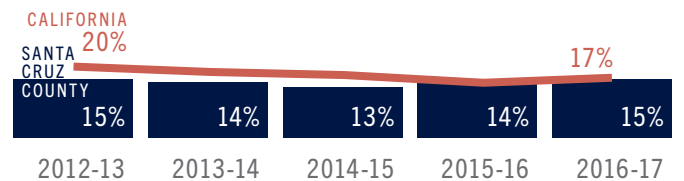
The percentage of Santa Cruz County high school graduates who *met* all A-G requirements increased 21% since 2013-14.⁴⁵



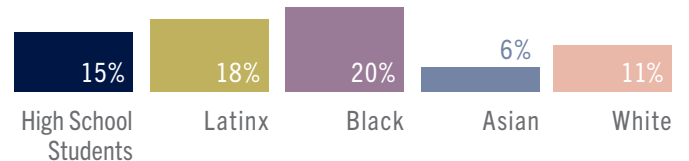
Santa Cruz County | 2017-18



The percentage of Santa Cruz County high school students who did *not* receive a regular high school diploma has remained constant for the past five years.⁴⁶



Santa Cruz County | 2016-17



Access to Care

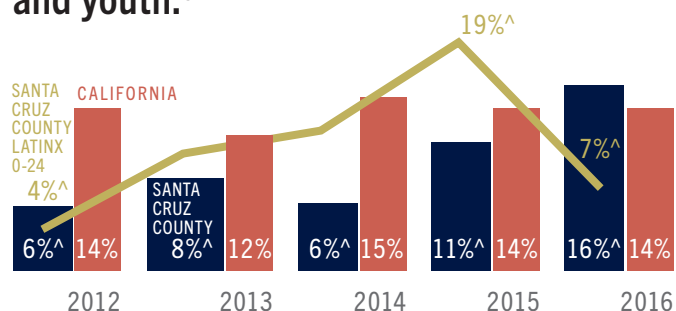
Access to health and dental care for children is important for the treatment of immediate concerns, and also for the monitoring of development and preventative care needs.⁴⁷ Children with medical homes, or regular sources of health care, are more likely to use these preventative services and have improved health outcomes.⁴⁸ In Santa Cruz County, between 2012 and 2016, the percentage of children and youth that do *not* have a usual source of needed medical care trended in the wrong direction going from 6% to 16%.

Healthy baby teeth are key to healthy development, helping babies chew, speak, and smile.⁴⁹ Annual dental visits are key to both preventing and detecting diseases and vitamin deficiencies. The majority (65%) of Medi-Cal recipients in Santa Cruz County ages 0-17 were *not* taking advantage of their annual dental visit benefits in 2015. It is worthwhile to note that only 10 out of 58 dental clinics in the county currently accept Medi-Cal benefits.⁵⁰

*What is the First Tooth, First Birthday Goal?

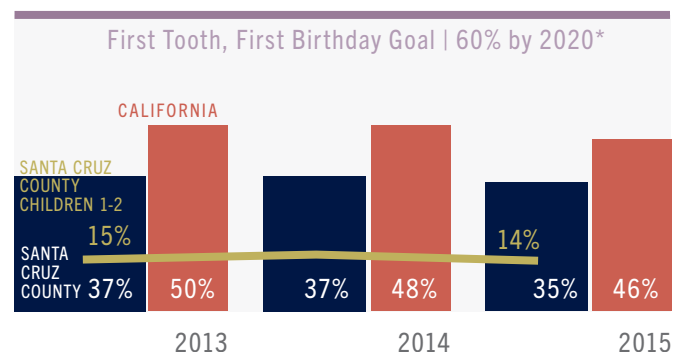
Oral Health Access Santa Cruz County launched the “First Tooth, First Birthday” campaign in 2016 with the goal of increasing Medi-Cal dental utilization rates through the promotion of dental visits and establishing a dental home by a child’s first birthday, or by their first tooth, whichever arrives sooner.⁵¹

The percentage of Santa Cruz County children and youth ages 0-24 *without a usual source of needed medical care* increased between 2012 and 2016, rates were higher among Latinx children and youth.⁵²



[^]Statistically unstable data.

Santa Cruz County Medi-Cal beneficiaries ages 1-17 *utilized* their benefits for annual dental visits at consistently lower rates than the state. However, beneficiaries ages 1-2 *utilized* these benefits at much lower rates than children in the county overall.⁵³



Mental Health

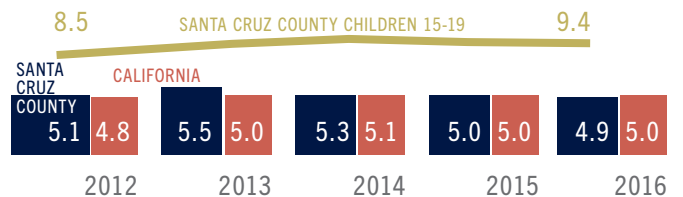
Sound emotional and mental health are essential to healthy development among children and youth, laying the groundwork for development of positive coping and social skills, an ability to adapt to challenging situations, and being able to securely navigate important life transitions.⁵⁴ While adolescents experience a wide array of feelings, persistent symptoms of anxiety and/or depression can negatively impact academic performance and relationships.⁵⁵

Mental health concerns, along with substance use disorder, are risk factors for suicide which is the second leading cause of death among youth and young adults ages 15-24 in the United States.⁵⁶ Nationally, LGBTQ youth report higher rates of depression and suicide than their heterosexual peers. Research indicates that LGBTQ youth suffer substantially from biases and prejudices leading to depression and suicidal ideation and hindering their ability to move through key sexual life transitions, such as disclosing one's orientation to others.⁵⁷ Programming supporting LGBTQ youth and their families in navigating and developing sexual orientation and gender identity is a potential strategy towards reducing suicidal behavior.⁵⁸

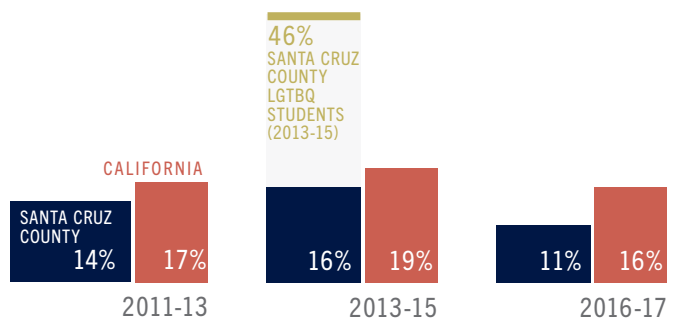
“... some activities that result in having a sense of well-being are eating healthy, having places to socialize, and expressing myself in my community.”

– Elizabeth, Jóvenes SANOS Youth Advocate

Santa Cruz County children ages 5-19 were hospitalized at a rate of 5 per 1,000 for mental health issues in 2015; rates were nearly twice as high among those children ages 15-19.⁵⁹



In 2013-15, those Santa Cruz County students identifying as LGBTQ were nearly 3x as likely as their peers to report they seriously considered attempting suicide in the past year.⁶⁰



Child Maltreatment

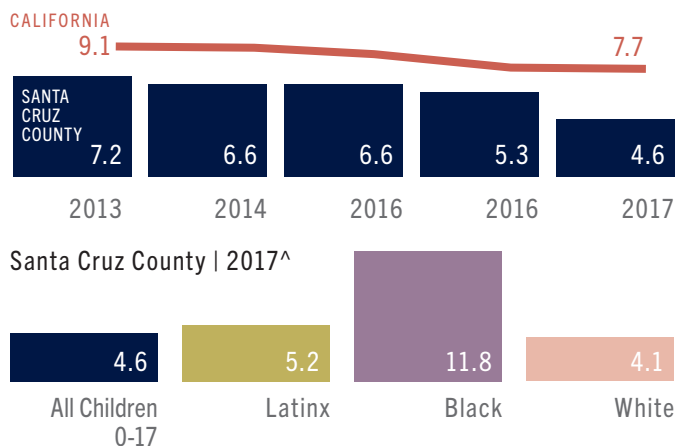
In addition to the physical trauma of cuts, bruises, or broken bones, early brain development can be disrupted by child abuse, neglect, and maltreatment. The effects to children who experience severe stress can be toxic and have an adverse effect on their nervous and immune system development. Children who are victims of abuse, neglect, or maltreatment are subsequently more likely to experience physical and mental health issues as adults, including chronic disease, eating disorders, and depression. These children are also more likely to participate in adverse health activities or high-risk behaviors, potentially perpetuating a cycle of violence by entering into unsafe relationships.⁶¹

Research suggests that interventions, such as providing young children with nurturing relationships early on in their lives is effective in offsetting the negative outcomes associated with adverse childhood experiences like maltreatment.⁶²

*What is meant by *substantiated* case?

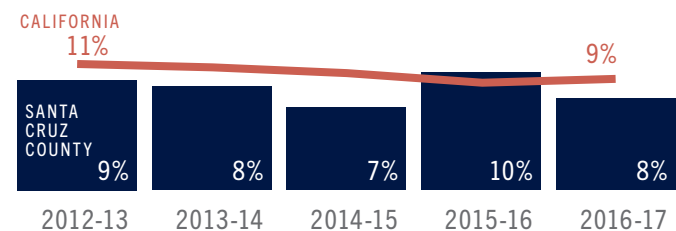
Data on maltreatment are generally grouped in two categories, *reports* and *substantiated cases*. While a report warrants an investigation into a claim of child neglect and/or abuse, a substantiated claim is verified as such following an investigation where the child protective services (CPS) agency has sufficient evidence that the incident of child abuse and/or neglect has taken place per the definition set by state law.⁶³

The rate of substantiated* cases of child abuse/maltreatment among all Santa Cruz County children ages 0-17 has steadily declined since 2013. In the county there is a disparity, with higher rates of substantiation in the population for Black children.^{^,64}



[^]Race/ethnicity rates should be interpreted with care due to low n's.

The percentage of children in Santa Cruz County with a recurrence of maltreatment within 12 months of the initial report has remained fairly consistent between 2012-13 and 2016-17.⁶⁵

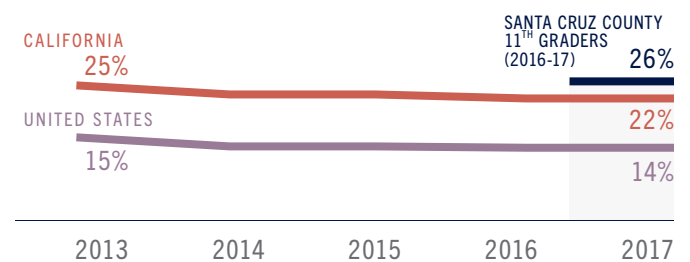


Parental Education

Research supports ties between the educational attainment of a parent and the future success of their children, as higher levels of education allow parents to build financial stability and maintain healthier households, supporting the circumstances that allow children to thrive.⁶⁶ In contrast, children who are raised in households where parents, guardians, or head of households have not graduated from high school, not only have fewer socioeconomic advantages, but also are more likely to experience health issues, low educational attainment and achievement, and ultimately have limited educational and employment opportunities as adults.⁶⁷ California ranks highest in the nation for the share of children living in families where the head of household *lacks* a high school diploma.⁶⁸ While these data are currently unavailable at the county level, the California Healthy Kids Survey does collect student reported data regarding parental educational attainment. In 2017, just over one-quarter of Santa Cruz County 11th grade students reported that their parents had *not* finished high school.

Over one-fifth (22%) of California children under 18 were living in families where the head of household *lacked* a high school diploma in 2016.⁶⁹

In 2016-17, 26% of Santa Cruz County 11th grade students answered "did *not* finish high school" when reporting the highest level of education their parents had completed.⁷⁰



Community Safety

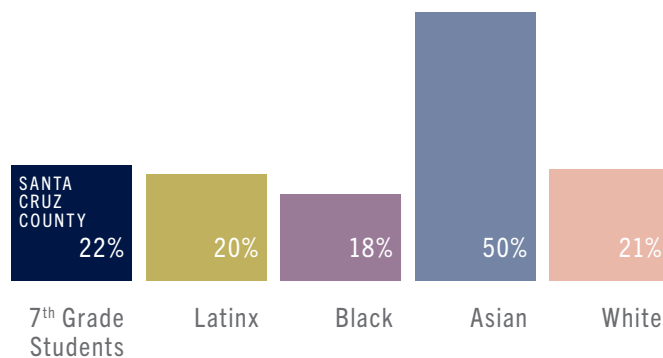
Children living and learning in safe environments are better poised for success. Bullying, whether experienced physically, verbally, or online, raises the risk of not only physical injury, but also increases the likelihood of mental health problems and lower levels of academic achievement.⁷¹ These effects are experienced by direct victims of bullying, and also by those who witness or engage in acts of bullying.⁷²

Negative mental and physical health outcomes are more likely to be experienced by youth who are arrested. The experience of the arrest itself, and any associated time in a detention facility, is associated with trauma-related effects. Arrests impact educational attainment and affect career prospects and income-generating potential - reinforcing the potential for a cycle of judicial system involvement.⁷³ Nationally, arrest rates disproportionately persist among children of color, and is reflected in local data as well. Pre-arrest diversion programs, along with other services that address family engagement and substance use disorders, are supported by research as effective strategies towards reducing recidivism.⁷⁴

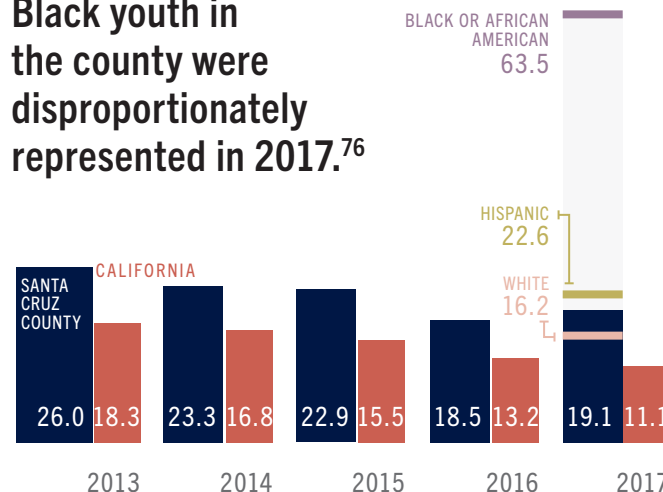
*What is bias-related harassment?

Bias-related harassment is defined by the California Healthy Kids Survey as based on one or more of the following five reasons: disability, gender, race/ethnicity or national origin, religion, or sexual orientation.

In the 2016-17 school year, one in two (50%) 7th grade Asian students in Santa Cruz County reported experiencing bias-related harassment,* more than 2x that of 7th grade students overall.⁷⁵



The misdemeanor arrest rate per 1,000 youth ages 10-19 in Santa Cruz County consistently outpaced the state; Black youth in the county were disproportionately represented in 2017.⁷⁶



Connectedness

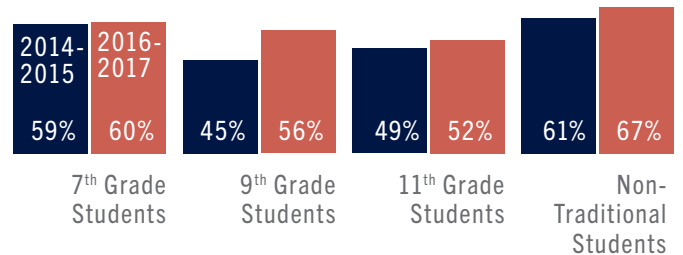
When youth feel safe and connected at school, they are better positioned to succeed and engage in healthy behaviors inside and outside of school.⁷⁷ Students who report high levels of school connectedness feel they have adults at school who care about them both as learners and as individuals.⁷⁸ Increasing school connectedness can positively contribute to academic motivation and productivity as well as deter youth from becoming disconnected.⁷⁹ Disconnected youth are those individuals ages 16-24 who are both *not* in school and *not* working. Disconnected youth are removed from people, communities, and experiences that would allow them the opportunities to develop critical skills to achieve stability and success into adulthood and further into their futures.⁸⁰ For instance, community connectedness is a positive predictor of "key character strengths, emotional competence, and effortful control".⁸¹

*How is school connectedness measured?

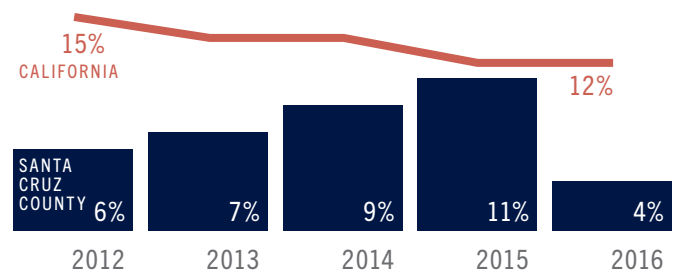
School connectedness is the combination of five questions on the California Healthy Kids Survey. Students are asked how strongly they agree or disagree with the following statements: I feel close to people at this school; I am happy to be at this school; I feel like I am part of this school; the teachers at this school treat students fairly; and I feel safe in my school.

More than half of Santa Cruz County 7th, 9th, 11th-grade and non-traditional students reported high levels of school connectedness* in both the 2014-15 and 2016-17 school years.⁸²

Santa Cruz County



In Santa Cruz County, the percentage of disconnected youth (those individuals ages 16-24 who are *not* in school and are *not* working)^ has remained consistently lower than the state overall between 2012 and 2016.⁸³



[^]The Public Use Microsample (PUMS) used to calculate disconnected youth is subject to large margins of error and percentages should be interpreted with this in mind.

Endnotes and Sources



You can further **engage with the data** presented in this report, including exploring additional population groups, through an **interactive, online platform** accessible on United Way of Santa Cruz County's website: www.unitedwaysc.org

"The main support is to have a united, healthy family and above all to have a goal in life. We need to give a lot of love, trust and dignified treatment to each of our children. That they focus on their studies and have a vision for the future. Start saving for their education. Be happy and fight to be better every day."

– Diana, Cradle 2 Career Parent

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About the Data in this Report

Secondary (pre-existing) data were collected from a myriad of sources including those from the federal and state level as well as through online databases and the Internet. Multiple years of data were shown to present trends whenever possible. This report underwent extensive proofing to ensure accuracy through adherence to a data proofing protocol requiring thorough checking of text, numbers, and formatting in the narrative, tables, and charts.

ABOUT THE RESEARCHER



ASR is a social research firm dedicated to helping people build better communities since 1980. We help communities to measure and improve their quality of life. We help organizations to measure and improve the impact of their services. ASR is passionate about the power of rigorous, usable research to help our clients promote practical and lasting change in the lives of individuals, children, and families.

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Children and Youth Well-being

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