

November 2010



Regional Matters: Through Young People's Eyes

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Nancy Erbstein, Ph.D.
Department of Human and Community Development

Rebeca Burciaga, Ph.D.
Department of Educational Leadership
San José State University

Gloria M. Rodriguez, PhD
School of Education

Center for Regional Change
University of California, Davis
One Shields Ave, 1309 Hart Hall
Davis, CA 95616
530.751.8799
<http://regionalchange.ucdavis.edu>

HYHR2010-ES02



This Working Paper Executive Summary is a product of Healthy Youth/ Healthy Regions, a collaborative partnership of the UC Davis Center for Regional Change, Sierra Health Foundation and The California Endowment. Healthy Youth/Healthy Regions was commissioned and funded by Sierra Health Foundation with additional funding from The California Endowment to document the connections between youth well-being and regional prosperity in the nine-county Capital Region of Northern California.

Healthy Youth/Healthy Regions produced a series of twelve related Working Papers. These papers can be accessed via the Center for Regional Change website: <http://regionalchange.ucdavis.edu/hyhr/main>

Published By: Center for Regional Change
University of California, Davis
One Shields Ave, 1309 Hart Hall
Davis, CA 95616
530.751.8799

Copyright: 2010 UC Davis Center for Regional Change

Citation Information:

Erbstein, Nancy, Rebeca Burciaga, Gloria M. Rodriguez. 2010. *Regional Matters: Through Young People's Eyes Executive Summary*. Healthy Youth/Healthy Regions Working Paper. Center for Regional Change, UC Davis

Key Findings

Young people in the Capital Region are living their lives regionally—that is, in ways that are shaped by regional dynamics, and at a scale that extends beyond neighborhoods, and even individual counties. Analysis of a group of young adults’ experiences from the Healthy Youth/ Healthy Regions study draws our attention to four important ways that region matters in producing young people’s disparate experiences of well-being and support.

- Young people’s life trajectories in the region are shaped in part by broader historical and current regional patterns of settlement, investment, and planning.
- Systems are unable to accommodate the level of mobility experienced by many youth, who are forced to move, and also need to move, around the region further compounding profound effects of fragmentation.
- Youth experience disparate access to resources across regions and within the region, and some regional scale resources typically seen as resource-rich have unequal access to lower income youth and youth of color. Conversely, cultural forms of wealth are often under-recognized in communities and across the region that are often seen as resource-poor.
- Places in the region are being socially defined vis à vis each other in ways that position some young people as “belonging” and others as not. Youth receive limited support to discuss and challenge these assumptions.

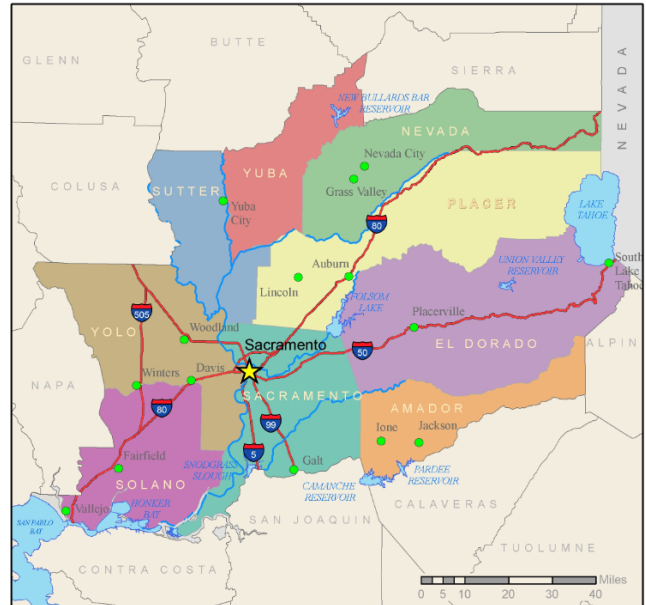


Figure 1. Nine County Capital Region

There has been limited attention to the region as a unit of analysis in fields focused more specifically on the well-being of children and youth and their pathways to adulthood. Why and how should “the region” matter to those of us concerned about youth well-being in general, and youth populations that are especially vulnerable to poor educational, economic and health trajectories in particular? The experiences of 16 young adults who grew up and attended high school in California’s Capital Region and left without graduating help us explore these questions.

While youth do not use the term “region” in describing their experiences, their stories demonstrate that the nature and dynamics of the Capital Region have been, and continue to be, of consequence for themselves and their families. These findings have several implications for efforts to promote youth well-being.

Regional Planning and Assessment Should Focus on Vulnerable Children, Youth and Families

The implications of the existence, quality and location of regional infrastructure—transportation, housing, jobs, parks, shopping, services—for young people suggest that policy, planning and evaluation processes should incorporate impact assessments that focus on and include children, youth and families. Particular emphasis should be placed on the interests, needs and resources of populations that are disproportionately affected by poor educational, economic, and health outcomes.

Institutional Data Systems Must Accommodate Mobility

Youth-serving systems and non-profit organizations—schools, healthcare, social services, probation, foster care, CalWorks, etc.—should develop data systems and implement strategies that facilitate working with young people as they move across places. Each of these systems should simultaneously identify young people who are experiencing high levels of school and/or residential mobility, investigate causes, and work towards implementing—either themselves or in partnership with other organizations—strategies that increase youth and family stability.

Institutional Data Systems Should Support Serving Youth

Current youth data collection processes are primarily focused on monitoring and compliance within sectors, rather than better serving young people. Study participants’ experiences suggest the importance of better using data to enable action with and on behalf of youth and across jurisdictional and system boundaries.

Require Responsive Approaches to Disparities in Opportunity

Across a range of sectors, institutional planning and investment strategies, provision of technical assistance and training, efforts to bring funding into the region, and social mobilization efforts, need to focus explicitly on addressing the barriers faced by vulnerable children, youth and families, and disparities in resources and opportunities across the region.

Account for the Complex Barriers to Well-being and Build on Youth, Community, and Regional Resources

Young adult interviewees highlight the knowledge, networks, and commitments of select adults they’ve come to view as allies, informal community leaders, and ethnic and faith networks as important local and regional resources for such efforts. In addition, young adults who have grown up navigating the challenges of regional inequity, resource gaps, system fragmentation, and discrimination hold critical insights regarding how to build a healthy region, and should be key partners in doing so as advisors, evaluators, and leaders.

Increase Programming and Practices that Build on Local and Regional Assets and Counter Negative Stereotypes

As a region, we need to find ways to foster community pride and regional connection, focus on inclusion, and break down race, class, cultural and other barriers. This is a responsibility for which adults and institutions (both those that serve youth and those that train the adults who work with our young people) must play a role. Young people in the region and beyond have proven themselves to be powerful leaders and partners in these efforts and should be further supported.