

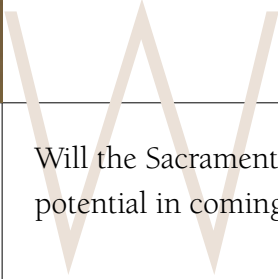
HEALTHY YOUTH / HEALTHY REGIONS

INFORMING ACTION FOR THE 9 COUNTY
CAPITAL REGION AND ITS YOUTH



COMMISSIONED BY SIERRA HEALTH FOUNDATION
WITH ADDITIONAL FUNDING FROM THE CALIFORNIA ENDOWMENT

STUDY DESIGNED AND CONDUCTED BY
THE UC DAVIS CENTER FOR REGIONAL CHANGE



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Will the Sacramento Capital Region prosper, thrive and ultimately grow into its full potential in coming years?

To answer this question, we have to look carefully at the well-being of young people who now inhabit the Capital Region’s nine counties. As go today’s young people – tomorrow’s workers, parents, neighbors and leaders – so goes the region. The interconnected prospects for our youth and our region have been examined by Healthy Youth/Healthy Regions (HY/HR), a two-year, multimethod study commissioned by Sierra Health Foundation with additional funding from The California Endowment and conducted by the UC Davis Center for Regional Change.

The study reflects evidence that many different factors determine our youth’s and region’s health and well-being, while focusing on five major, interrelated contributors: 1) education, 2) physical and mental health, 3) employment, 4) civic engagement, and 5) the built environment – the structures and surroundings created and modified by people. We explored the relationship between positive outcomes and regional dynamics, drawing on data from secondary sources and youth surveys, interviews with institutional leaders, young adults who left or considered leaving high school without graduating and their adult allies, and youth-generated media documenting local conditions. This report synthesizes the research findings. Detailed HY/HR Working Papers, as well as maps and data on specific subjects addressed in this report, can be found at <http://regionalchange.ucdavis.edu/projects/Healthy-Youth-Healthy-Regions>.

The overall findings of HY/HR can be briefly summarized by four key points:

1. The Capital Region cannot succeed unless its youth are successful in terms of health, education, job readiness and their preparation for the demands of family and civic life.
2. Today significant structural challenges undermine youth’s progress in all these areas. Underscoring these challenges are disparities in resources and opportunities

associated with geography, socioeconomic status, race, ethnicity, immigration status and other factors.

3. The challenges we now face must be met through a unified approach that crosses sectors and systems on both a local and regional scale.
4. Fostering healthy youth and a healthy region requires leadership from many people, including youth themselves, and unrealized community assets across all nine Capital Region counties.

This report urges leaders and community members to think regionally about youth, stressing that the conventional demarcations frequently used to plan and allocate public resources fail to account for young people’s highly mobile lives. Many young people live their lives regionally as they seek jobs, education, services and recreation, and change their residence frequently as dictated by family crisis or opportunity.

In addition, this report highlights undertapped regional wealth that could be mobilized to foster youth and regional health, including the energy, insight and talents of young people themselves throughout the area. “If I don’t attempt to change the community,” asked one teenager, “who will? Doesn’t it start with the ones living in it? ‘Me’ participating in a group effort to improve my community – that’s an obvious answer to an unasked question.”

Capital Region Index of Youth Vulnerability (by Zip Code)

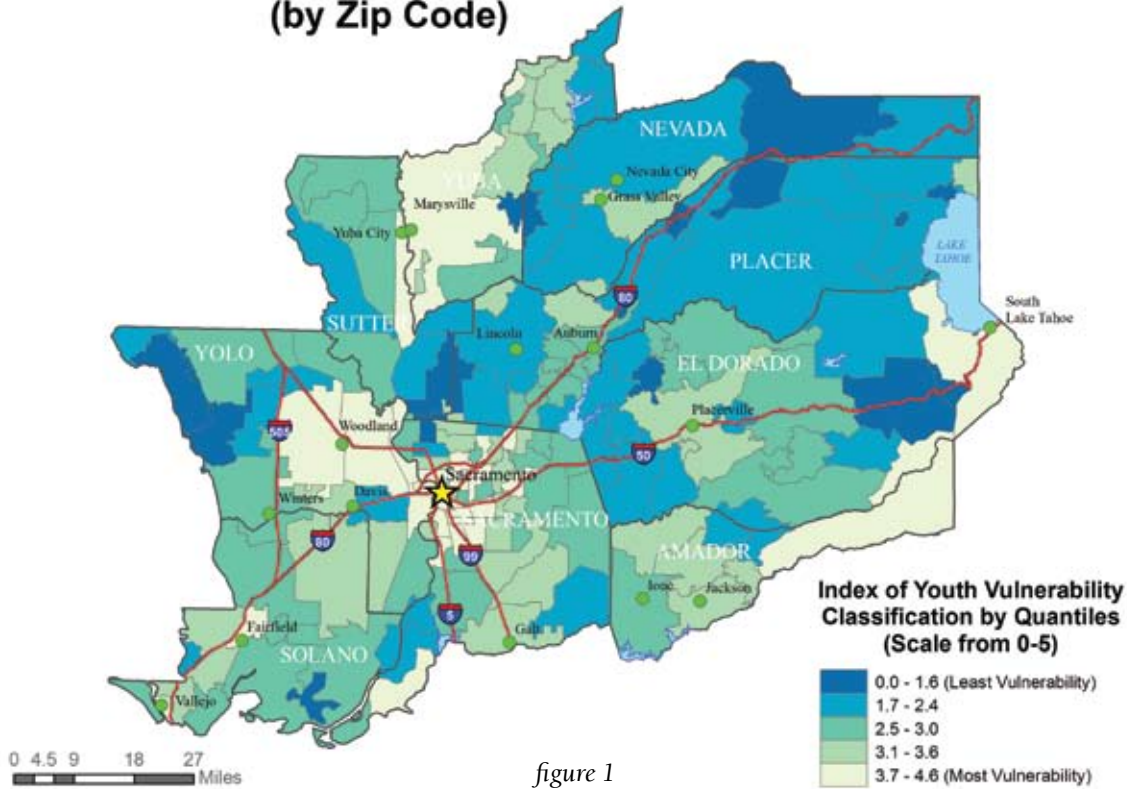


figure 1



Sactown Heroes,
West Sacramento
Youth Resource
Coalition

THE CHALLENGE BEFORE US

“You can’t describe the region as a whole,” observed a legal advocate. “The region includes pockets of poverty and pockets of intense wealth. We have a patchwork of political subdivisions that result in inequitable allocations for infrastructure, schools and the like. So for white kids from wealthy families, it’s a great place to live. For others, especially young people of color, it can be miserable.” Overall, youth opportunity and well-being, as well as disparities associated with who you are and where you live, are undermining our regional well-being.

Healthy Youth/Healthy Regions outlines a host of interrelated challenges facing young people and the Capital Region. For example:

- Of the 41,000 students who entered 9th grade in 2004, only 66% graduated in four years;
- Only 28% of Latino students and 31% of African-American students attend schools with high or very high graduation rates;
- Among the students entering high school in 2004, only 23% graduated having completed their college entrance requirements for the University of California or California State University systems, compared with 37% statewide;

- Only 39% of the region’s students entered a public college or university within one year of graduation, far fewer than the statewide average of 55%;
- Fewer than one in 10 students reported that they have high levels of adult encouragement to explore future careers or pursue formal education.
- African-American and Latino young adults (18-24) in the Capital Region are overrepresented in low-wage retail occupations and underrepresented in the region’s higher wage growth sectors of health care, education and high technology.
- The economic costs of teen birth is approximately \$82 million a year – the culmination of lost tax revenues, public assistance, child health care, foster care and involvement with the criminal justice system.

The research team constructed a Youth Vulnerability Index that measures concentrations of youth experiencing conditions that often disconnect them from support for a healthy transition to adulthood: high school completion, teen pregnancy, foster care placement, poverty and juvenile felony arrests (figure 1). At the regional scale, these

Capital Region Index of Youth Well-Being (by School District)

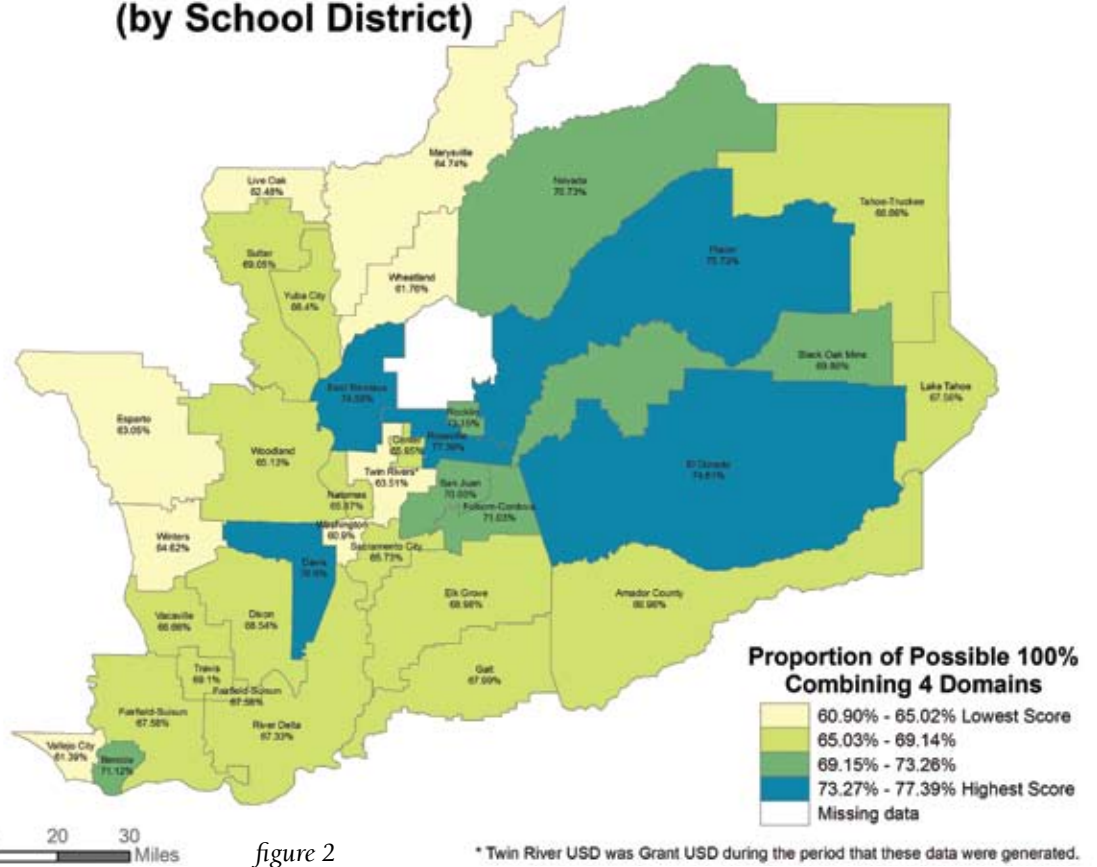


figure 2

* Twin River USD was Grant USD during the period that these data were generated.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

data demonstrate high and concentrated levels of vulnerability in the urban core and some inner-ring suburbs and rural areas.

Researchers also constructed an Index of Youth Well-Being to assess overall youth well-being in four major domains: physical health, education, psychological/emotional health and social supports (figure 2). Although parts of the Capital Region ranked relatively high, far more areas scored very low, with more than two-thirds of school districts lodged in the lowest two categories of well-being scores. This is likely a conservative estimate of the situation, as youth who left high school without graduating or who attend alternative schools (e.g., continuation schools) or who are incarcerated are likely underrepresented in these data.

In sum, the Healthy Youth/Healthy Regions study points to recurring cycles of social neglect and missed opportunity whose impact compounds over time, while also identifying significant assets and opportunities that could be mobilized.

For the Capital Region, these limited supports and accumulated losses presage a social and fiscal

calamity. The estimated lifetime bill for one year's cohort of Capital Region students who do not complete high school totals \$480 million for state and local governments and more than \$1 billion for the federal government. The human cost remains incalculable.

Yet these real and mounting challenges do not describe the entire picture. The region's past achievements and present assets also figure significantly in our ability to address this crisis. Our collective research suggests that the Capital Region contains many of the elements necessary to uproot even the most entrenched problems facing young people today. Not least among these are our youth themselves. We were impressed by the tone of hope and optimism that characterized the worldview of many young people, including those facing enormous obstacles. While these young men and women spoke candidly about their doubts, confusion and fears for the future, they also described their deep desire and efforts – which in some cases are truly heroic – to be part of the solution.

Passion, urgency and a willingness to work hard exist in substantial measure among the Capital

T HIS REPORT URGES LEADERS AND COMMUNITY MEMBERS TO THINK REGIONALLY ABOUT YOUTH, STRESSING THAT THE CONVENTIONAL DEMARCATIONS FREQUENTLY USED TO PLAN AND ALLOCATE PUBLIC RESOURCES FAIL TO ACCOUNT FOR YOUNG PEOPLE'S HIGHLY MOBILE LIVES.

Region's youth. Many long to engage the issues that will determine their future. The real question is whether the adults currently in charge will support their aspirations and afford them the opportunity to grow into their rightful role as today's and tomorrow's leaders.

INFORMED ACTION FOR HEALTHY YOUTH AND A HEALTHY REGION

This study indicates that successful initiatives on behalf of youth's healthy development can only be secured by changes in our regional approach to education, youth development, employment, health services and infrastructure improvements. One youth employment specialist illustrated the urgency for collective action, saying, "[Youth need] people behind them, a broad spectrum of people ... None of us is successful unless this [young] person is successful, so we need to do something to make sure that they are successful."

To this end, the Healthy Youth/Healthy Regions report makes three broad recommendations as a framework for action.

1. PLACE YOUTH AT THE CENTER (NOT MARGINS) OF REGIONAL IMPROVEMENT STRATEGIES

A coherent policy framework for youth that individuals, organizations and networks can rally around remains an essential unmet need in the Capital Region. While specific action strategies could assume a myriad of shapes, any framework should address social and geographic disparities in youth opportunities and outcomes, and four areas of emphasis should be afforded serious consideration: 1) reframing public perceptions of youth, 2) amplifying the voices of young people (including our most vulnerable populations), 3) designing youth and family-friendly regional infrastructure, and 4) promoting policy tools that make the health and well-being of young people a primary metric of success.

2. ENSURE SUFFICIENT RESOURCES FOR LONG-RANGE PLANNING, ACTION AND EVALUATION

The report urges improvements in the effectiveness of allocating and coordinating existing funds through the use of children's budgets, tax-sharing measures across local governments, and evidence-based and performance-based budgeting. In addition, increasing the available funds for youth development through parcel taxes and through public-private partnerships are important steps.

3. CONVENE A CAPITAL REGION COORDINATING BODY DEDICATED TO IMPROVING THE PROSPECTS FOR YOUTH

A vital regional coordinating body can enable local leaders to think, plan and act at a cooperative level of unprecedented breadth and depth. It also holds the potential to make room for new voices, including those of young people themselves. Support for associated community organizing efforts – particularly with the most underserved populations – will facilitate effective policy strategies and representation of all regional constituencies. An urgent priority for this body should be bridging the gaps between systems and jurisdictions to ensure that the most vulnerable youth do not fall through the cracks, and are provided on-ramps to healthy, prosperous and meaningful lives.

THE OPPORTUNITY BEFORE US

We face a clear, unambiguous choice. We can take the actions outlined in this report and invest the funds and energy now required to support the development of healthy youth who will contribute immensely toward building a healthy region. Or we can push our civic responsibilities further down the road, allowing the social problems to compound and the accumulated fiscal costs to skyrocket. Like the fate of our youth and our region, the moral and economic cases for action remain inextricably linked. We need to back the creative renovation of systems, services and social networks, ensuring the well-being of our youth because we should and because we must. In pursuing this path, we have everything to win.



Tuere Anderson, director of Health Services for Youth Radio, speaks at the Youth Media Forum for Social Change, 2010.