



## **Summary of Key Facts in SSMC’s Indicators Report: “The Well-Being of Children Youth and Families in San Mateo County”**

**NOTE:** The full report is located at [bit.ly/2023IndicatorsReport](https://bit.ly/2023IndicatorsReport). It was published on October 26, 2023. Chapter and page numbers follow each excerpt. For example, “1-4” is Chapter 1, page 4.

### **INTRODUCTION**

Worldwide, communities naturally thrive when their children thrive. Instead of asking one another “How are you?”, the Masai people traditionally greet one another with a phrase that translates to “And how are the children?” The traditional response is “The children are well.” This exchange underscores the idea that the health and sustainability of a community are dependent on the well-being of its children.

### **CHAPTER 1: BASIC NEEDS**

#### **ECONOMIC SECURITY**

Between 2017 and 2021, about 6.2% of the population in San Mateo County lived below the poverty threshold. The percent of people living below the poverty threshold in San Mateo County is lower than in California (12.3%) and the U.S. average (12.6%).

1-4

#### **HOUSING**

Students experiencing housing insecurity are six times more likely than their peers to be chronically absent.

1-11

In San Mateo County, the 2022 One Day Homeless Count identified 1,808 individuals — including 119 family households — experiencing homelessness on the night of February 23, 2022.

1-12

According to a 2022 report by the John W. Gardner Center at Stanford University, 2% of K-12 students in San Mateo County public schools — over 2,600 children — reported experiencing housing instability at some point during the 2016-17 and 2018-19 school years.

1-14

Elementary school students in San Mateo County who are homeless are six times more likely to be absent than their income-stable peers.

1-17

#### **FOOD SECURITY**

In 2021 in San Mateo County, 18% of households with children having incomes above 185% of the poverty guideline were likely food insecure. Yet, these households likely do not qualify for most federal nutrition assistance programs. 1-24

To ensure all individuals in need are covered in San Mateo County, especially considering its elevated cost of living, the food bank Second Harvest of Silicon Valley uses a higher poverty threshold to determine eligibility for its programs. Families with income below 275% of the federal poverty level qualify for assistance.

1-24

## **HEALTH CARE**

In 2021, a smaller percentage of children were uninsured in San Mateo County (approximately 4,050 people aged under 19), compared to California (fig. 1.19) and the national average (5%). However, for the population with income below 138% of the poverty line, the rate of uninsured children in San Mateo County reaches 10%, higher than the levels of both the U.S. (7%) and California (4.6%). According to the 2023 national poverty guidelines, for a family of 4 an income of \$41,400 or less corresponds to 138% of Poverty Guideline (PG); an income of \$75,000 to 250% or less of PG; and \$120,000 to 400% or less of PG. 1-31

In San Mateo County, according to the 2023 Community Health Needs Assessment access to health care for children has worsened since 2004, with 23% of caregivers surveyed rating it “fair” or “poor.” No differences in perceived access to child health services were found between low- and high-income populations.

1-32

## **CHAPTER 2: DEVELOPMENTAL & EDUCATIONAL OPPORTUNITIES**

### **CHILD CARE**

According to the Economic Policy Institute, underfunding is the root cause of these issues in California. Furthermore, what parents can afford to pay is not enough to provide child care providers and early childhood educators with a living wage and ensure high-quality care and education for young children. There is a largely unchallenged expectation that child care providers and early childhood educators will underwrite the cost of the child care system with their low wages.

2-2

According to the San Mateo County Child Care Needs Assessment 2022, more than 80% of respondents stated their need for child care was to work outside of the home. In a San Mateo County parent survey conducted in the fall of 2022, 73% of survey respondents said they had turned down work due to lack of child care.

2-2

According to Christine Padilla of the nonprofit Build Up for San Mateo County’s Children, “In regions with competitive real estate markets, one of the greatest barriers to meeting the communities’ need for child care is finding the facilities, the physical square footage, to house programs. In San Mateo County, we have such a tremendous and growing shortage ... that the county has actually had to turn down more than \$1 million in state support for subsidized child care due to lack of facilities to house the programs.”

2-4

According to the Economic Policy Institute, high-quality child care providers and early childhood educators in California are undervalued and underpaid, resulting in economic and food insecurity among these workers — almost exclusively women and the majority people of color. These workers are twice as likely as other California workers and six times as likely as K-12 teachers to live in poverty.

2-5

Based on information provided by San Mateo County Office of Education (SMCOE) and the California Department of Education, San Mateo County offered about 7,000 *subsidized* child care spaces (409 for infants, 2,895 for preschool-aged children, and 3,794 for school-age children), accounting for approximately 17% of the total child care spaces available in the county in 2022 (fig. 2.6). However, a substantial unmet demand for subsidized child care is estimated to be 33,000 spaces. Specifically, only 4% of the demand for subsidized infant care is being met, compared to 52% of the preschool demand and 21% of the school-age demand.

2-6

According to data from the California Department of Social Services, as of September 2021, nearly 8,500 licensed child care providers closed permanently due to COVID-19.

2-8

## **EDUCATION**

As of April 30, 2021, 55% of all California students in public school attended school remotely. The rate of full-time, in-person attendance was three times greater at schools serving few families with low income than at schools serving primarily families with low income.

2-15

The Policy Analysis for California Education (PACE) research center assessed the learning lag (i.e., slower academic growth relative to expected progress) of approximately 100,000 students across 19 local education agencies in California at the time they completed the winter 2021 interim assessments in grades 4-8. The PACE assessment showed that students had a learning lag of about 2.6 months in English language arts (ELA) and 2.5 months in math. Economically disadvantaged students, English learners and Latinx students had more pronounced learning lags compared to their peers outside these categories.

2-15

Students are identified as chronically absent when they miss 10% or more school days for any reason. In 2019, 10% of students in San Mateo County were chronically absent from school, compared to 12% on average in California. Chronic absenteeism increased at both the county and state level between 2019 and 2022 to 23% in San Mateo County and 30% on average in California.

2-16

## **CHAPTER 3: PHYSICAL AND MENTAL WELL-BEING**

### **NUTRITION AND PHYSICAL HEALTH**

According to the California Health Interview Survey, in 2016 rates of physical activity among children were low and declining. Only 11% of children ages 5-17 in San Mateo County were estimated to be getting 60 minutes of physical activity every day, the amount recommended for children and adolescents.

3-6

## ASTHMA

In California, 12% of the population ages 0-17 was diagnosed with asthma between 2019 and 2020. The rate for children in San Mateo County during that time was 14%, which was higher than the state and national averages.

3-10

The American Lung Association’s assigns “State of the Air” grades based on the number of days a county’s air reaches unhealth levels on the Air Quality Index. San Mateo County’s grade declined steadily between 2010 and 2021.

3-12

Air Quality Index Report Card for San Mateo County			
Period	Particle Pollution Grade		Ozone Grade
	24-hour	Annual	
2019-2021	F	Pass	C
2018-2020	F	Pass	C
2017-2019	F	Pass	C
2016-2018	F	Pass	B
2015-2017	D	Pass	C
2014-2016	A	Pass	B
2013-2015	C	Pass	B
2012-2014	C	Pass	B
2011-2013	C	Pass	A
2010-2012	B	Pass	B

## MENTAL HEALTH

Across the 7<sup>th</sup>, 9<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> grades, more than a third of Black, Latinx and Pacific Islander students in San Mateo County reported depression-related feelings in 2019-2021.

3-16

The percentage of students in San Mateo County who reported contemplating suicide decreased, on average, from 17% in 2017-19 to 12.5% in 2019-2021. The percentage statewide was 16% in 2019-2021.

3-17

## SUBSTANCE ABUSE

Data for alcohol and drug use in adolescents in San Mateo County shows increased use with age. The 2017-19 California Healthy Kids survey showed 5% of 7th graders in San Mateo County reporting use in the previous 30 days, compared to 25% of 11th graders.

3-20

An emerging issue is the rising prevalence of fentanyl use among youth. Nationally, drug overdoses increased by 30% between 2019 and 2020 and 15% between 2020 and 2021. Overdose deaths increased by 94% among people ages 14-18 from 2019 to 2020 and 20% in the following year. In California, 5,961 people of all ages died from fentanyl overdose in 2021, and one in five youth deaths involved fentanyl.

3-22

## TEEN PREGNANCY

San Mateo County has made real progress toward reducing teen pregnancy. As of 2021, the county averaged just 6.2 births per 1,000 15- to 19-year-old female residents per year, down from about 15 births per year a decade ago. The rates at both the state and national level are higher — at 10.3 and 15.2 births per year, respectively — although rates at both levels have also been declining for the past 30 years.

3-27

## CHAPTER 4: SAFE AND SUPPORTIVE ENVIRONMENTS

### Child Abuse and Neglect

In San Mateo County, incidents of child abuse and/or neglect decreased significantly from 2.8 substantiated claims per 1,000 children in 2013 to 1.2 in 2021. This number is lower than both state (6.3) and national (8.9) averages.

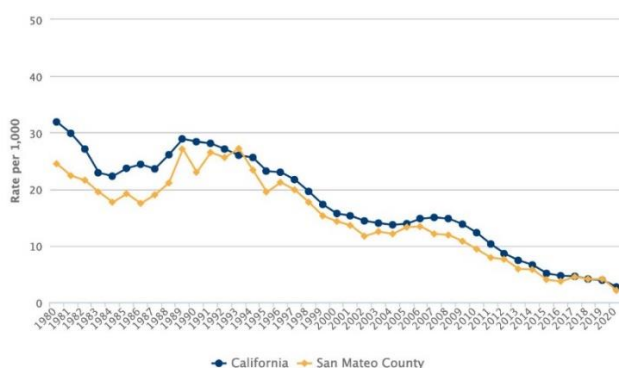
4-3

### Juvenile Justice Involvement

In 2018, the total juvenile arrest rate in San Mateo County was 1,003 arrests per 100,000 juveniles (ages 10-17). The felony juvenile arrest rate was 400 per 100,000 (fig. 4.5, source: California Department of Justice ). By 2020, the felony juvenile arrest rate had declined to 201 per 100,000 (fig. 4.6, source: Kidsdata). The decrease in juvenile arrest rates reflects the county's efforts to provide additional support and diversion programs, as well as changing judicial policies and approaches. NOTE: Arrests were declining even before COVID.

4-8

Figure 4.6 - Juvenile Felony Arrest Rates in California and San Mateo County from 1980 to 2020



## SCHOOL SAFETY

According to a 2019 survey, 44% of U.S. high school students reported experiencing one or more forms of violence in the previous year, such as bullying, a physical fight (fig. 4.13, data source: KidsData), threats involving weapons, dating violence or sexual misconduct. Among specific demographics, females and LGBTQ students had a higher likelihood of encountering multiple forms of violence compared to males and heterosexual students. Moreover, studies indicate a recent rise in reports of hate crimes and mass incidents of violence in educational institutions.

4-17

In a 2022 national survey conducted by the Pew Research Center, more than 70% of K-12 parents are worried about a shooting happening at their children's school; of these parents, 32% said they are extremely or very worried, and about 40% are somewhat worried.

4-18

Between 1970 and April 2023, 232 school shooting events occurred in California, the highest number of any state in the U.S. Four of those events occurred in San Mateo County, with the most recent taking place at San Mateo High School during the spring of 2021.

4-19

## **GREEN SPACES**

In San Mateo County, 8% (approximately 47,000 adults and 11,000 children) of residents live farther than a half mile from a park on average.

4-22

In San Mateo County, 59% of residents (approximately 348,000 adults and 82,000 children) live in areas with less than three acres of parks or open space per 1,000 residents (fig. 4.16, source: State of California).

4-24

## **CLIMATE CHANGE**

The largest study of climate anxiety and eco-anxiety (i.e., distress relating to the climate and ecological crises) in youth around the world was conducted in 2021. Ten thousand 16- to 25-year-olds in 10 countries participated in the study. More than 50% of all participants responded that they feel sad, anxious, angry, powerless, helpless or guilty about climate change, and over 45% responded that these feelings negatively affect their lives. Of U.S. participants, almost 50% responded that they feel extremely or very worried about climate change. An astonishing 83% of participants responded that they think people fail to take care of the planet, and 75% think their future is frightening. When asked how they perceived governmental responses to climate change, 64% thought that governments were not taking their concerns seriously and were not doing enough to avoid climate catastrophe; 57% agreed that governments were not acting in line with climate science and 58% felt betrayed; and 61% did not feel governments were protecting them or future generations.

4-31

Forty-five schools in Belmont, Burlingame, East Palo Alto, Foster City, Menlo Park, Pacifica, Redwood City, San Bruno and San Mateo were determined to be vulnerable to flooding.

4-36

Research conducted by Stanford University reported that of the San Francisco Bay Area counties that border the 100-year floodplain, San Mateo County has the most residential buildings at risk for coastal

flooding between 2020 and 2060. The people living in the areas of highest risk are already vulnerable. The average household income in flood-affected census blocks is less than the county median.  
4-38

## **KEY RECOMMENDATIONS**

### **1. Provide additional state and county funding for child care subsidies to working parents and child care providers.**

**Rationale:** In the 2022 San Mateo County Child Care Needs Assessment, 65% of respondents said affordable child care was hard to find. The demand for subsidized child care is estimated at 33,000 spaces, but only 21% are currently subsidized. There is strong evidence that child care subsidies increase job security for parents and, thus, economic security for families. Child care subsidies to families can increase employment and enrollment in school and job training of single mothers, in particular those with low incomes and/or without a high school education. In San Mateo County, families with children headed by single women have the lowest median income.

### **2. Provide more affordable housing for low-income residents, teachers, child care providers and other workers who provide essential services.**

**Rationale:** The extreme shortage and high expense of housing is one of the biggest problems in San Mateo County, which has the highest median sales price for houses and some of the highest rents in the San Francisco Bay Area. High housing costs cause essential workers to move to other counties, travel farther to work (thus increasing transportation emissions) and prevent home ownership. Cities, school districts and religious organizations could help by building housing on parking lots or vacant land for those with low or very low incomes, as defined by the state's Regional Housing Needs Allocation. The county and state could help by incentivizing owners of offices and more hotels to convert excess space into affordable housing.

Redwood City's affordable housing ordinance offers a good model for other cities. It requires all nonresidential and smaller residential developments (between five and 19 units) to pay an affordable housing impact fee, and it requires residential developments with 20 units or more to construct affordable housing on-site. For rental projects, Redwood City requires 20% of units to be affordable, of which 10% must be set aside for moderate-income households, 5% for low-income households and 5% for very low-income households.

### **3. Expand the guaranteed income program started by former Congresswoman Jackie Speier and San Mateo County Supervisors Noelia Corzo and Ray Mueller to offer more funds to more families in need.**

**Rationale:** Providing \$300 a month with no strings attached helps families with low incomes afford essentials like food and medicine. The pilot program, which aims to serve 300 families in San Mateo County with newborns that are eligible for Medicaid, is a good start. But with approximately 26,200 K-12 children living in poverty in the county in 2022, there is a far greater need. Evidence shows that similar programs, such as cash transfer or supplemental assistance programs, can have positive, multi-generational effects, without significantly reducing labor supply.

### **4. Provide assistance to eligible working families raising children so they may claim the Earned Income Tax Credit.**

**Rationale:** There is strong evidence that the Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC) could help reduce disparities in socioeconomic status among working individuals and increase income and employment for eligible people. About 20% of eligible workers did not claim the EITC in 2019. This group includes families living in rural areas, self-employed workers, households with disabled children, those without English proficiency, grandparents raising grandchildren and new parents. Local governments could promote awareness of this tax benefit via community organizations offering free tax assistance, such as United Way Bay Area, and facilitate partnerships between these organizations and those serving the eligible population, such as pediatric primary clinics, child care centers and schools. According to United Way Bay Area, “California residents who made less than \$30,000 in 2022 may be eligible for up to \$8,000 in state and federal tax credits, depending on income and family size.”

**5. Create a new San Mateo County department like Santa Clara County’s Department of Family and Children’s Service to evaluate and improve services that support children and families, especially those with limited incomes.**

**Rationale:** A dedicated department can serve as a hub for families, ensuring they don't have to navigate a maze of bureaucracy. It would facilitate coordination across entities that serve children, youth and families to address overarching issues such as policy analysis, collaboration and strategic initiatives. A unified department would be better equipped to coordinate services, share data, carry out in-depth analyses of existing policies and their efficacy, and ensure that there are no redundancies or gaps in the services offered. It would then make evidence-based recommendations for new policies or policy revisions. With a holistic view of all services and their outcomes, it would prioritize areas of need and develop a long-term strategy for serving children and families. By consolidating services and resources, there can be potential cost savings due to reduced duplication of efforts, better negotiation powers (for services or tools), and efficient allocation of funds. Moreover, the department would act as a platform for collaboration between governmental agencies, nonprofits, community organizations and other stakeholders. This department would foster innovative solutions, pooling of resources and community buy-in.