

## II. Desired Outcome: Children Are Nurtured in a Stable, Caring Environment

Family economic self-sufficiency and the presence of stable, caring adults greatly affect children's well-being (see Table 3 for relevant indicators). In San Mateo County, the percentage of children living below the Federal Poverty Level is less than half the average for California, but the high cost of living in the county has profound effects on children and families. About 30% of children (approximately 27,000 in 2006) are in the free or reduced price school meal program, a 25% increase over the percentage enrolled in 2002. Financial difficulties can interfere with providing a stable home environment and can be associated with parental mental health problems; for example, in 2006, very low-income mothers (< \$15,000 per year) of children ages 0-5 were about 12 times more likely to show signs of depression than those earning \$80,000 or more in the county. Still, in 2003-2004, more than three-quarters of children in grades five and seven reported highly supportive connections to others in their homes, though only about half reported the same in grades nine and 11.

*Key issues related to stable, caring environments for children are summarized below, and more data are available at [www.kidsdata.org](http://www.kidsdata.org).*

### Family Economic Self-Sufficiency

Low household income can introduce stress, as parents struggle to provide food and shelter for their children. Parents may find it more difficult to spend time with and actively promote the development of their children if they are working long hours or juggling multiple jobs to make ends meet. Children who grow up in poverty are more likely to go hungry, to live in overcrowded or unstable housing and unsafe neighborhoods, and to receive a poorer education. They tend to have less access to health

**Table 3. Children Are Nurtured in a Stable, Caring Environment:  
Key Indicators in San Mateo County**

#### Family Economic Self-Sufficiency

- Household income
- Children living in poverty
- Children on CalWORKs
- Housing affordability
- Children enrolled in free/reduced price school meal program

#### Supportive Adults

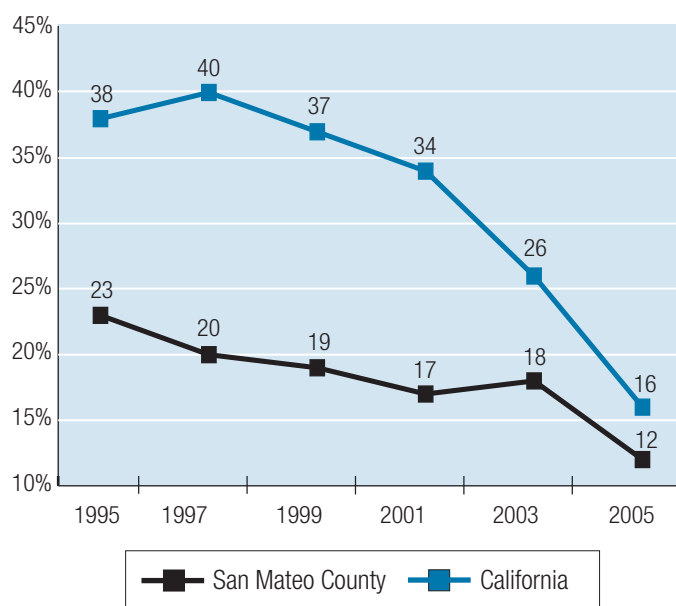
- Maternal depression
- Children who are self-supervised
- Supportive connections to adults

care, child care and other community resources, such as after-school programs, sports and extracurricular opportunities.<sup>50</sup>

In 2005, the median family income in San Mateo County was \$82,376, well above the California median of \$61,476, but down from the peak of \$87,762 in 2004.<sup>51</sup> The percentage of children living below the Federal Poverty Level (annual income of \$18,850 for a family of four in 2004) has risen from 6.8% in 2000 to 8.3% in 2004 (13,704 children), but it is still far below the state figure of 18.7%.<sup>52</sup> The percentage of public school students whose families receive CalWORKs (California Work Opportunity and Responsibility to Kids, the renamed welfare program) is even lower—just 3.1% in 2004.<sup>53</sup>

At the same time, the cost of living in the county is so high that many families with incomes above the Federal Poverty Level cannot make ends meet. The soaring cost of housing means that fewer families than ever can afford to purchase the median-priced home in the county—12% in 2005 versus 23% in 1995 (see Figure 5).<sup>54</sup> The average two-bedroom apartment in the primary metropolitan statistical area that includes San Mateo County rented for \$1,539 in 2005.<sup>55</sup> In 2003, a family of four in San Mateo County needed more than a \$52,000 annual income to meet basic needs.<sup>56</sup> In addition, more public school students were enrolled in the free or reduced price meal program in 2006 than in 2002 (30.4% versus 24.2%),<sup>57</sup> with nearly one-fifth of the county’s school districts having more than the state average of 50.1% of students enrolled in the program.<sup>58</sup>

**Figure 5. Percentage of Households that Can Afford to Purchase a Median-Priced Home**



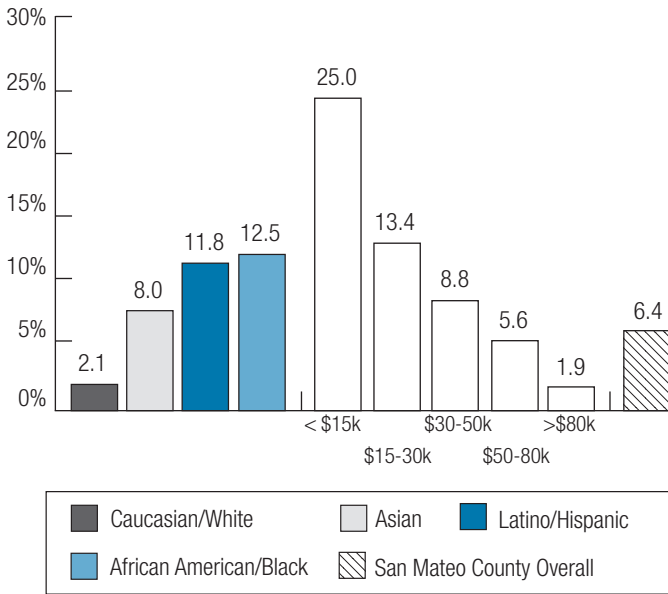
Source: California Association of Realtors, Housing Affordability Index. <http://www.car.org>, as cited on [www.kidsdata.org](http://www.kidsdata.org).

### Supportive Adults

As noted, parents’ mental health problems, sometimes exacerbated by financial difficulties, can be another barrier to providing supportive and stable home environments for children. For example, parental depression can inhibit parents from interacting with their children in the most appropriate and nurturing ways. Research shows that young children with depressed mothers are more likely to have socio-emotional and behavioral problems, difficulties in school, poor peer relationships, aggression, lower IQ scores, impulsivity and developmental delays.<sup>59</sup> Nationally, about 8% to 15% of childbearing women and up to 48% of low-income mothers experience postpartum depression within the first year after childbirth.<sup>60</sup>

Among San Mateo County mothers of children ages 0-5 in 2006, 6.4% reported symptoms of depression, with marked differences in rates by race/ethnicity and income level.<sup>61</sup> Caucasian/white mothers were least likely to show signs of depression, and very low-income mothers (< \$15,000 per year) were about 12 times more likely to report symptoms of depression than mothers with annual household incomes of more than \$80,000 (see Figure 6).

**Figure 6. Percentage of San Mateo County Mothers of Children Ages 0-5 Who Report Symptoms of Depression, by Income and by Race/Ethnicity (2006)**



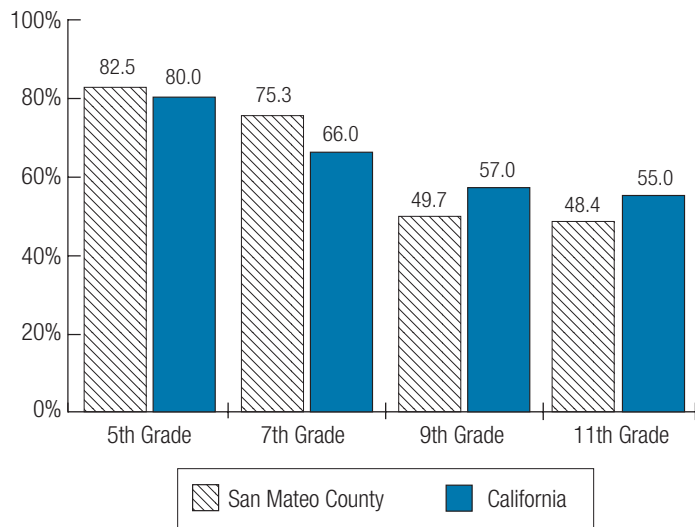
Source: First 5 San Mateo County Family Survey, 2006.

Note: Figures are based on responses from 611 caregivers.

For children to be nurtured, whether by their parents or other adults, they need adult supervision and support after school. The after-school hours are the time when children are most likely to be victims of crime or engage in high risk behavior, such as substance use or sexual activity.<sup>62</sup> However, not all children are supervised, often because parents must work and/or cannot afford another care arrangement (e.g., child care or after-school program). In 2004, 14.1% of parents of school-age children reported that their children were self-supervised after school.<sup>63</sup> In 2004-2006, 38% and 59% of fifth and seventh graders, respectively (approximately 6,400 children), reported that they spent at least one hour after school one day per week without adult supervision—slightly higher than statewide figures (36% of fifth graders and 56% of seventh graders in California).<sup>64</sup>

Nevertheless, in 2003-2004, most children reported highly supportive connections to others in their homes who model and support healthy development and well-being, although that was more true for younger children. The percentages for fifth and seventh graders exceeded California averages, whereas percentages for ninth and 11th graders were below statewide figures (see Figure 7).<sup>65</sup>

**Figure 7. Percentage of Students Who Report Highly Supportive Connections to Adults in their Homes (2003-04)**

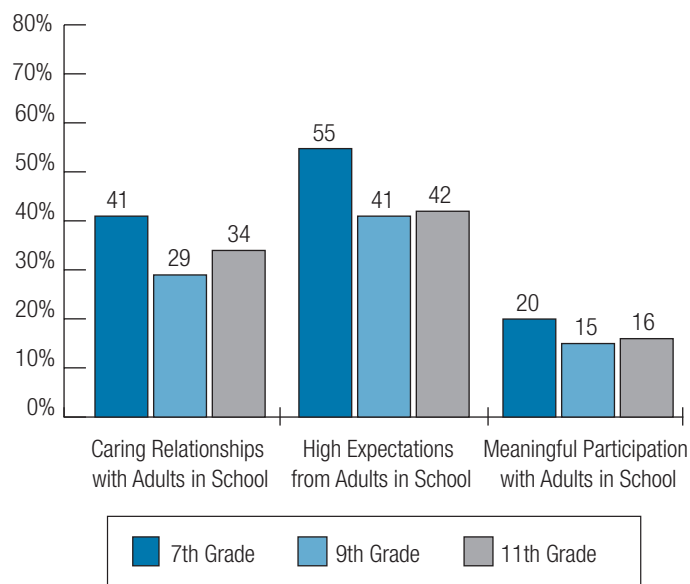


Source: California Healthy Kids Survey San Mateo County 2003-2004, as cited in *San Mateo County Adolescent Report 2007 with the Youth Commission's Policy Recommendations*. [http://www.plsinfo.org/healthysmc/pdf/adolescent\\_report\\_07.pdf](http://www.plsinfo.org/healthysmc/pdf/adolescent_report_07.pdf). Retrieved 07/11/07.

Note: Figures are based on survey responses from 3,445 fifth graders, 1,228 seventh graders, 765 ninth graders, and 641 11th graders.

In 2004-2006 surveys, seventh, ninth and 11th graders were asked about their connections to adults at school and in the community (see Figures 8-9). Students reported higher levels of connections to adults in the community than at school, and younger students tended to report closer connections to adults than older students.

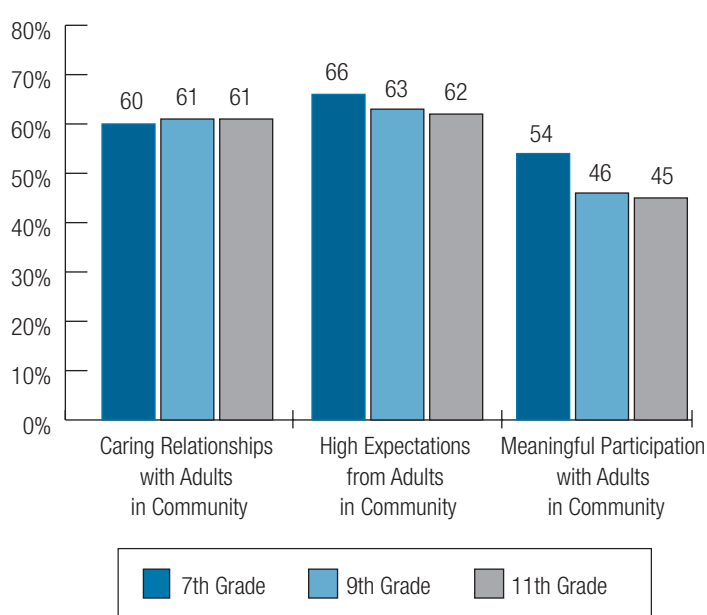
**Figure 8. Percentage of San Mateo County 7th, 9th, and 11th Graders with High Levels of Connections to Adults at School (2004-2006)**



Source: WestEd, California Healthy Kids Survey San Mateo County, 2004-06. [http://www.wested.org/cs/chks/query/q/1298?county=San\\_Mateo](http://www.wested.org/cs/chks/query/q/1298?county=San_Mateo). Retrieved 07/11/07.

Note: Figures are based on survey responses from 4,254 seventh graders, 3,781 ninth graders, and 3,541 11th graders. The percentages in this figure represent students scoring “high” in each area. Scores were calculated based on a set of survey questions. See Table B1 using link above for more information.

**Figure 9. Percentage of San Mateo County 7th, 9th, and 11th Graders with High Levels of Connections to Adults in the Community (2004-2006)**



Source: WestEd, California Healthy Kids Survey San Mateo County, 2004-06. [http://www.wested.org/cs/chks/query/q/1298?county=San\\_Mateo](http://www.wested.org/cs/chks/query/q/1298?county=San_Mateo). Retrieved 07/11/07.

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### Other Data and Analyses

Few measures of children’s connections to their parents and other adults are regularly collected, perhaps because these relationships are difficult to measure. Nevertheless, they are important, and more information is needed on the quality of the relationships children and youth of all ages have with their parents and other adults in the community. In addition, the influence of family economic self-sufficiency/income should be included in more analyses.