

## IV. Desired Outcome: Children Are Safe

Many indicators are used to assess children’s safety at home, in school and in the community (see Table 5). In San Mateo County, data related to child maltreatment and the foster care system are better than state averages, but have remained static in recent years. In contrast, in 2004–2006, students were more likely to report use of alcohol, marijuana or cigarettes than their counterparts in California. The rate of juvenile felony arrests has fallen in the past decade but showed a slight increase in 2005, the last year for which data are available. Death rates for older youths (ages 15 to 24) were higher in 2002–2004 than in the previous two-year period.

*Key issues related to child safety are summarized below, and more data are available at [www.kidsdata.org](http://www.kidsdata.org).*

**Table 5. Children Are Safe:  
Key Indicators in San Mateo County**

**Child Maltreatment and Foster Care**

- Reports and substantiated cases of child abuse/neglect
- Foster care entry and length of stay

**Drug, Alcohol and Cigarette Use**

**Safety at School**

- Theft, property damage and exposure to weapons
- Students who feel safe

**Juvenile Felony Arrests**

**Injuries and Deaths**

- Hospitalizations for injuries
- Child and adolescent death rates

### Child Maltreatment and Foster Care

Factors associated with increased rates of child abuse and neglect include parents who have problems with substance abuse, domestic violence in the home, chronic poverty, unemployment, homelessness and mental health disorders.<sup>80</sup> Effects of child abuse and neglect can be long lasting. Children who have been abused or neglected experience higher rates of suicide, depression, substance abuse, difficulties in school and other behavioral problems later in life, and they also are at greater risk of mistreating their own children.<sup>81</sup> When maltreatment is deemed sufficiently serious and/or is substantiated by the court, children can be removed from their homes and placed with foster parents or relatives (referred to as kinship care).

Two indicators commonly are used to assess rates of child maltreatment: the number of child maltreatment reports per 1,000 children ages 0-17 received by the county’s Children and Family Services, and the number of reports per 1,000 children ages 0-17 that were substantiated. On both indicators, the rates of abuse and neglect in San Mateo County are about half or less than half the rates for California (in 2005, 4.5 in the county versus 11.3 per 1,000 in California for substantiated cases; and 24.5 in the county versus 50.1 statewide for reports).<sup>82</sup> Rates of child abuse/neglect reports and substantiated cases have remained fairly steady in San Mateo County from 2001 to 2005.<sup>83</sup>

As of July 2006, San Mateo County had 482 children in foster care.<sup>84</sup> The rates of children entering foster care for the first time remained fairly steady between 1998 and 2005 (at about one per 1,000 children) and consistently are below the statewide rate of roughly three per 1,000.<sup>85</sup> The median length of stay for children in foster care was one year in 2004, an increase from prior years but better than in California as a whole (14.8 months).<sup>86</sup>

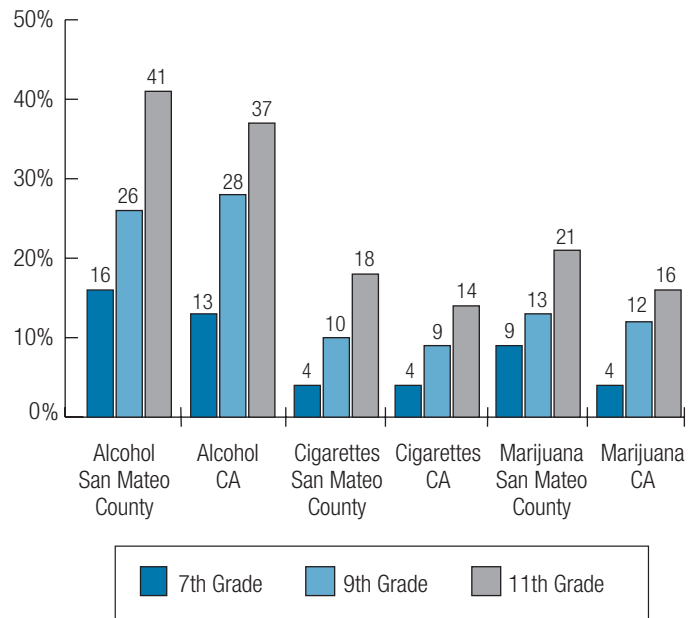
African American and Latino/Hispanic children are represented disproportionately in statistics related to child maltreatment and foster care. For example, Latino/Hispanic children made up 45% of substantiated child abuse/neglect cases in 2005, but they comprise only 31% of the child population.<sup>87</sup> African American children made up 12% of cases, but only 2% of the child population. Rates of substantiated cases of abuse/neglect illustrate these differences: In 2006, there were 30.3 substantiated cases of abuse/neglect per 1,000 African American children; 7.2 per 1,000 Latino/Hispanic children; 3.1 per 1,000 Caucasian/white children; and 2.5 per 1,000 Asian/Pacific Islander children.<sup>88</sup> Similarly, the foster care population in San Mateo County is disproportionately composed of children of color.

### Drug, Alcohol and Cigarette Use

The use of alcohol and other drugs among youth is linked to unintentional injuries, social and emotional difficulties, physical violence, academic problems and risky behaviors, such as truancy, sexual activity, drunk driving and other criminal activity.<sup>89</sup>

In San Mateo County, as elsewhere, children start drinking alcohol and smoking cigarettes earlier than they use other substances. In 2004-2006, by the 11th grade, 41% of students reported having consumed alcohol in the previous month, 21% reported having smoked marijuana and 18% reported having smoked cigarettes (see Figure 12).<sup>90</sup> These percentages are all higher than comparable percentages for 11th graders in California. In addition, 16% of seventh graders, 30% of ninth graders and 36% of 11th graders reported that they had been offered an illegal drug at school in the previous year.<sup>91</sup>

**Figure 12. Percentage of Students in San Mateo County and California Reporting Drug, Alcohol, and Tobacco Use Within Past Month, by Grade Level (2004-06)**



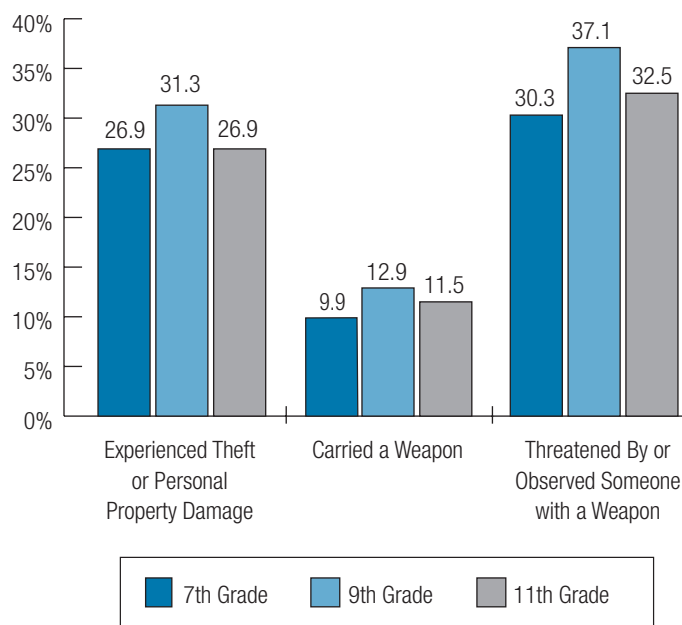
Source: WestEd, California Healthy Kids Survey San Mateo County, 2004-06. [http://www.wested.org/cs/chks/query/q/1298?county=San\\_Mateo](http://www.wested.org/cs/chks/query/q/1298?county=San_Mateo). Retrieved 07/11/07.

Note: The 2004-2006 San Mateo County sample sizes were 4,698 for seventh graders, 4,191 for ninth graders, and 3,817 for 11th graders.

### Safety at School

More than one-quarter of seventh, ninth and 11th graders reported they experienced theft or personal property damage at school during the past year.<sup>92</sup> Roughly one-third also saw someone carrying a weapon (e.g., gun, knife or other weapon) at school, and about one in 10 admitted that they themselves had carried a weapon to school (see Figure 13).<sup>93</sup>

**Figure 13. Percentage of San Mateo County Students Who Reported Theft/Property Damage, Possession of a Weapon, or Exposure to Weapons at School in Past Year (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: The survey numbers are different for each item in the figure. Use the link, above, to see specific numbers.

Still, the majority of students (59%) say they feel safe at their schools, although results vary by racial/ethnic groups, according to 2005-2006 data. While three-quarters of Caucasian/white students and two-thirds of Asian students report feeling safe, only 41% of Latino/Hispanic and 43% of African American students feel the same.<sup>94</sup>

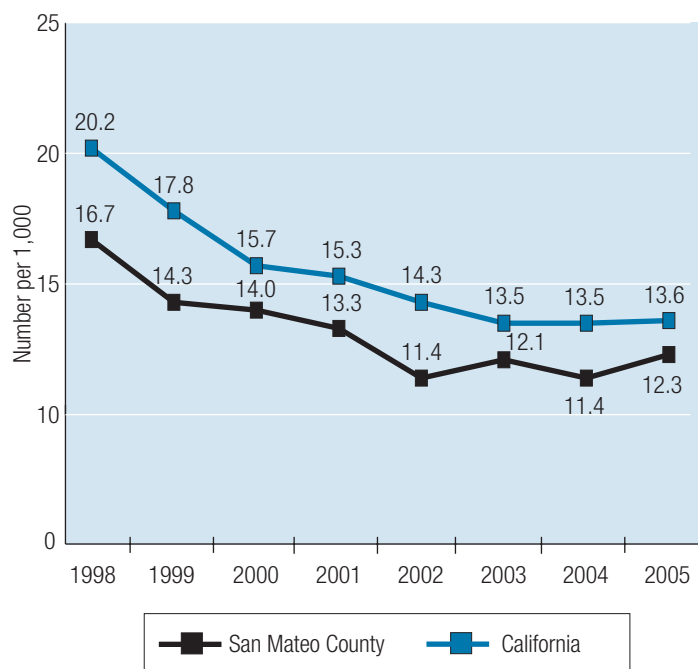
### Juvenile Felony Arrests

Many adult criminals were involved as children or youth in delinquent or at-risk behavior, although not all juveniles who are arrested go on to become adult criminals.<sup>95</sup> The rate of juvenile felony arrests is an indicator of the most serious problematic behaviors. Felonies include crimes that involve injury

or substantial property loss and may include violent, property, drug, alcohol, sex, or other offenses.<sup>96</sup>

In San Mateo County and California, juvenile felony arrests dropped over the past decade, but rates in the county leveled off during 2002-2005 (see Figure 14).<sup>97</sup>

**Figure 14. Rate of Felony Arrests for Youth Ages 10-17**



Source: State of California Department of Justice, California Criminal Justice Profiles, <http://caag.state.ca.us/cjpc/index.htm>. Retrieved 08/07/07. State of California, Department of Finance, Race/Ethnic Population with Age and Sex Detail, 1990-1999 and Race/Ethnic Population with Age and Sex Detail, 2000-2050. May 2005. [http://www.dof.ca.gov/html/Demograp/DRU\\_datafiles/DRU\\_datafiles.htm](http://www.dof.ca.gov/html/Demograp/DRU_datafiles/DRU_datafiles.htm)

Youth of color are overrepresented in these arrest rates. Of the 890 juvenile felony arrests in 2005, for example, 41.5% were of Latino/Hispanic youth, and 19.4% were of African American youth. This translates into juvenile arrest rates that are about two times higher for Latinos/Hispanics and 12 times higher for African Americans than for Caucasian/whites (see Table 6).<sup>98</sup>

**Table 6. San Mateo County Juvenile Felony Arrest Rates per 1,000, by Race/Ethnicity**

Race/Ethnicity	2002	2003	2004	2005
African American/Black	61.4	79.9	74.9	94.7
Caucasian/White	7.2	8.1	6.7	7.7
Latino/Hispanic	14.1	14.3	14.5	16.1
Other	8.6	8.9	8.8	6.8

Source: California Department of Justice, California Criminal Justice Profiles, <http://caag.state.ca.us/cjsc/index.htm>. State of California, Department of Finance, Race/Ethnic Population with Age and Sex Detail, 1990-1999 and Race/Ethnic Population with Age and Sex Detail, 2000-2050. May 2005. [http://www.dof.ca.gov/html/Demograp/DRU\\_datafiles/DRU\\_datafiles.htm](http://www.dof.ca.gov/html/Demograp/DRU_datafiles/DRU_datafiles.htm). Retrieved 08/13/07, as cited on [www.kidsdata.org](http://www.kidsdata.org).

It is important to note that the juvenile felony arrest rate is not a perfect indicator of actual criminal activity in communities. The number of arrests can vary as a result of changes in the number of police on the streets, legislative or judicial action to increase or reduce penalties, or trends in prosecutors' charging decisions. Many felony charges are reduced to misdemeanors or are dismissed in the later phases of the court process.

### Injuries and Deaths

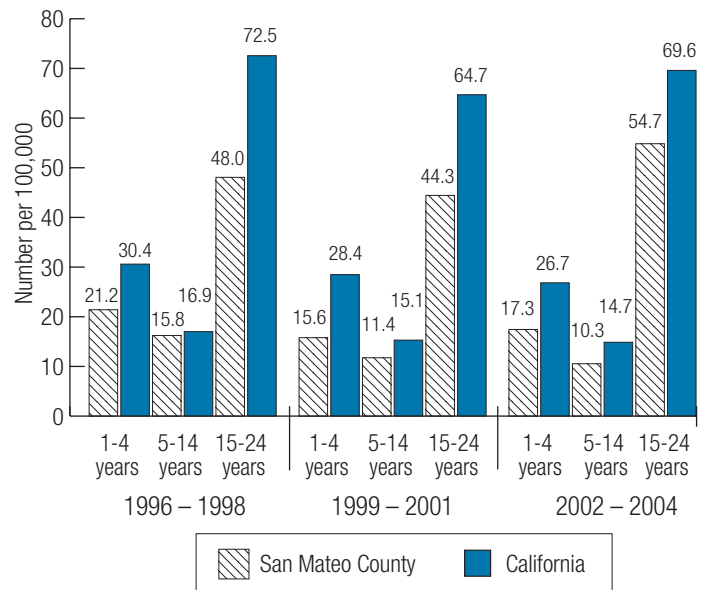
Key measures of children's safety are rates of injuries (typically assessed by rate of hospitalization for injury) and deaths. Most hospitalizations for injury are to treat *unintentional*, preventable injuries (accidents) such as those due to motor vehicle, bicycle, or skateboarding accidents, falls, fires, etc. Hospitalizations for *intentional* injuries are frequently due to child abuse, assaults with firearms, knives or other objects, and self-inflicted injuries.<sup>99</sup>

Rates of non-fatal injury hospitalizations (unintentional and intentional injuries combined) are lower in San Mateo County than in California (247.5 compared to 347.9 per 100,000 ages 0-20,

respectively, in 2004).<sup>100</sup> The highest rates of both intentional and unintentional injury hospitalizations occur among older youth (i.e., ages 16-20). In that age group, rates of intentional injury hospitalizations declined from 227 per 100,000 in 1999 to 162.8 in 2002, but then increased to 219.5 in 2004.<sup>101</sup>

Most child deaths are attributable to unintentional and intentional injuries. The overall child/youth death rates have fallen in San Mateo County and California in the past decade, and the county's rates have consistently remained lower than state figures. In 2002-2004, for example, the county rate was 28.8 deaths per 100,000 children/youth ages 1-24, compared to the state rate of 39.2.<sup>102</sup> Nevertheless, the rate of decline has slowed locally, largely driven by an apparent increase in the death rate of 15- to 24-year-olds, which rose from 48.0 per 100,000 in 1996-1998 to 54.7 in 2002-2004 (see Figure 15).<sup>103</sup>

**Figure 15. Child and Youth Death Rates, by Age Group**

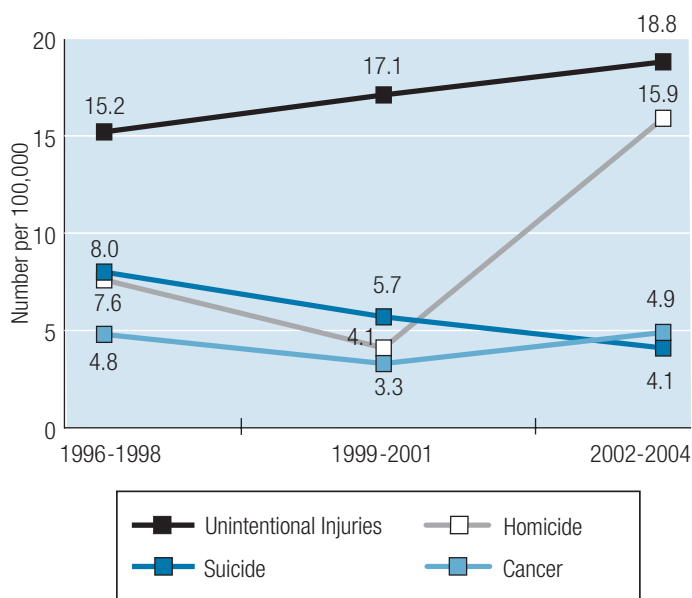


Source: California Department of Health Services, Center for Health Statistics, Vital Statistics Query System. <http://www.applications.dhs.ca.gov/vsq/default.asp>. Retrieved 03/19/07, as cited on [www.kidsdata.org](http://www.kidsdata.org).

Note: In 2002-2004 in San Mateo County, there were 20 deaths among ages 1-4, 28 among ages 5-14, and 134 deaths among ages 15-24.

The rise in death rates among individuals ages 15-24 appears to be related to increases in deaths due to homicides and unintentional injuries. For example, homicides among 15- to 24-year-olds increased from 7.6 per 100,000 in 1996-98 to 15.9 in 2002-2004, and deaths due to unintentional injuries increased from 15.2 to 18.8 per 100,000. During the same time period, suicides among ages 15-24 declined from 8.0 to 4.1 per 100,000 (see Figure 16).<sup>104</sup> These all reflect very low numbers of deaths, so close monitoring is needed to see if these trends continue in the future.

**Figure 16. San Mateo County Death Rates (Ages 15-24), by National Leading Causes**



Source: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, National Centers for Injury Prevention and Control. Web-based Injury Statistics Query and Reporting System (WISQARS), [www.cdc.gov/nipc/wisqars](http://www.cdc.gov/nipc/wisqars); California Department of Health Services, Center for Health Statistics, Vital Statistics Query System, <http://www.applications.dhs.ca.gov/vsq/default.asp>. Retrieved 03/20/07, as cited on [www.kidsdata.org](http://www.kidsdata.org).

Note: Of the 134 deaths among 15- to 24-year-olds in San Mateo County from 2002-2004, 46 were due to unintentional injuries, 39 to homicide, 10 to suicide and 12 to cancer.

Similar to other indicators, death rates vary across racial/ethnic lines, with rates for African American children/youth (102.1 per 100,000 ages 1-24; 17 total deaths) five times higher than the rates for Caucasians/whites (20.4 per 100,000; 49 total deaths) in 2002-2004. During the same period, the death rate was 30.4 for Asians (37 total deaths), 32.9 for Latinos/Hispanics (68 total deaths) and 47.6 for Pacific Islanders (6 total deaths).<sup>105</sup> The absolute number of deaths among children/youth in San Mateo County is low (182 from 2002-2004), so it will be important to track these statistics to see if the disparities continue. If they do, the disparities may reflect differences across income levels, among other factors, as children from low-income families and communities may be exposed to more hazards and crime.

### Other Data and Analyses

As described above, the juvenile felony arrest rate is an imperfect measure of actual crime in a community. Another measure of criminal activity is the level of victimization in communities (see [www.ojp.usdoj.gov/bjs/cvict.htm](http://www.ojp.usdoj.gov/bjs/cvict.htm)). If collected, reported and analyzed with greater detail, such a measure could highlight at what age children are most likely to be exposed to and become victims of violence in their neighborhoods. Another measure, the percentage of children of all ages who participate in organized leisure time programs (e.g., public and private community-based, after-school, organized sports and summer programs), also would reflect children’s safety in the community, as well as the community’s commitment to helping children/youth develop the strengths and life skills they will need to reach their full potential.

Endnotes are available online at [www.kidsdata.org/sanmateoreport](http://www.kidsdata.org/sanmateoreport).