



# Policymakers: A Checklist of Youth Development Principles



We envision all California’s youth living in communities that support their development and a service delivery system that is comprehensive, collaborative, youth and family centered, and focused on youth development principles and practices. We envision policymakers creating and supporting policies that are research-based and reflect youth as a top priority.

To further this vision, the California Collaborative for Youth Development offers the following principles and a checklist of important questions as a guide for policymakers when creating, modifying, supporting, and/or funding youth policy and programs.

## General Principles for Youth Policy Development:

- Communities fund, coordinate, and evaluate community-wide initiatives that address the needs of its youth. They engage collaborative teams that include researchers, practitioners, funders, youth and policymakers. State and local funding include these requirements.
- Youth programs are funded based on research and on the achievement of identifiable results.
- Youth programs have enough funding to include an evaluation process that involves youth, family, and community members. Evaluations include identifying best practices in youth development.
- Community program staff and volunteers providing youth services are knowledgeable and use youth development principles in their training, program delivery, and evaluation.

## Important Questions To Develop State and Local Policy for Youth (check box if response is “Yes”):

- Is this policy or program based on research?
- Does this policy or program promote and support youth acquiring positive personal and social skills and abilities?
- Does this policy or program encourage, support, and assist communities to create an environment where programs for youth are essential services and have priority with health and safety?
- Does this policy or program promote and support an environment and activities that contribute to current well-being, and a successful transition from childhood and adolescence to adulthood, for youth?
- Does this policy or program promote a variety of opportunities that are appealing to all youth in the community? Does it target disadvantaged and underserved youth in the community? Does it promote equal availability, accessibility and quality opportunities for all young people?
- Does this policy or program require new programs to coordinate with established youth programs in the community? Does it promote collaboration among programs?

**Instilling youth development principles in state and local policy is a cost effective means of ensuring that California youth live in communities that support their development as positive, contributing members of society.**

## California Collaborative for Youth Development

- Alliance for Education Solutions
- CA 4-H Youth Development Program
- CA Association of Student Councils
- CA Attorney General
- CA Department of Education
- CA Department of Health Services
- CA Department of Mental Health
- CA Friday Night Live Partnership
- CA Park & Recreation Society
- CA State Library
- CA Youth Advocacy Network
- Center for Community Schools Partnerships
- The Community College Foundation
- Youth Leadership Institute

**Checklist developed by the California Collaborative for Youth Development.  
For comments contact Leslie Fritz, [leslie@cprs.org](mailto:leslie@cprs.org)**

## YOUTH DEVELOPMENT PRINCIPLES

Youth development is an approach that builds on youth's assets and their potential. Key principles<sup>1</sup> of youth development are:

<sup>1</sup> U.S. Department of Health & Human Services, Administration of Children and Families, "Towards a Blueprint for Youth: Making Positive Youth Development a National Priority," [www.acf.dhhs.gov/programs/fysb/youthinfor/blueprint.htm](http://www.acf.dhhs.gov/programs/fysb/youthinfor/blueprint.htm)

- Providing youth with safe and supportive environments.
- Fostering relationships between youth and caring adults who can mentor and guide them.
- Supporting development of youth's knowledge and skills in a variety of ways, including study, tutoring, sports, the arts, vocational education and service learning.
- Engaging youth as active partners and leaders who can help move communities forward.
- Providing opportunities for youth to show that they care – about others and society.
- Promoting healthy lifestyles and teaching positive patterns of social interactions.

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## SUMMARY OF RECENT RESEARCH

### Youth Development Approach Results in Positive Outcomes and is Cost Effective

The National Research Council and Institute of Medicine report is based on scientific evidence from a variety of studies in family, schools, and community settings. It concludes that adolescents who grow up in communities rich in developmental opportunities for them show evidence of higher rates of positive development and lower incidences of problem behaviors such as early pregnancy, drug use, and delinquency. Further, communities that offer a diversity of program opportunities that provide continued exposure to positive experiences, settings, and people are more likely to support broad adolescent development and meet the needs of a greater number of youth.

[National Research Council and Institute of Medicine. *Community Programs to Promote Youth Development*. Committee on Community-Level Programs for Youth. Jacquelynne Eccles and Jennifer A. Gootman, eds. Washington, DC: National Academy Press. 2002.]

The Search Institute's latest research on developmental assets – including the first longitudinal studies and studies that link assets to actual school records – adds to the growing evidence that comprehensive, asset-based approaches to education and youth development have tremendous potential to contribute to the academic success of students from all backgrounds and in a wide range of communities. Students with more assets reported higher grades; low-income students with more assets were dramatically more likely to do well in school and avoid school problems. (Assets include support, empowerment, boundaries and expectations, constructive use of time, commitment to learning, positive values, social competencies, and positive identity.)

[Search Institute. "Boosting Student Achievement: New Research on the Power of Developmental Assets." *Insights and Evidence*, vol. 1 no. 1., October 2003.]

New findings from the brain and behavioral sciences sheds important light on the biological need for youth to be part of a network of enduring relationships linked to moral and spiritual meaning. A recent report from the Commission on Children at Risk (a group of children's doctors, research scientists, and mental health and youth service professionals) concludes that human beings are hardwired to form relationships and that nurturing environments powerfully affect brain development. Recent research indicates that the adolescent propensity for risk taking, novelty seeking, excitement, and peer affiliation is partly

biologically based – a conclusion that highlights the importance of the social environments that we create, or fail to create, to meet these needs in our youth.

[The Commission on Children at Risk. *Hardwired to Connect: The New Scientific Case for Authoritative Communities*. An initiative of the YMCA of the USA, Dartmouth Medical School, and the Institute for American Values. New York: Institute for American Values. 2003.]

Research from California and across the nation shows that quality after-school programs can cut juvenile crime and violence, reduce adolescent sex and pregnancy, cut substance use, and prevent school discipline problems. They can also increase academic achievement, reduce dropout rates, promote civic participation, and provide experiences and opportunities that youth need to succeed. Investing in after-school programs also saves taxpayers' money. One study of a high school after-school program concluded that it resulted in nearly \$2.00 in crime savings alone for every dollar invested. When compared with California's "Three Strikes" law, the program was over five times more effective at preventing serious crimes than "Three Strikes."

[Fight Crime: Invest in Kids California. *California's Next After-School Challenge: Keeping High School Teen Off the Street and On the Right Track*. Oakland: Fight Crime: Invest in Kids California. 2004.]

Young people, on average, have a minimum of 1,900 hours per year of discretionary time without structure or supervision. In an attempt to quantify the cost of and return on investment for providing youth with developmental opportunities and supports, a formula was established to quantify the developmental supports that all youth need to become productive, economically viable adults. They determined that the minimum cost to provide youth development opportunities to young people beyond school hours is approximately \$3,000 per child per year. Further, they calculated that a sustained investment to develop youth into economically and socially viable adults can result in a potential return on investment of \$10.51 for every dollar spent.

[Newman, R.P., Smith, S.P., & Murphy, R. *A Matter of Money: The Cost and Financing of Youth Development in America*. Washington, DC: Academy for Educational Development (AED) – Center for Youth Development and Policy Research. 2001.]