

# **The City of Alexandria Children and Youth Master Plan 2014**

*Revised Draft \**

**Submitted to the Executive Committee of the Children, Youth and Families Collaborative Commission**

**By the Forum for Youth Investment**

***All of Alexandria's children and youth succeeding today and tomorrow***

***Placeholders for:***

Welcome or intro letter  
Commission boilerplate  
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*"Make no little plans; they have no magic to stir men's blood and probably themselves will not be realized. Make big plans; aim high in hope and work, remembering that a noble, logical diagram once recorded will never die, but long after we are gone will be a living thing, asserting itself with ever-growing insistency. Remember that our sons and grandsons are going to do things that would stagger us. Let your watchword be order and your beacon beauty."*

- American Architect and City Planner Daniel Hudson Burnham

## Overview

Alexandria is a community that supports and enhances the well-being, success and achievement of children, youth and families. To further this vision, the City's Strategic Plan defines the specific objectives as:

- The City's children enter kindergarten and graduate from high school prepared for success;
- The City promotes the well-being of children, youth and families with quality evidence-based initiatives; and
- The City, its schools and community services are effectively aligned.

In 2010, the Alexandria City Council created the Children, Youth and Families Collaborative Commission (CYFCC) with the support of Alexandria City Public Schools (ACPS), in part, to promote the coordination, alignment and effectiveness of services provided to children, youth and their families by the City, ACPS and private organizations. The creation of the Commission represented a paradigm shift to help Alexandria move from an age-based focus to a more holistic, outcome focus for its programs and services. This outcome focused approach aspires to maximize the taxpayers' investment and improve outcomes for all Alexandria residents.

To that end, the City Council charged the Commission with the development of the city's first Children and Youth Master Plan to guide this alignment and ongoing collaboration.

The Children and Youth Master Plan implements the City Council's vision and strategic objectives for children, youth and families. The Children and Youth Master Plan is also aligned with and seeks to further the goals, principles and strategic objectives of the Alexandria City Public Schools Strategic Plan as well as the strategic plans of other Alexandria commissions, boards and coalitions (see Appendix V).

Alexandria's plan, presented in this report, culminates hundreds of hours of discussion, debate and problem-solving that began with public forums of youth and adults and that continued with a Design Team comprised of community, school, faith-based and parent and youth representatives. The CYFCC led the creation of the plan and will lead the critical next steps to ensure progress.

Alexandria's Children and Youth Master Plan:

- Focuses on all young people from birth to 21 in the City of Alexandria.
- Recognizes and addresses the inequities in situations and services that limit the life chances of some young people.
- Establishes a comprehensive, measurable set of cradle-to-career goals that include, but are not limited to, academic success.
- Identifies a range of solutions – from broad strategies that will increase economic opportunities to focused strategies that will increase youth resilience – all aimed at improving youth outcomes across the board.
- Requires commitments and collaboration across systems and sectors.
- Recognizes the need for better data, regular reporting and revised goal-setting.

Alexandria’s Children and Youth Master Plan builds on and links to other plans in the city. With the many agencies, non-profits and individuals focused on improving the community, each with their own strategic plan, the Design Team reviewed the city efforts most relevant to children and youth. These strategic plans were reviewed with a focus on aligning and leveraging existing efforts and priorities. Whenever possible, strategies already underway were incorporated here. To see how the plans connect and align, see Appendix V.

The Plan solidifies the community’s commitment to be accountable for the success of Alexandria’s young people. The goals and strategies described within and in the companion document, Alexandria’s Children and Youth Well-being Profile, will not change over the next five years. The action steps will change as the CYFCC refines priorities, implements plans and assesses progress.

The CYFCC selected the Forum for Youth Investment (Forum) to guide and support the planning process using its field-tested Ready by 21<sup>®</sup> approach.

### **About the Alexandria Children and Youth Master Planning Process**

Relationships. Relevance. Rigor. These words were evoked throughout the process of designing the Youth Master Plan. The Design Team – an interim team appointed by the CYFCC – worked with the Forum to create a process to ensure that the planning was grounded in data (rigor), informed by a diversity of perspectives (relevance) and structured in a way that encouraged meaningful and sustained participation by a wide array of residents and existing partnerships (relationships).

The Design Team was comprised of 30 administrative and community leaders with expertise in the child and youth sector, including:

Alexandria School Board	NAACP Education Committee
Center for Alexandria’s Children	Workforce Investment Board
Department of Community and Human Services	Parent Teacher Association
Substance Abuse Coalition of Alexandria	Public Health Advisory Board
Alexandria Tutoring Consortium	Montgomery Street Family Resource Center
Gang Response Intervention Team	Local private businesses
Tenants and Workers	Faith-based community

These leaders met regularly, building relationships with each other, delving into the data and creating opportunities for the community to explore and engage with the issues.

Between November 2012 and July 2013, the Design Team worked with the Forum for Youth Investment to:

- Define a vision statement and core principles to guide the work.
- Codify the five broad goal statements that now serve as the City’s definition of child and youth success.
- Review and compile the data and research on these goals into the Alexandria Children and Youth Well-Being Profile, the companion document to this report.

- Engage more than 300 youth and adults in three public forums that provided opportunities to elicit input from community members, examine the data about Alexandria’s youth, identify priority indicators, discuss the root causes and local conditions behind the data and suggest solutions.
- Engage nearly 200 middle and high school students in nine forums in which they created and reviewed their own data. The students responded to 12 multiple choice statements about the quality of the experiences they have in their schools and neighborhoods, as well as the extent to which they feel prepared for their futures and then discussed the reasons behind their responses.
- Pinpoint the community priorities for action that emerged from these forums to identify cross-cutting themes to address in work groups.
- Lead work groups charged with reviewing relevant research and practices, reviewing other relevant city plans and developing action recommendations.

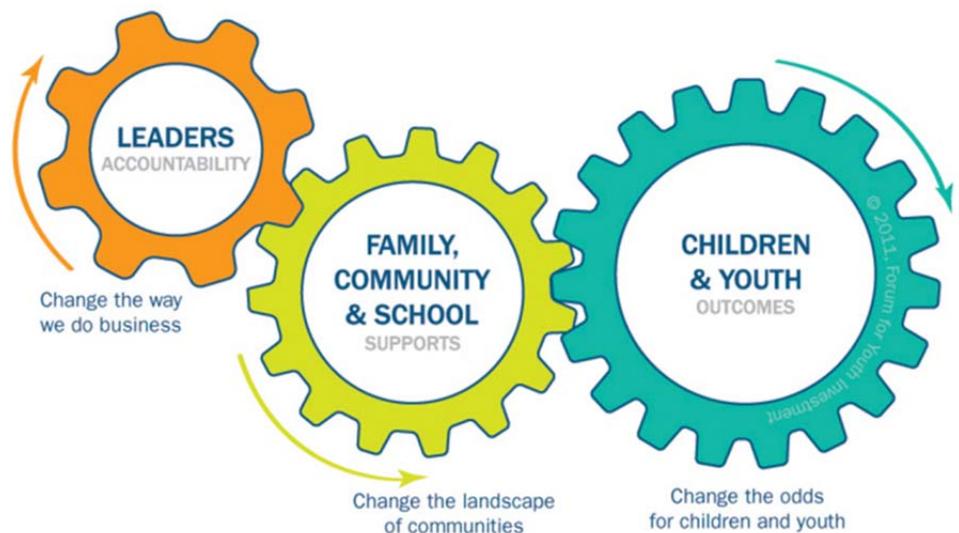
With the publishing of the Plan, the CYFCC adds four Rs to the list: Responsibility. Reporting. Resources. Responsiveness.

- Responsibility – This plan will come to fruition through ongoing stewardship from the CYFCC and community stakeholders.
- Reporting –Utilization of a clear process for reporting and tracking progress and setbacks.
- Resources – While there are proposed action steps that require little to no resources, additional funding will be needed to accomplish the agenda.
- Responsiveness –The frame work of the Plan provides structure, yet the Plan will be nimble to accommodate course corrections, innovations and other changes.

### The Principles Behind the Process

The CYFCC chose to partner with the Forum for Youth Investment to guide the Plan development process because of its experience and its step-by-step whole child/whole community approach to achieving collective impact.

Like the Forum, Alexandria’s residents affirm that academic progress is a critical yet insufficient indicator of whether children are thriving and successful. The Forum uses three gears to describe the relationship between youth outcomes, community supports and community leadership. Using this Master Plan to begin moving “the small gear” will make the biggest difference for youth outcomes.



The Design Team developed the following core principles that guided the work at every step:

How we lead	How we improve our community supports	How we approach our children and youth
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Engage all sectors and stakeholders.</li> <li>See youth and families as change agents, not clients.</li> <li>Inspire and inform the public.</li> <li>Value diversity and acknowledge its impact.</li> <li>Coordinate efforts and align resources.</li> <li>Establish real, reasonable expectations and metrics to assess progress.</li> <li>Learn from the success of others.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Recognize that children don't grow up in programs, but in families and communities.</li> <li>Support a full range of learning opportunities – formal and informal, in school and out.</li> <li>Assess and improve quality, reach and impact across all of the places young people spend their time.</li> <li>Recruit, train and retain good staff.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Support the whole child.</li> <li>Invest in the early years and sustain those investments over a child's development.</li> <li>Build on strengths, don't just focus on problem reduction.</li> <li>Focus attention on those most in need.</li> <li>Address gaps in preparation in order to reduce gaps in achievement.</li> </ul>

### Goals for Alexandria's Children and Youth

In order to realize the vision “All of Alexandria’s children and youth succeeding today and tomorrow,” the Design Team developed goals to make the process more manageable. They began the process by creating two work groups: one focused on crafting broad goal statements that conveyed the community’s desires for Alexandria’s children and youth, and one was charged with reviewing and assessing the data available to measure progress toward these goals.

The Alexandria Children and Youth Master Plan is built on the belief that all children and youth, from birth to 21, should be *physically safe and healthy; academically and vocationally successful; culturally connected and competent; emotionally secure, hopeful and resilient; socially and civically engaged and empowered.*

#### **Goal: Physically Safe and Healthy**

*Objectives:*

- Increase Number of Children with a Healthy Start
- Increase Youth Physical Fitness
- Improve the Safety of Environments for Children
- Reduce Teen Pregnancy

#### **Goal: Academically and Vocationally Successful**

*Objectives:*

- Improve School Readiness
- Improve School Achievement
- Improve School Attachment
- Improve and Increase College and Career Readiness and Attainment

#### **Goal: Culturally Connected and Competent**

*Objective:*

- Increase Cultural Competence

#### **Goal: Emotionally Secure, Hopeful and Resilient**

*Objectives:*

- Increase the Number of Youth with Caring Adults
- Improve Youth Mental Health
- Improve Resilience

#### **Goal: Socially and Civically Engaged and Empowered**

*Objectives:*

- Decrease Number of Youth Entering the Juvenile Justice System
- Decrease Number of Youth and Young Adults in the Juvenile/Adult Justice System
- Increase Youth Engagement in Service

## **The Dashboard: Tracking Data**

The Design Team selected data in key areas based on 1) ability to track data over time, 2) the data's significance in representing achievement of an outcome, and 3) the data's resonance with community concerns. The headline indicators associated with these areas will be tracked by the CYFCC using the following dashboard. The companion Children and Youth Well-Being Profile provides a baseline, a summary of the research behind the goals and measures, and a broader set of indicators. Measures may be added and replaced as better measures are identified.

The headline indicators associated with these areas will be tracked by the CYFCC using the following dashboard. The companion Children and Youth Well-Being Profile provides a baseline, a summary of the research behind the goals and measures, and a broader set of indicators. Measures may be added and replaced as better measures are identified.

The dashboard provides a statistical snapshot of information on the well-being of children and youth in Alexandria. It shows "headline data" based on current and historical trends of key indicators. The dashboard is provided here to show conditions that the Plan is designed to improve. To gain a fuller perspective of the status of children and youth, and to review the data considered by the Design Team, see the Alexandria Youth Well-Being Profile 2013, which served as a reference for the Design Team.

The dashboard, through color coding, provides two pieces of information on each indicator:

- Based on the most recent data, how well are Alexandria's children and youth doing?
- Is the trend getting better or worse?

### ***Actual Data***

Where there is trend data, the data point will be color coded:

Going in the opposite direction of desired result; About the same; Trending in the desired direction.

For example, the first data indicator in the dashboard illustrates the percentage of students who demonstrated readiness for kindergarten (87%). The Green (87%) indicates that the figure has increased over the last few years (ie, trending in the right direction).

**Children & Youth Master Plan  
Dashboard**

	<i>Early Childhood</i>	<i>Middle Childhood</i>	<i>Youth</i>	<i>Young Adult</i>
<b><i>Academically and vocationally successful</i></b>				
Kindergarten Readiness	<b>87%</b>			
3rd Grade Reading Proficiency*		<b>76%</b>		
Student Attendance for Middle Grades		<b>Awaiting Data</b>		
Algebra I Proficiency*		<b>63%</b>		
High School Dropout Rate*			<b>12%</b>	
SAT Score by Income			<b>1242</b>	
Unemployment			<b>21%</b>	<b>11%</b>
Student Persistence in College				<b>60%</b>
<b><i>Culturally competent and connected</i></b>				
Cultural Competence		<b>52%</b>	<b>53%</b>	
<b><i>Emotionally secure, hopeful and resilient</i></b>				
Made a Plan About How to Attempt Suicide*		<b>12%</b>	<b>10%</b>	
Caring Adult		<b>40%</b>	<b>43%</b>	
Problem Solving		<b>29%</b>	<b>34%</b>	
<b><i>Physically safe and healthy</i></b>				
Low/Very Low Birth Weight	<b>8.5%</b>			
Teen Pregnancy*	<b>2.9%</b>		<b>2.9%</b>	
Founded Child Abuse		<b>1.8%</b>		
Engaged in 5+ Days of Exercise Lasting 60 min or More		<b>53%</b>	<b>33%</b>	
<b><i>Socially and civically engaged and empowered</i></b>				
Service to Others		<b>46%</b>	<b>46%</b>	
Number of Group A Juvenile Crime (Serious Crimes)		<b>229</b>		
Afterschool Program Participation (comparison to region)		<b>84%</b>		

*\*Are able to be disaggregated by race.*

## **Community Input**

More than 300 residents participated in three public forums to help inform this plan. At each forum, adults and youth broke into workgroups to examine data found in the Children and Youth Well-being Profile, identify priority issues, discuss the root causes and local conditions behind those issues and suggest solutions. The discussions affirmed the five desired goal areas: that all Alexandria youth become academically and vocationally successful; physically safe and healthy; emotionally secure, hopeful and resilient; socially and civically engaged and empowered; and culturally competent and connected.

The participants voted for the indicators that were most important to them, then separated into workgroups to discuss specific issues such as truancy, substance abuse and participation in community activities. The purpose of this discussion was to understand the root causes behind these issues. All of the participants then came together to compare the root causes. What they found was striking. From issues impacting early childhood to young adults, there were common barriers identified as consistently impeding the healthy development of Alexandria's young people.

In order to comprehensively address these barriers, the following community priorities were developed:

1. Supporting Social, Emotional, Intellectual and Physical Growth
2. Empowering and Equipping Families
3. Creating Caring Networks and Systems
4. Promoting Equity and Nurturing Cultural Connections
5. Improving Economic Opportunities
6. Data, Implementation and Fiscal Accountability

These priority areas serve as the framework and vision for Alexandria's first Children and Youth Master Plan. Each area has been researched by a team of community leaders to review current, successful practices in Alexandria. These groups put together recommendations, aligned with current City work plans that will improve the well-being of Alexandria's children and youth.

### ***Community Priority 1: Supporting Social, Emotional, Intellectual & Physical Growth***

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#### **Defining Social, Emotional, Intellectual and Physical Growth**

Obtaining the desired outcomes for children and youth, requires the prioritization of children's access to experiences that help them grow socially, intellectually, emotionally and physically. Social and emotional development captures a broad range of skills that include the ability to form relationships and manage emotions, behavior and attention. Intellectual growth focuses on a child's growing capability to think, analyze, problem-solve, and use language to expand knowledge and understanding about the world. At a basic level, physical growth reflects the extent to which children demonstrate consistent progress along their respective individual growth curves. Yet, the state of being physically healthy is heavily influenced by other factors, including quality and quantity of food intake, exercise and movement, substances use/abuse (e.g., cigarettes, alcohol and other drugs), and access to continuous

health care. Together, these areas represent a comprehensive understanding about the ways in which children and youth develop.

### **The Importance of Supporting Social, Emotional, Intellectual and Physical Growth**

Investing in children and youth from a holistic perspective—social, emotional, intellectual and physical—represents the best chance of fostering success in school and life. The skills and capacities acquired in these areas are inextricably linked; therefore, the strategies must value each area. Science has documented that young children who enter school with the skills needed to self-regulate are more likely to engage in the learning process in ways that place them on a path for success. Similarly, when a child’s physical health is adversely impacted by food scarcity and insecurity, it undermines his/her ability to concentrate and fully engage in the learning process. Critical thinking and problem solving skills are essential for engaging in the learning process, yet they also help children and youth navigate social interactions with peers and adults. Whether at home, school or in the community, when work with children and youth incorporates the ways that each of these domains influence behavior and development, the chances increase for helping children and youth thrive.

### **Measuring Social, Emotional, Intellectual and Physical Supports and Opportunities**

There are a variety of ways to measure the supports and opportunities in each of these developmental domains, including the following:

- The number/percentage of programs that incorporate a focus on social and emotional skill development
- The number/percentage of youth participating in physical fitness activities
- The number of youth pursuing postsecondary education and training
- The number of youth participating in positive developmental experiences (e.g., volunteering, jobs)
- The number of youth experiencing more internal and external development assets
- The quality, access and reach of programs and services

### **Consistency with Other Alexandria Plans**

A number of plans across the City support improved developmental outcomes including the strategic plans of the City of Alexandria; the Substance Abuse Coalition of Alexandria; Alexandria City Public Schools; Department of Recreation, Parks and Cultural Activities; and the Gang Prevention Community Task Force.

### **Strategies and Recommended Action Steps**

**Strategy 1:** Provide an accessible continuum of quality academic learning environments for all children from birth to 21 to ensure readiness, academic success and vocational preparedness.

#### **Action steps:**

- Ensure that all programs meet the highest standards, specific to their discipline/agency.
- Ensure that City-funded and subsidized afterschool programs help promote positive academic, physical, emotional and social development.

- Coordinate with and support ACPS efforts to a) demonstrate that every student achieves at least one year of academic progress annually in reading, writing and math, and b) ensure that every secondary student has a comprehensive plan for success.
- Implement strategy 2, noted below, to address the needs of children 0 to 5.

**Potential Measures of Success:**

- Number of agencies/providers participating in quality initiatives (accreditation, Star Quality Ratings, etc.)
- Number of students with Individual Achievement Plans

**Strategy 2:** Develop an integrated early care and education system.

**Action steps:**

- Create an integrated early care and education strategy based on bright spot research and local data that incorporates the input of Alexandria Department of Community and Human Services, Alexandria Health Department, CYFCC, ACPS, private and non-profit providers and residents.
- Create a public awareness campaign to promote access to resources as well as resource development.
- Support the healthy development of children prenatal to age 5, including improving access for prenatal to age 3 programs.
- Increase access to quality, affordable early childhood opportunities.
- Align the early childhood system with the K-12 system.

**Potential Measures of Success:**

- Collaboration among providers involved in the provision of early care and education services
- Parent knowledge of how to access services in this integrated system
- Child participation rates

**Strategy 3:** Improve supports for the health and wellness of children, youth and families.

**Action steps:**

- Advocate for health promotion policies including the Medicaid expansion option under the Affordable Care Act and smoke-free policies for multi-unit housing.
- Launch a campaign such as “Let’s Move Cities, Towns and Counties” that features action plans for improving nutrition and promoting physical activity among children and youth.
- Promote the resources of the Substance Abuse Coalition of Alexandria (SAPCA), the Alexandria Campaign on Adolescent Pregnancy (ACAP), and the Gang Prevention Community Task Force and expand the offerings of the FACE Center to include education on healthy habits.

**Potential Measures of Success:**

- Medicaid expansion option in place
- Measurement of action plans within campaigns

- Increase in participation in all sectors within ACAP, SAPCA and Gang Prevention Task Force
- Smoke-free policies for multi-unit housing in place and enforced
- Increased wellness offerings at FACE Centers

**Strategy 4:** Provide and support child and youth asset-building programs that promote positive development and target multiple risk avoidance behaviors.

**Action steps:**

- Utilize sixth grade interest questionnaire to identify aptitudes and inform school counselors, coaches and community leaders who are trained in providing consistent, stable and supportive environments to foster positive child outcomes.
- Deliver quality, age-appropriate programs that promote positive developmental outcomes and foster a growth mindset.
- Introduce an afterschool conflict resolution and communication program that builds skills in healthy decision making, anger management, coping and problem solving through ACPS and Department of Recreation, Parks and Cultural Activities partnership.
- Coordinate with and support City Council efforts to a) improve the coordination and alignment of youth mentoring programs and expand capacity citywide, b) coordinate and align public out-of-school time experiences for elementary school youth and middle school youth to improve access to quality programs.

**Potential Measures of Success:**

- Percent of students enrolled in ACPS with a completed sixth grade interest questionnaire
- Percent of students enrolled with aptitudes and goals identified at graduation
- The number of adult leaders trained in supporting resiliency; selection and implementation of a SAMHSA model program
- Scores for the Virginia Quality Rating and Improvement System (QRIS)

**Strategy 5:** Provide opportunities for youth to develop community involvement and workplace related skills.

**Action steps:**

- Actively involve youth, their families and other community members in community service and partnerships, neighborhood building, boards, program planning and assessments, and commissions.
- Create a mentoring program focused on cultivating workforce skills and implement coaching to find and maintain employment.
- Provide opportunities to develop civic responsibility through community service projects.
- Encourage participation in team sports, internships and afterschool activities.

**Potential Measures of Success:**

- Youth outreach needs assessment completed by youth regularly
- The number of boards/commissions/partnerships with participating youth

- Percentage of students at ACPS completing community service projects as part of the curriculum
- Increased scores in job preparedness survey
- The number of teens served by JobLink and enrolled in Northern Virginia Community College classes
- Percent of teens seeking employment who obtain employment

## ***Community Priority 2: Empowering and Equipping Families***

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### **Defining Empowering and Equipping Families**

Family support and involvement takes on multiple dimensions. It involves a range of parenting behaviors and family conditions, including: good parenting in the home, providing a secure and stable environment, intellectual stimulation, parent-child discussion, role-modeling of social and educational values, contact with schools, ensuring daily school attendance, participating in school events and supporting the school overall (e.g., involvement in parent-teacher-student organizations).<sup>i</sup>

In order to support their children, families need early and sustained supports to assist them with the tasks of parenting. Such supports can be especially critical for the most isolated parents. A lack of social connections – informal and formal – and low levels of contact with others are risk factors for child abuse and neglect. In addition, providing basic supports to families coping with economic stress in general, and poverty specifically, plays an important role in preventing child maltreatment.<sup>ii</sup>

### **The Importance of Empowering and Equipping Families**

Brain development research shows the critical relationship between stable, supportive caregivers and the developing brain during the earliest stages of life.<sup>iii</sup> A positive home environment predicts positive cognitive and social development among children. A key determinant in the effectiveness of family supports is whether the parent has adequate knowledge of child development and demonstrated parenting skills. Knowledge about typical development and realistic expectations is likely to influence child-rearing practices, including the use of praise, discipline, limit-setting and monitoring.<sup>iv</sup>

Search Institute’s research on assets lists family support among its key external assets for children and youth, and highlights the important link between family support (alongside other assets) and thriving. For some youth, the absence of support seems particularly related to antisocial behavior.<sup>v</sup>

As children reach school age, parental support for their academic development and school achievement, including school attendance is essential to school success. Older youth, in middle and high school, continue to need family support to navigate their more academically and socially complex learning environments – support that helps youth to navigate peer relationships, increases the chances for smooth transitions between school levels and decreases the likelihood of dropping out. However, parental involvement and support drops off, rather than picks up, during these critical years – often dramatically. Parental involvement declines significantly in the middle school years and further declines as students reach high school age.<sup>vi,vii</sup>

Beyond the home, research further suggests that parental engagement in community-based programs and services for children and youth is associated with lower rates of risky sexual behavior, tobacco use, drug use, alcohol use, delinquency and violent behavior in their children. Such involvement also coincides with youth reports of higher levels of trust, and lower levels of lying to and arguing with parents. Some studies suggest that having a parental component to community-based organizational activities leads to better youth outcomes than in similar programs that do not reach out to parents.<sup>viii</sup>

### **Measuring the Empowerment of Families to Support Children and Youth**

Measuring the empowerment of families to support Alexandria’s children and youth can be done in a variety of ways, including measuring and tracking:

- The number of parent/family education programs and services in Alexandria and the number of families who actually participate in them;
- A professional development needs survey for staff charged with promoting effective parent/family engagement;
- Annual budgets and training records directed at family engagement efforts; and
- Availability and use of funding streams directed at family engagement.

### **Consistency with other Alexandria Plans**

Numerous priorities from the various strategic plans address the needs of families. These range from strengthening family resource centers to expanding support for breast feeding. Included plans come from the Alexandria Campaign on Adolescent Pregnancy, Alexandria City Public Schools, Gang Prevention Task Force, Substance Abuse Prevention Coalition of Alexandria, Department of Recreation, Parks and Cultural Activities, Alexandria Public Health Advisory Commission and Alexandria Department of Community and Human Services.

### **Strategies and Recommended Action Steps**

**Strategy 1:** Create a shared citywide vision of family engagement and promote a common message that values parental involvement.

#### **Action steps:**

- Create a transparent and accessible *Parent’s Bill of Rights and Responsibilities* and a simple tagline that shows the city’s commitment to parental engagement and parents’ value as partners in their children’s education and healthy development.
- Identify a senior level officer responsible for family engagement who bridges City and school programs, establishes internal communication channels and convenes a parent and professional advisory board.

#### **Potential Measures of Success:**

- Adoption and utilization of communication items, including visible posting of Parent’s Bill of Rights and Responsibilities in every City/ACPS site and non-profit program
- Record of appointment of officer by Alexandria City Manager and ACPS Superintendent

**Strategy 2:** Provide high-quality, family-focused programming that builds a purposeful connection between child development, parental best practices and learning outcomes.

**Action steps:**

- Encourage best-practices across all adult, youth and family programming and adopt the national model of Strengthening Families, where applicable.
- Adopt a formal recommendation by City Council for any new or expanded high-quality programming, in conjunction with the ACPS strategic plan.
- Develop a standard reporting process and implement cross-agency software to evaluate outcomes of existing family-focused programs.

**Potential Measures of Success:**

- CYFCC, City Council and ACPS Meeting Agenda and Minutes and Annual Report from Accountability Committee

**Strategy 3:** Offer ongoing professional development and technical assistance for all "family facing" staff across the City of Alexandria/ACPS.

**Action steps:**

- Provide ongoing training on cultural competence and the implementation of the Parent's Bill of Rights and Responsibilities for all "family facing" staff.
- Provide training in the Strengthening Families Model.

**Potential Measure of Success:**

- Review of annual budgets and documented training records

**Strategy 4:** Create a robust multilingual communications system regarding parent engagement that reaches all stakeholders and families.

**Action steps:**

- Distribute welcome packets to all new students (public and private) to promote positive out of school time activities and city services.
- Create two coordinated communications campaigns: one jointly led by the City and ACPS on a specific theme monthly (e.g. Family Literacy Month, Attendance Awareness Month) and another on early childhood education programming and impact.
- Promote the use of Language Line services across the City/ACPS, ensure all printed materials and websites are available in Spanish, Arabic and Amharic, and provide translation services upon request in any language.

**Potential Measures of Success:**

- Return of forms in welcome packet and record of distribution
- Annual campaign calendar
- Communication plan of execution
- Data regarding use of language line
- Report to CYFCC Implementation Committee with sample materials

**Strategy 5:** Ensure accountability for results by engaging young people and families in identifying solutions to be used on an ongoing basis to improve programs and approaches.

**Action steps:**

- Identify meaningful metrics tracking major family engagement projects, with a focus on successes and improvements.
- Create and implement a walk-through evaluation assessing accessibility, appearance and culture of City/ACPS facilities.

**Potential Measure of Success:**

- Annual Accountability Committee Report and Evaluation results of Accessibility, Appearance and Culture walk-through

**Strategy 6:** Ensure adequate and effective funding for parent engagement programs.

**Action steps:**

- Develop a cost analysis of City/ACPS existing family engagement programs and advocate for increased investment in high-quality family programming.
- Seek new funding streams and identify synergistic funding opportunities in the city and school budgets to expand existing effective programming and new opportunities for family engagement.

**Potential Measure of Success:**

- Annual Budget and Advocacy Committee Reports

### **Community Priority 3: Creating Caring Networks and Systems**

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#### **Defining Caring Networks and Systems**

Caring and supportive adults and peers are important external assets for young people. Additionally, the institutions that make up the networks and systems that support youth must also be places where youth are known and where they feel as if someone cares about them. What are the characteristics of such places and individuals? Caring individuals and systems provide children and youth with:

- Opportunities to feel supported in the places where they live and learn;
- The consistent presence of advocates, mentors/role models and champions;
- The feeling of being valued as assets in the community;
- Early warning systems for those who have gotten off track; and
- The integration of services and supports where they live and learn.

#### **The Importance of Caring Networks and Systems**

Every young person needs caring individuals that teach, believe in and support them. While parents are critically important, young people's social networks also consist of peers, siblings, extended family and unrelated adults. The research shows a strong relationship between supportive non-parental adults and peers and positive developmental outcomes. Non-parental adults can serve many of the same functions as parents, particularly in relation to role modeling, teaching and encouraging.<sup>ix</sup>

Youth who have positive relationships with adults outside their families also experience mental health benefits. They feel more supported, are more socially expressive, and are less likely to be depressed

than youth who lack such relationships.<sup>x</sup> Youth who have positive, influential adults in their lives are also significantly less likely to be involved in misconduct, regardless of the behavior of close family or friends. Both quality and frequency of such support matters – both are reportedly “extremely important” to teens.<sup>xi</sup>

Peers can also have a positive effect on youths’ well-being and efficacy. In a study on the positive effects of peer mentoring between high school youth and their younger middle school counterparts, significant impacts were found on overall academic performance, quality of class work and the number of assignments completed. Impacts were also found on student-reported scholastic efficacy. Students who had slightly older peer mentors were also more likely to be able to identify a supportive adult friend.<sup>xii</sup>

Taking these principles to the organizational level, the research consensus is converging on the idea that the most effective programs and interventions across program models, fields and intended outcomes are mediated through strong relationships. Gil Noam suggests that:

“After-school programs that are well-attended, for example, exist because students feel bonded to one another and to one or more of the adults who work there. The most academically successful schools are typically those where students feel attached to and respected by their teachers. Patients who feel understood and cared for by their therapist have better therapeutic results. It is not the specific method of interaction that is the most critical determinant of success ... but the quality and perception of the interaction between patient and therapist, student and teacher, mentee and mentor, youth and youth worker.”<sup>xiii</sup>

Major systems – health care, child welfare and education – can also demonstrate caring for children and youth. At a system level, an array of practices can facilitate caring support for young people.

- In schools, educational liaisons can provide extra supports to at-risk students and connect them to needed services. Early warning systems can help identify students who have gone academically off-track, helping to reduce dropout rates and promote positive outcomes for vulnerable students.<sup>xiv</sup>
- In the health area, the research supports the notion that a medical home – one set of medical professionals who know a child’s medical history and serve as a central home for medical needs – promotes overall health and reduces the odds of delayed diagnosis of health problems and preventable conditions.<sup>xv, xvi</sup>
- Child welfare and family support systems can respond to the needs of children and youth by facilitating the stability throughout childhood that fosters healthy development. For example, fewer changes in placement while in foster care, successful family reunification and strong preparation for independent living all appear to significantly reduce the number of negative outcomes for foster youth.
- More broadly, communities can focus on integrating mental health services and supports with other youth-serving programs, including school-based and youth development programs. Research points to the potential of embedded supports within the context of other youth-serving programs to improve positive outcomes.<sup>xvii</sup>

## **Measuring the Presence and Effectiveness of Caring Networks and Systems**

Measuring the presence and effectiveness of caring networks and system among Alexandria’s children and youth can be carried out in a variety of ways, including measuring or tracking:

- Changes to local funding guidelines related to the Children and Youth Master Plan goals around caring networks and systems;
- The number of policy changes within and among community systems and institutions associated with the Children and Youth Master Plan goals around caring networks and systems;
- Data from client-satisfaction surveys;
- Percentage of youth reporting a connection with at least one caring, responsible adult; and
- The change in developmental assets scores in youth over time.

## **Consistency with other Alexandria Plans**

Building and strengthening systems is a major aim in Alexandria. Indeed, plans developed by the City Council, the Department of Community and Human Services and the Alexandria City Public Schools all highlight the need to align efforts between schools, City services and community services in order to support the success of families, children and youth. Additional plans of note with a focus on creating caring systems and networks are those of the Alexandria Campaign on Adolescent Pregnancy, Alexandria Coalition for Clean and Smoke Free Air, Alexandria Redevelopment and Housing Authority, Alexandria Public Health Advisory Commission and the Substance Abuse Prevention Coalition of Alexandria.

## **Strategies and Recommended Action Steps**

**Strategy 1:** Promote and incentivize alignment and collaboration among various entities and systems serving/seeking to serve families and youth.

### **Action steps:**

- Raise awareness among entities and agencies serving families and children about the Children and Youth Master Plan goals, outcomes and indicators.
- Encourage all funding entities (public and private) to prioritize funding for organizational collaboration and alignment and the goals and outcomes of the Children and Youth Master Plan.

### **Potential Measure of Success:**

- Evidence in funding guidelines or in City Manager’s budget

**Strategy 2:** Ensure systems (i.e., social services, health, juvenile justice) become client-centered, culturally competent and welcoming to families. (See also Empowering and Equipping Families Strategies #1 and #3.)

### **Action step:**

- Establish a rating system for agencies to look at how well they are serving consumers, along with a ‘mystery shopper’ component designed to promote service improvement.

### **Potential Measure of Success:**

- Rating system and mystery shopper data

**Strategy 3:** Ensure all families are aware of and have access to appropriate services, including access to trained individuals who can assess family needs in order to properly refer them.

**Action steps:**

- In conjunction with the 211 managing entity, determine the best platform for updating and sharing information about child, youth and family services in Alexandria.
- In alignment with Empowering and Equipping Families Strategy #4, develop a Resource Reference Guide, marketing campaign in multiple languages, and Resource Awareness Open Houses at schools and community centers.
- Implement “Satellite Services Alexandria” in which services rotate once per month in order to collect and share information.
- In alignment with Empowering and Equipping Families Strategy #3, provide training to all employees on “no wrong door” so they are prepared to offer excellent customer service beyond their specific department.

**Potential Measure of Success:**

- Participation in Resource Guide, Open Houses, Satellite Services and trainings

**Strategy 4:** Ensure that all young people have the opportunity to establish a relationship with a responsible adult advocate, mentor or advisor.

**Action steps:**

- Educate adults (those with and without children), businesses and organizations about the importance of positive relationships with youth, mentoring and intergenerational activities. Incorporate learning from best practices on effective relationships and local data such as Search Institute’s Developmental Assets Survey.
- Coordinate with and support ACPS efforts to ensure that every student has a responsible adult mentor or advisor.

**Potential Measures of Success:**

- Development of materials and completion of campaign
- The number of youth with sustained mentorship
- The number of businesses and organizations supporting positive relationships with young people

**Strategy 5:** Promote civic engagement among youth by giving them meaningful opportunities to engage and lead. Raise awareness about those opportunities and encourage public and private stakeholders to involve young people in new ways.

**Action steps:**

- Identify a shared staff person to work with ACPS, the City and Department of Recreation, Parks and Cultural Activities to build the expectation that youth must be engaged in meaningful leadership building opportunities.
- Meet with business leaders to encourage them to look at creative ways to include youth.
- Educate boards, commissions and neighborhood associations about the importance of involving youth and require them to reserve spots for young people and to educate, recruit and incentivize youth to participate.

**Potential Measures of Success:**

- Engagement opportunities catalogued
- Materials and presentations created
- Changed bylaws
- The number of youth sitting on boards and commissions

**Strategy 6:** Schools and other child-serving agencies coordinate an early warning system to identify problems early and address them.

**Action steps:**

- Identify criteria for an early warning system by engaging stakeholders, parents and young people.
- Expand the early warning system beyond the school system to ensure it is supported by data and context from community providers and social services.

**Potential Measure of Success:**

- Early warning system in place and communication channels are established between partner agencies

***Community Priority 4: Promoting Equity and Nurturing Cultural Connections***

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**Defining Equity, Cultural Competence and Connectedness**

Given the root causes of disparities in health, neighborhood quality, access to employment and educational opportunities, equity is an important concept in the development of community strategies to counteract the pervasive consequences of disparities between various populations within the community. Equity refers to the condition that would be achieved if one's social identity (i.e., ethnic or racial identity) no longer predicted, in a statistical sense, life outcomes. Working for equity includes addressing root causes, not just current conditions. It includes the elimination of policies, practices, attitudes and cultural messages that reinforce or fail to eliminate disparities.<sup>1</sup>

The divergent realities that can arise between communities and individuals because of these disparities can be associated with lack of cultural awareness, lack of trust between communities, divided opportunity and, importantly, limited opportunities to socially connect diverse ethnic groups and gain cultural competence.

Cultural competence involves the ability to work with and respond effectively to others from diverse racial, ethnic, religious, socio-economic and other backgrounds in a manner that acknowledges and respects individuals' culturally-based beliefs, attitudes, behaviors and customs.<sup>xviii, xix</sup> One aspect of cultural competence is the capacity for respectful engagement rooted in the view that others' backgrounds are assets rather than deficits. Additional characteristics of individual cultural competence include the ability to:

- Value diversity and similarities among all peoples;
- Understand and effectively respond to cultural differences;

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<sup>1</sup> Source: Center for Assessment and Policy Development.

- Engage in individual cultural self-assessment; and
- Internalize cultural knowledge.<sup>xx</sup>

### **The Importance of Equity, Cultural Competence and Connectedness**

Students who have opportunities to engage in multicultural learning experiences in which all cultures and identities are promoted have the potential for healthier psycho-social development and gains in achievement.<sup>xxi, xxii</sup> Furthermore, some research points to the role that technology can play in strengthening cultural connections, helping children and youth understand and value the differences among people, discuss their own culture and its meaning in their lives, and explore cultures from around the world.<sup>xxiii</sup>

Institutions such as schools, social service agencies and community-based organizations have an important structural and policy role to play – not just in promoting all cultures and identities, but in addressing root causes affecting disparate social realities and in promoting equity. Researchers have identified segregation as a primary cause of racial differences in socioeconomic status, due to differing access to educational and employment opportunities. Some researchers advocate that efforts to eliminate racial disparities must acknowledge and confront this de facto segregation and its pervasive consequences.<sup>xxiv</sup>

Given this reality, a more immediately attainable step includes acknowledging that neighborhood segregation maintains the human tendency to “see commonly the worst of each other” (DuBois, 1990, p. 121) and makes upward mobility more difficult for certain populations. While the ethnic and racial composition of city neighborhoods is much more complex than in the past, many communities follow patterns of persisting segregation.<sup>xxv</sup>

Children’s and youth’s capacity to see “the best in each other” is shaped by a variety of influences: peers, parents and media, as well as neighborhood/school experiences. Both families and schools can play pivotal roles. Parents play a central and fundamental role as “first teachers,” including shaping children’s cultural attitudes and ideas about themselves in relation to others from diverse backgrounds. Research establishes a strong link between parental attitudes and their children’s attitudes, both positive and negative.<sup>xxvi</sup>

While somewhat dated, Beverly Daniels-Tatum’s seminal book on seemingly self-selected segregation between groups of ethnically similar youths explains the social pushes and pulls that serve to keep school cafeterias, sports teams and classes significantly segregated along lines of race.<sup>xxvii</sup> Indeed, about one in 12 white high school students have a best friend of another race. Eighty-five percent of black youth report that their best friends are black. Diverse schools often increase contact, but without intentional strategies to promote inclusion, students end up no more likely to have close friendships across racial lines, and students’ racial attitudes appear no different than (and are sometimes even worse than) those of students in racially homogenous schools.<sup>xxviii</sup>

However, intergroup contact and friendship are keys to reducing prejudice and creating greater positive interactions. Intentional efforts help as cross-race friendships decline as youth get older. One study showed that children with less biased attitudes had more cross-race friendships and more positive perceptions of their friends.<sup>xxix</sup> Promoting cross-race peer connections may be most effective when activities center on a common goal, as in cooperative learning groups and when teachers model aspects of cultural competence. Moreover, mentoring appears to have some positive effects on connectedness to culturally different peers.<sup>xxx</sup>

### **Measuring Equity, Cultural Competence and Connectedness**

Measuring gains in equity, cultural competence and connectedness among Alexandria’s children and youth is a complex undertaking. Nevertheless, it can be done in a variety of ways, including measuring and tracking:

- The number of cross-cultural event opportunities;
- The number of community dialogue events held, using the Community Dialogue Model;
- Development or identification of a cultural competence measure, and changes over time reflected in the measure; and
- Use of racial equity “scorecards” to determine disproportionality at key points in service delivery in various sectors.<sup>2,3</sup>

### **Consistency with Other Alexandria Plans**

Cultural diversity and language barriers were considered across a number of plans. For example, the Alexandria Redevelopment and Housing Authority aims to “modify how residents and their living environment are perceived to improve community acceptance and understanding of challenges and opportunities of diversity.” Eliminating differences in achievement among racial, income, disability and language subgroups is an aim of ACPS and the Department of Recreation, Parks and Cultural Activities. Other organizations with plans that address cultural connections and disparities are the Alexandria Department of Community and Human Services and the Substance Abuse Prevention Coalition of Alexandria.

### **Strategies and Recommended Action Steps**

**Strategy 1:** Increase opportunities for individuals and groups to connect across cultures.

#### **Action steps:**

- Increase the number of cross-cultural event opportunities for the community and for service providers. Incorporate social media platforms where appropriate.
- Infuse cultural diversity in the school system via a range of channels, including literature, school lunches, song and music. Incorporate social media platforms as appropriate.

#### **Potential Measure of Success:**

- Completion of events, related materials and curriculums

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<sup>2</sup> For an example, see the Children’s Bureau Express [Strategies and Tool for Practice: Measuring Racial Equity in Child Welfare](#).

<sup>3</sup> For additional detail, refer to the full list of strategies and action steps in *Alexandria Strategies and Action Steps*.

**Strategy 2:** Introduce an ongoing Community Dialogue Model to involve entire neighborhoods.

**Action steps:**

- Research, select and pilot the Community Dialogue Model, focused on honest communication and social change.
- Evaluate and seek grant funds for sustainability and include youth leaders in implementation.

**Potential Measures of Success:**

- Completion of pilot in one community or organization
- Completed trainings
- Number of dialogues held
- Number of youth involved
- Participant feedback

**Strategy 3:** Expand the definition of culture beyond color (e.g. socioeconomic status, sexual orientation, disabilities, national origin, etc.)

**Action steps:**

- Advocate including an expanded definition of culture in the City Strategic Plan.
- Upon the implementation of a sub-committee (See Community Priority 6: Infrastructure Strategy #1), develop a report about what cultures exist in Alexandria.

**Potential Measures of Success:**

- City Strategic Plan includes expanded definition
- Annual Report of the CYFCC

**Strategy 4:** Identify and evaluate additional measures of cultural competence and connection.

**Action steps:**

- Develop a Cultural Competence Measures Team to explore evaluation measures.
- Upon selection, implement measures in appropriate venue.

**Potential Measures of Success:**

- Team identified and assembled
- Options reviewed and measures in place

**Strategy 5:** Promote high expectations and achievement for all students.

**Action steps:**

- Support the ACPS plan to eliminate achievement differences among race, sexual orientation income, and disability and language subgroups.
- In alignment with Caring Networks and Systems strategy #2, achieve cultural competence for all staff with diversity training that incorporates awareness, understanding, high expectations and appropriate instruction for all students.

**Potential Measures of Success:**

- Materials developed and completion of training
- Participant feedback
- Improved cultural competence measures in Alexandria

## *Community Priority 5: Improving Economic Opportunity*

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### **Overview of Economic Opportunity**

In community conversations in Alexandria, stakeholders identified challenging economic conditions as a major stressor for many families. Over the past 20 years, the cost of living in the United States has increased by almost 90 percent, drastically outpacing income growth. To make ends meet, families are borrowing heavily and relying on high cost alternatives to cover their daily living expenses. Furthermore, a significant percentage of families with children are experiencing deep economic distress. Since the mid-1970s, children under 18 have been much more likely than adults to be poor. In 2010 and 2011, more than one in five children (22 percent) lived in families with incomes below the poverty line. Alexandria follows the national trend. Stakeholders have identified growing poverty and lack of affordable housing as primary local conditions leading to negative youth indicators such as dropping out, juvenile crime, school offenses, teen pregnancy, and abuse and neglect rates. The community perceives that these factors also contribute to family instability and limited opportunities for civic engagement.

### **The Importance of Improving Economic Opportunity to Support Children and Families**

Poor children are disproportionately exposed to a variety of risk factors – including inadequate nutrition, substandard housing and untreated illness – that can affect their cognitive, social and emotional development. Research shows that poor children are more likely to experience chronic health problems, mental health problems and educational challenges. The economic stressors that many families face challenge their efforts to support their children’s academic achievement. Such challenges as housing instability, food shortage, family conflict and inadequate transportation make it difficult for some families to provide the resources and supports – both financial and psychological – children need to succeed in school. Creating economic opportunities for families increases the odds not only that they can earn adequate income to cover basic needs, but also that families can build the assets that enable them to avoid the risk factors that are associated with poverty.

Since the economic well-being of children and their parents are inextricably linked, economic policy strategies should promote opportunities for parents and children at the same time. Families must have financial stability and family-sustaining wages; be able to find affordable housing; have knowledge of and access to income supports that might be available to them; and receive additional instrumental support to effectively manage life challenges, including those associated with parenting (Policy for Results, 2013).<sup>xxxii</sup>

Programs providing income supplements to enhance the earnings of low-income families have significant positive effects on young children and tend to produce higher school achievement. Some studies have found that income supplement programs also reduce behavioral problems, increase positive social behavior and improve children’s overall health. Programs that increase parental employment without increasing parental income have few positive effects on young children in those families (Morris, et al., 2001, 2004).<sup>xxxii, xxxiii</sup>

Finally, older youth need support for financial literacy and access to financial systems as they navigate the road to young adulthood. Youth in the U.S. face an increasingly complex and perilous financial

world. Economically disadvantaged youth, in particular, lack both financial knowledge and access to mainstream financial institutions.

Johnson and Sherraden (2007) argue that financial literacy education is not enough to succeed. Youth must also have access to mainstream financial services and institutions in order to choose a financially literate lifestyle. Johnson and Sherraden discuss the conditions of financial capability: an approach that blends developing financial knowledge and skills in youth with access to financial tools and services.<sup>xxxiv</sup>

### **Measuring the Improvement of Economic Conditions**

Measuring the improvement of economic conditions among Alexandria's families can be done in a variety of ways, including measuring or tracking:

- The number of families with family-sustaining employment;
- Increases in training and internship slots;
- The number of out-of-school time programs with leadership development/career exploration components;
- The number of families connected to federal supports such as Earned Income Tax Credit, child care subsidies and other supports; and
- The number of youth accessing coaching and information on financial literacy.

### **Consistency with Other Alexandria Plans**

As a community, Alexandria has a number of considerations when it comes to economic conditions and opportunities. This issue resonated throughout the strategic plans in Alexandria, from the Housing Master Plan with a call for long-term housing affordability to the City Council's goal of maintaining an environment where businesses can thrive. In addition, economic conditions were addressed across strategic plans from: Alexandria Coalition for Clean and Smoke Free Air, Alexandria Department of Community and Human Services, Alexandria Redevelopment and Housing Authority and the Recommended Action Plan for Tobacco Cessation and Prevention.

### **Strategies and Recommended Action Steps**

**Strategy 1:** Ensure youth and family voice in citywide planning on economic development, housing and transportation.

#### **Action steps:**

- Establish seats on relevant city commissions for youth and parents, improve recruitment strategies, promote participation via transportation stipend and provide appropriate orientation to new members and returning commission members.
- Designate a liaison from the CYFCC to serve on the Affordable Housing Advisory Committee and the Alexandria Transportation Committee in order to ensure CYFCC coordination and communication in their planning processes.

#### **Potential Measures of Success:**

- Increased number of seats for parents and youth
- Increased retention of parent and youth members

- Designation of liaisons
- Number of plans reviewed by CYFCC members

**Strategy 2:** Connect youth and parents to career paths.

**Action steps:**

- Devise and promote career paths by exploring school credit for work experience, the establishment of a NOVA middle college program, and the implementation of a YouthBuild program.
- Partner with the private sector to offer vocational training and internships in business, health/elder care, and green housing audits.
- Increase the number of computers in libraries (and consider adding written guides or staff support for career exploration and job search).
- Foster leadership development and career exploration within out-of-school time programs for middle grade and older youth.

**Potential Measures of Success:**

- Institution of career paths
- Increase in opportunities for trainings and internships
- Number of computers
- Number of out-of-school time programs with leadership development/career exploration components

**Strategy 3:** Expand financial education and asset development.

**Action steps:**

- Connect families to federal supports such as Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC), child care subsidies, and nutritional supports such as SNAP/WIC.
- Provide connections to safe, affordable banking, such as a Bank On Alexandria partnership with financial institutions to provide free/low-cost checking accounts, along with financial planning information and coaching.
- Establish matched savings, such as IDAs for housing, starting a new business or higher education/training, or child development accounts (“Cribs to College” model).
- Promote a stronger public safety net by advocating for increased minimum wage, refundable Child Tax Credit, stronger EITC.

**Potential Measures of Success:**

- Increase the number of families connected to federal supports
- Number of youth accessing information, coaching and banking
- Increase in matched savings accounts
- Changes in policies

**Strategy 4:** Work with the business community to create jobs for youth, job readiness opportunities, and encourage entrepreneurship among youth.

## Community Priority 6: Data, Implementation and Fiscal Accountability

The infrastructure to support this ambitious action plan is largely in place. However, many of the community forum participants, Design Team members and work groups made similar recommendations that reinforce this idea: Leaders must focus not only on *what* to do to support children and youth directly, but on *how* to work together. Achieving collective impact requires a process of continuous improvement. In that spirit, the following recommendations will help Alexandria leaders keep pace with the plan and ensure that the CYFCC is able to track as well as promote the goals being achieved.

### **Data and Information**

**Strategy 1:** Ensure data on children are robust, balanced and used for decision making.

#### **Action steps:**

- Continue the work of the Data subcommittee and the Children and Youth Well-Being Profile of the Commission (CYFCC) by pursuing a data development agenda with an emphasis on new data about cultural connections, parent engagement and social/emotional well-being.
- Plan for more robust and coordinated regular assessment of the resiliency of – and connection between – children, youth and families.

**Strategy 2:** Ensure that information on the quality, access and reach of programs, services and supports is thorough.

#### **Action steps:**

- Develop an “All-in” web portal for youth, parents, providers and other leaders that provides youth and family resources; volunteer, internship and job opportunities; and information about promising practices, all organized by child development milestones.
- Plan for more robust assessment of staff on their professional development needs and cultural competency.
- Survey parents and youth about the customer service and cultural sensitivity of staff.

### **Implementation**

**Strategy 1:** Ensure that this Children and Youth Master Plan is a priority and focus for the Commission, City Council, ACPS Board and Senior City staff.

#### **Action Steps:**

- The City Council should direct the City Manager to work with all Alexandria departments and agencies to specifically develop and to report on a schedule for implementing this Children and Youth Master Plan.
- The School Board should direct the Superintendent to fully cooperate with the implementation of this Children and Youth Master Plan and to develop a schedule for its implementation.
- The City Council/School Board Sub-Committee, which includes the Alexandria Mayor and Chair of the Alexandria City Public Schools, and the City & Schools Staff Group should prioritize the implementation of this Children and Youth Master Plan and monitor the progress of all City and ACPS activities.

- The City Manager and the Superintendent of Schools should each prioritize the implementation of this Children and Youth Master Plan. They should work together to ensure effective cross-department coordination and collaboration.

**Strategy 2:** Engage the public to ensure long-term successful implementation of this Children and Youth Master Plan.

**Action Steps:**

- The City & Schools Staff Group should report periodically to the Commission the progress made on the implementation of the Children and Youth Master Plan.
- The Commission should hold regular hearings regarding the status of implementation by the City, ACPS and private agencies.
- The Commission shall report regularly to the public the status of implementation and the impact it is having on key indicators.
- The Commission shall actively engage with other Boards and Commissions, community groups as well as with Alexandria youth and families to ensure the implementation of this Children and Youth Master Plan.

**Strategy 3:** Implement a coordinated communications campaign that reaches diverse audiences and brings more community stakeholders on board to implement the plan.

**Action steps:**

- Update the Commission’s website with ongoing information about the plan and utilize social media to drive traffic to the plan.
- Highlight and tell stories about progress in implementing the plan, making sure there are early wins.
- Use public service announcements, press releases, events and other opportunities to promote the plan.

**Infrastructure**

**Strategy 1:** Strengthen the work of the Children, Youth and Families Collaborative Commission.

**Action steps:**

- Build and expand on the CYFCC: create implementation teams to tackle the priorities in this plan utilizing the many coalitions and networks operating already; include more business leadership on the CYFCC; and create a subcommittee of the CYFCC to focus on cultural competence.
- Conduct a regular self-assessment of the CYFCC and its leadership capacity.
- Strengthen the staffing supports provided to the CYFCC and build the skills of the staff on topics such as: policy alignment, fiscal mapping, building integrated data systems, and communications.

**Strategy 2:** Ensure cross-fertilization among the Children, Youth and Families Collaborative Commission and the other commissions and boards in the city.

**Action steps:**

- Provide opportunities for diverse representation of teens and young adults on city commissions that go beyond issues affecting just youth.
- Have members of the CYFCC participate and report back on other city commissions to ensure a flow of communication about other work occurring in the city.

**Fiscal Accountability and Alignment**

**Strategy 1:** Require that private organizations that receive funds or support from the City or ACPS to serve children, youth and/or families assist with and support the implementation of this Children and Youth Master Plan.

**Action Step:**

- The Commission will work on guidelines for implementing this strategy by the City and with ACPS.

**Strategy 2:** By Fiscal Year 2016, the City Finance Department shall create a section of the City and ACPS budgets that clearly enumerates all funding streams and expenses that support services for children, youth and families.

**Action Steps:**

- The Commission will work to identify best practices from other communities regarding Children and Youth Budgets.
- The Commission shall work with the City Manager, City Budget officials and the Budget and Fiscal Affairs Advisory Committee to develop a recommended structure for the Children and Youth Budget and a clear set of priorities for the use of funds allocated to public and private agencies that aligns with the Children and Youth Master Plan.

### ***Timeline for Action***

**Unless otherwise specified, it is the goal of this Children and Youth Master Plan to make progress on every strategy each year, with strategies and action items prioritized and assessed for feasibility annually. Additionally, it is the goal of this plan that each strategy be fully implemented within three-five years of this Plan's adoption.**

Additionally, it is the goal of this Children and Youth Master Plan that there be material and measured improvement in the headline indicators within five years of this Plan's adoption. In addition, there should be improvement in indicator metrics and/or formative tests relating to each indicator within 18 months of the adoption of this plan.

### ***Community and Youth: What You Can Do***

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A master plan helps guide a community's energy and effort with a focus on a better future for children, youth and families. Each action matters. At the forums, the following question was posed: "What is one thing that you can do today to improve Alexandria?" While considering how the long term efforts of this Plan add up, it is also important to consider how little steps taken by everyone each day can add up.

Here are some ways, as suggested by Alexandrians, to take action:

- Volunteer or be a mentor
- Be a reading buddy and read to a child
- Reach out to other parents who need support
- Seek out information about other cultures
- Be present to the young people in your life
- Share a book
- Speak up for what you need
- Invite a new neighbor over for dinner
- Write a letter to an official (school board, city council) advocating for something important to you
- Learn about your library
- Take advantage of the current great programs being offered
- Walk through your neighborhood
- Walk through a neighborhood that is not your own
- Help a young person identify his or her strengths
- Spread the word about an upcoming cultural opportunity

## Appendix I Glossary of Terms and Acronyms

**Children and Youth Master Plan:** a document detailing the Outcomes, Community Priority Areas and Strategies as selected by the Child Youth and Families Collaborative Commission and its appointed Design Team.

**Goal:** a desired condition of well-being (e.g., children born healthy; clean environment).

**Indicator:** a way to measure progress toward a result (e.g., rate of low birth weight; air quality index).

**Community Priority Area:** issues that were selected to focus on, as identified by the Design Team and the community, and supported by research and practice (e.g., creating caring networks and systems).

**Strategy:** an overarching intent, focused on addressing the identified Community Priority Areas (e.g., promote civic engagement among youth by giving them meaningful opportunities to engage and lead. Raise awareness about those opportunities and encourage public and private stakeholders to involve young people in new ways).

**Action Step:** a defined step to fulfill the strategy; must include responsible party (e.g., identify a shared staff person to work with ACPS, the City and Department of Recreation, Parks and Cultural Activities to build the expectation that youth must be engaged in meaningful leadership building activities).

**ACAP:** Alexandria Campaign on Adolescent Pregnancy

**ACHSO:** Alexandria Council of Human Service Organizations

**ACPS:** Alexandria City Public Schools

**ACT:** Alexandria Community Trust

**ARHA:** Alexandria Redevelopment and Housing Authority

**CAC:** Center for Alexandria's Children

**CYFCC:** Children, Youth and Families Collaborative Commission

**DCHS:** Alexandria Department of Community and Human Services

**DSS:** Virginia Department of Social Services

**FACE Center:** Family and Community Engagement Center (located inside T.C. Williams High School)

**NOVA:** Alexandria Campus of Northern Virginia Community College

**NVCC:** Northern Virginia Community College

**RPCA:** Alexandria Department of Recreation, Parks and Cultural Activities

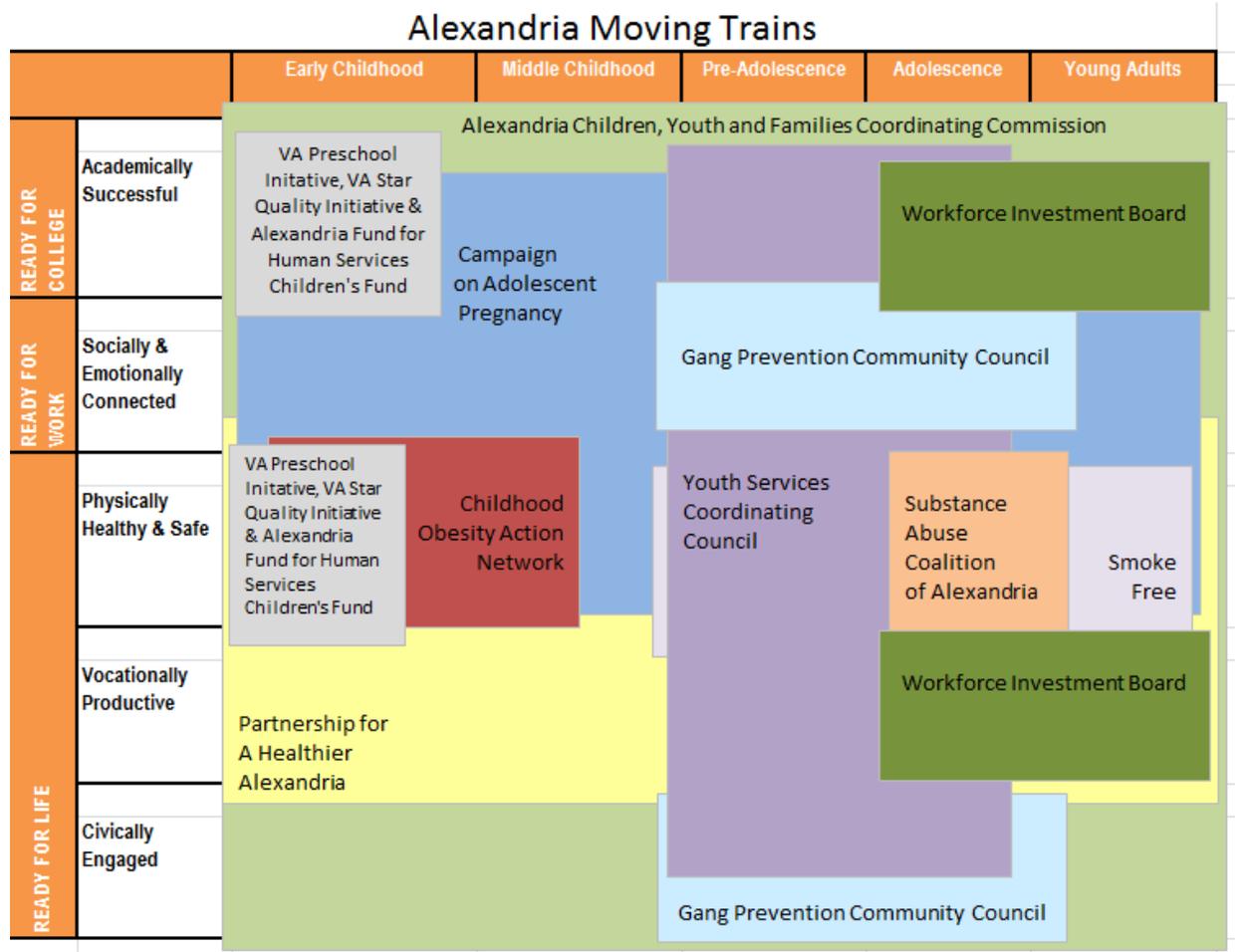
**SAPCA:** Substance Abuse Prevention Coalition of Alexandria

**SCAN:** Stop Child Abuse Now

**VDH:** Virginia Department of Health

## Appendix II Alexandria's Moving Trains

The Forum reviewed the work of a number of coalitions and networks (i.e., moving trains) to better understand their outcome focus and age focus. The chart below provides a glimpse of the many active endeavors in Alexandria. One goal of a master plan is to leverage opportunities to align efforts working toward the same goals.



## **Appendix III Article From March 2013 Forum for Youth Investment Newsletter**

### Residents Help Build a Children and Youth Master Plan

More than 300 residents recently participated in three public forums to help create Alexandria's first Children and Youth Master Plan, which will serve as a blueprint for developing and improving services and supports for the City's young people, from cradle to career.

"We're really excited about this process and what we're hoping to get out of this is a roadmap that we can use to affect the lives of youth in our city to make them better prepared for life," said David Miller, Alexandria Recreation Services Division Chief, at the last forum, held February 23 at William Ramsay Elementary School.

The City's Children, Youth and Families Collaborative Commission is leading the creation of the master plan in partnership with the Forum for Youth Investment, a non-profit based in Washington. "The commission is working with citizens and community leaders to determine the goals that will help all of its young people achieve, and provide strategies to meet those goals," said Jacqueline Coachman, Youth Services Program Specialist with the City's Department of Community and Human Services.

Public input is critical. To get that input, the newly formed commission held three public meetings in February: Saturday morning sessions at T.C. Williams High School and at Ramsay Elementary, and a weeknight session at the Charles Houston Recreation Center.

At each forum, adults and youths broke into workgroups to examine data about the City's youth, identify priority issues, discuss the factors behind those issues and suggest solutions. The discussion focused on five broad outcome areas. That youth are: academically and vocationally successful; physically safe and healthy; emotionally secure, hopeful and resilient; socially and civically engaged and empowered; and culturally competent and connected.

The participants voted for indicators that were most important to them, and then separated into workgroups where they could discuss specific issues such as truancy, substance abuse and participation in community activities.

The work groups then explored solutions, including life skills and leadership training for young people; school orientation sessions with parents to explain what is expected of them to help their children succeed; greater collaboration among agencies and organizations to share resources and skills; and peer-to-peer mentoring.

The work groups shared their discussions with reports to the full group. At the Feb. 23 meeting, those ideas included: a central bi-lingual Alexandria hotline that parents can call to get information about programs and services for youth; mentorship and resiliency training in schools; ensuring that City leaders and policymakers spend a couple of days in the schools, riding the school buses and understanding what is going on in schools and different areas of the City; creating policies and programs that promote cultural and neighborhood integration; and creating a peer-parent program to get engaged parents to mentor other parents and teach better parenting skills.

One participant explained that he hopes the master plan "will allow us to prioritize and effectively use our resources to create the best process for children in the City of Alexandria.

## Appendix IV Youth Forums Summary

Nine youth forums were held in May 2013 – three each at George Washington Elementary School, Hammond Middle School and the Interim Education building. Guidance counselors and administrators at each site selected forum participants, taking great care to assure a representative sample of the respective student bodies. Using keypads that immediately tabulated and visually displayed the results, 191 ACPS middle and high school students responded to 12 multiple choice statements/questions. Here is a sampling:

### **I ENJOY COMING TO SCHOOL.**

46% of the students strongly agreed or agreed. Support was highest among GW 6<sup>th</sup> graders (68% strongly agreed or agreed). A significant number of students (29%) were neutral, including 42% of 6<sup>th</sup> graders and 36% of 7<sup>th</sup> graders at Hammond, and 36% of 7<sup>th</sup> graders at GW.

### **I FEEL PREPARED TO GO TO HIGH SCHOOL.**

Two-thirds of all the students felt prepared for high school. The percentage was higher for GW 8<sup>th</sup> graders (79%) and Hammond 8<sup>th</sup> graders (74%). More than one-third of those enrolled in the Interim Education high school program strongly disagreed or disagreed. The number of neutral responses was high: 21% overall, 27% for GW 7<sup>th</sup> graders (27%) and 32% for Hammond 6<sup>th</sup> graders.

### **I AM STRUGGLING WITH MY SCHOOL WORK.**

Of the total number of students participating in the forums, 46% strongly disagreed or disagreed with that statement. The highest incidence of students who said they were not struggling was among GW 6<sup>th</sup> graders (52%) and Hammond 8<sup>th</sup> graders (55%). Almost one-third of all students (32%) chose “neutral.” Choosing neutral were 60% of Interim Education middle school students, 44% of GW 7<sup>th</sup> graders and 42% of Hammond 6<sup>th</sup> graders. Over one-third (37%, or 10 students) of Hammond 7<sup>th</sup> graders indicated they are struggling. Five (42%) Interim Education high school students and nine (27%) of GW 8<sup>th</sup> graders indicated they are struggling.

### **I HAVE CONSIDERED DROPPING OUT OF SCHOOL.**

The vast majority of students (83%) indicated they had not considered dropping out of school. However, 44% of the students in Interim Education did agree with the statement, as did five Hammond 6<sup>th</sup> graders (26%).

### **THE CITY OF ALEXANDRIA PROVIDES MEANINGFUL OUT-OF-SCHOOL TIME ACTIVITIES FOR YOUTH.**

While only 45% of all the students supported that statement, 73% of GW 8<sup>th</sup> graders did. However, 67% of the students in Interim Education and 64% of Hammond 7<sup>th</sup> graders strongly disagreed or disagreed. One-fifth of all students were neutral.

### **A NUMBER OF BOARDS AND COMMISSIONS IN THE CITY OF ALEXANDRIA HAVE SEATS FOR YOUTH REPRESENTATIVES THAT TOO OFTEN GO UNFILLED. WHAT WOULD INCREASE CIVIC ENGAGEMENT AMONG TEENS?**

The option selected by most students (36%) was to better publicize opportunities; 80% of Interim Education middle school students indicated a need for more publicity. The second-most popular option was creating a City Council youth advisor (33%, or 60 students). A number of comments spoke of the challenge that transportation poses for youth who want to participate.

**WHAT CAN BE DONE TO HELP TEENS BETTER APPRECIATE AND VALUE DIFFERENT CULTURAL, RACIAL AND ETHNIC BACKGROUNDS?**

Many students (36%) recommended more opportunities for youth of different backgrounds to socialize; 28% suggested sponsoring more events that promote the importance of diversity. The idea of a diversity council was popular at GW and Hammond (33 students each), but received no support from Interim Education students.

## Appendix V Strategic Plans and Needs Assessments

The Strategic Plans and Needs Assessments below were reviewed and incorporated into the Children and Youth Master Plan. These are the community priorities that are addressed in those plans.

Plan	Community Priority Areas				
	Developing Resilience	Empowering & Equipping Families	Creating Caring Networks & Systems	Promoting Equity & Nurturing Cultural Connections	Improving Economic Conditions
Alexandria Campaign on Adolescent Pregnancy Action Plan, 2011		X	X		
Alexandria City Council Strategic Plan, 2010			X		X
Alexandria City Public School Strategic Plan, 2010-2015	X	X	X	X	
Alexandria Coalition for Clean and Smoke Free Air Action Plan, 2011-2012			X		X
Alexandria Council of Human Service Organizations Needs Assessment, 2008		X	X	X	X
Alexandria Department of Community and Human Services Plan, 2013-2015	X	X	X	X	X
Alexandria Gang Prevention Community Task Force Strategic Plan, 2012	X	X			
Alexandria Housing Master Plan, 2012					X
Alexandria Department of Recreation, Parks and Cultural Activities Needs Assessment, 2011		X		X	
Alexandria Redevelopment and Housing Authority Strategic Plan, 2012			X	X	X
Alexandria Strategic Plan on Aging, 2013-2017	X				X
Recommendations for an Action Plan on Childhood Obesity, 2013		X	X		
Recommended Action Plan for Tobacco Cessation and Prevention in the City of Alexandria, 2013			X		X
Substance Abuse Prevention Coalition of Alexandria Plan, 2012-2013	X	X	X	X	

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