



# Youth Master Plans Guide Action in Nashville, Grand Rapids, and Berkeley

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The ability to employ scarce local resources effectively is an important factor in the success of efforts to improve child well-being, particularly in communities where service delivery is fragmented among numerous city and county agencies, schools and nonprofits.

More than two dozen cities have dealt with this challenge by establishing "youth master plans" to better coordinate programs and services for young people. By adapting this concept from land use, economic development and parks and recreation planning, municipal leaders set in motion a process for engaging the community to develop shared objectives and outcomes for children and youth.

In recent months, three cities - Nashville, Tenn.; Grand Rapids, Mich.; and Berkeley, Calif. - have moved forward with new youth master plans, each completing a goal set as part of their participation in the Mayors' Action Challenge for Children and Families ([www.mayorsforkids.org](http://www.mayorsforkids.org)).

"Our most precious community asset is our children," said Grand Rapids Mayor George Heartwell. "I am honored to join my colleagues from across the nation to set forth bold, new goals to collectively support our children now for a brighter future."

## **Nashville**

Last February, Nashville Mayor Karl Dean brought together 52 community leaders, including youth, for the first meeting of a Child and Youth Master Plan task force. Co-chaired by Councilmember-At-Large Ronnie Steine and coordinated by the Mayor's Office of Children and Youth, the task force established five committees to focus on health, safety, out-of-school time, education, and mobility and stability for young people from birth to adulthood.

"The intent of the master plan was to look beyond what takes place in the classroom from kindergarten to 12th grade and examine the many community and home life factors that impact our children's overall well-being and success," said Mayor Dean.

"In Nashville, we are blessed to have many organizations and individuals doing great work, but we've discovered incremental approaches wouldn't get us where we want to be, so the Child and Youth Master Plan is designed to tie together all our hopes, dreams and intentions into one document," said Councilmember Steine. "The plan puts us all on the same page so we can move forward together to accomplish common, agreed-upon goals."

Over a six-month period, the planning committees conducted 10 community listening sessions throughout Davidson County, surveyed more than 1,200 high school students and 800 adults, conducted several focus groups with youth and hosted a Mayor's Youth Summit with students from nearly every local high school. In July, the task force announced a plan consisting of 14 desired outcomes, each linked to specific research findings, objectives and strategies, and informed by the Forum for Youth Investment's Ready By 21 Challenge.

One bold new initiative will be the creation of the Nashville Family Connections Center (NFCC) to reduce the number of children and youth exposed to family violence. Modeled after the Family Justice Center approach of co-locating and coordinating multi-disciplinary services under one roof, NFCC will focus on domestic violence, child abuse, delinquency prevention, intervention and family support. NFCC follows a collaborative model similar to the Metro Student Attendance Center. Launched by the city in 2008, the Attendance Center has reduced truancy by more than 17 percent.

Key NFCC partners will include the police department, district attorney's office, Tennessee Department of Children's Services, Metro Social Services, juvenile court and nonprofit advocacy groups.

"Children who are abused or exposed to domestic violence are much more likely to participate in criminal behavior themselves," said Mayor Dean. "This center will allow us to intervene early and effectively and, as a result, reduce the cyclical pattern of family violence in our community."

Other exciting new strategies resulting from the plan include development of a shared data management system to track client information across service providers, creation of youth resident associations in public housing to combat gang influence, and expansion of the Nashville After Zone Alliance out-of-school time system.

To download the Nashville youth master plan, visit [www.nashville.gov/mocy](http://www.nashville.gov/mocy).

### **Grand Rapids**

In 2008, the City of Grand Rapids participated in a youth master planning technical assistance project sponsored by NLC's Institute for Youth, Education, and Families. Like Nashville, the city used the Ready By 21 framework, conducted a thorough community engagement process and involved youth in all aspects of the plan.

Under the leadership of Mayor Heartwell, Our Community's Children - a child advocacy office of the city and Grand Rapids Public Schools - initiated and sustained momentum in partnership with a 39-member steering committee and a 25-member Youth Commission. The commission surveyed more than 1,500 youth to produce a Grand Rapids Teen profile, and the city also gathered information from 13 focus groups and an effort to map community services. City leaders worked in partnership with Kent County, ensuring the plan had citywide impact with countywide scope.

The plan unveiled in May 2010 outlines goals for young people of all age groups (pre-kindergarten, elementary, middle and high school, and young adults ages 19-21) with a dashboard of result statements and indicators to measure progress. Recommendations address specific issues such as increasing regular school attendance and access to employment opportunities, as well as broader "infrastructure" issues. For instance, the city will develop an accessible, online data repository for child-related outcomes that will be used as an accountability tool by a new Council for Child and Youth Outcomes.

"This plan will change the way we do business and allow us to be smarter with every dollar," said Lynn Heemstra, executive director of Our Community's Children.

To download the plan, visit [www.grand-rapids.mi.us/3501](http://www.grand-rapids.mi.us/3501).

### **Berkeley**

Formed to address one of the highest racial achievement gaps in California, the 2020 Vision for Berkeley's Children and Youth is a community-wide movement to eliminate racial disparities in academic and health outcomes among Berkeley's public school students by the year 2020.

Developed in collaboration among the City of Berkeley, Berkeley Unified School District (BUSD), University of California-Berkeley and United in Action - a multiethnic coalition of faith-based and community organizations - the 2020 Vision emphasizes improving service coordination, applying data-driven strategy development and evaluation, strengthening parent/guardian engagement and initiating institutional systems change to support vulnerable children and families.

The 2020 Vision outlines eight goals linked to recommendations and indicators, as well as four pilot projects. These projects include creating a summer bridge program to support transitions between schools and providing joint training to early childhood and BUSD staff to align preschool and prekindergarten support services.

"Success in school is not the sole responsibility of the school district," said Mayor Tom Bates. "Kids are in their home and community more hours a day than they are in school. We must work together to ensure all of our youth graduate high school with a high-quality education and clear pathways to college or a career."

To learn more about Vision 2020, visit [www.berkeleyalliance.org](http://www.berkeleyalliance.org).

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