

MARCH 2023

Toward EQUITY in EDUCATION

Prioritizing Nashville's
children and youth to
reach student success

A POLICY BRIEF



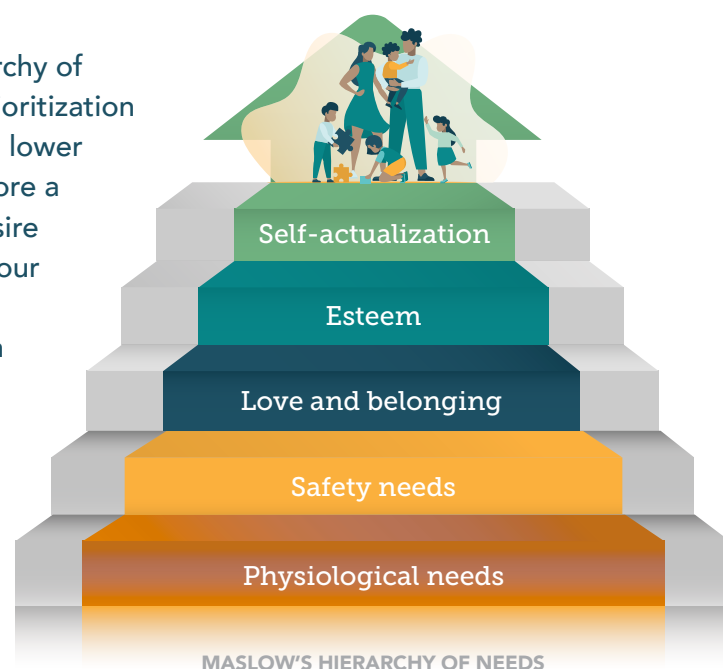
Nashville
Public Education
FOUNDATION

HELPING CHILDREN THRIVE SINCE 2002

Every aspiring teacher learns about Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs, the psychological theory that lays out a prioritization of human necessities. The theory suggests that needs lower on the hierarchy (e.g., food, shelter) must be met before a person can move to the top of the hierarchy (e.g., desire to become the most that one can be). We want all of our students to become the most that they can be, reach their full potential, explore opportunities, and excel in school and life.

Schools have long been seen as the responsible institution for supporting the development of children and youth – and certainly play a central role. However, over the course of a childhood, a student will spend approximately only 20% of their time in school and 80% of their time at home and in the community. Researchers

have estimated that up to 60% of student achievement in school can be determined by factors outside of school, including housing instability,^{1,2} food insecurity,^{3,4} health challenges,⁵ and exposure to traumatic events.⁶



So how do we build a city that prioritizes children and youth—in school and outside of school—to ensure all students have a variety of opportunities and supports to reach their full potential?

The First Step: Developing a Citywide Plan for Children and Youth

In 2010, under the leadership of Mayor Karl Dean, Nashville made a commitment to supporting the success of children and youth and drafted *14 For Our Future*,⁷ the city's first Child and Youth Master Plan. At that time, Nashville was poised for significant growth, but child well-being indicators demonstrated that our children and youth were struggling to fulfill basic needs, access services and supports, connect with their school and community, and meet key milestones linked to student success.



Revisiting *14 For Our Future*

14 For Our Future served as a catalyst for some of Nashville's boldest initiatives over the past 13 years. The plan cast a vision for Nashville's youngest residents and outlined 14 outcomes and aligned strategic objectives to improve the lives of our youngest residents. *14 For Our Future* was developed through a robust youth and community engagement process that identified key findings and was supplemented by research and data analysis. One of the key strengths of the plan was how it demonstrated the ways in which every Nashvillian could support our children and youth.

Today, many things about Nashville have changed. Visitors flock to Nashville to enjoy our downtown. Corporate giants are reshaping the Nashville skyline. MNPS is educating double the number of students with limited English proficiency. Rapid development and the effects of a global pandemic strain our housing market and workforce while many residents are finding our once affordable city to be increasingly unaffordable.

Yet, for all that has changed, many things have stayed the same. Disparities in child well-being indicators between white and non-white children persist. Schools are still expected to ameliorate social challenges for our children and youth while maintaining a focus on educating them. And youth still feel disconnected to our community.

This brief takes a look back on the impact of *14 For Our Future*, assesses progress on child and youth outcomes since 2010, and suggests how Nashville can leverage *14 For Our Future* to further our commitment to Nashville's children and youth.



Assessing the Impact of *14 For Our Future*

To better understand progress made toward the objectives in *14 For Our Future*, we researched the status of the strategies listed in the plan, connected those strategies to publicly available data, and analyzed the results. While not every strategy could be connected to a discrete data point, it is evident that Nashville has made some strides in supporting children and youth. Overall, Nashville saw a reduction in the percentage of children living in poverty, an increase in high school graduation rates, and a decrease in youth unemployment. At this same time, Nashville has not made progress on the city's college-going rate, the percentage of children under the age of 18 who are food insecure, and the obesity rate of public school students. Additionally, Nashville is experiencing worse outcomes for infants with an increase in the percentage of babies with low birth weight and an increase in infant mortality disparities between whites and Blacks.



Over the last thirteen years, Nashville data illustrates the complexity of the child and youth experience. Progress has been uneven and difficult to sustain through city leadership changes. While we celebrate improvements in some areas, Metro Social Services' *2021 Community Needs Evaluation: The State of Economic and Social Well-Being* demonstrates the ways in which Nashville's prosperity has been unequally distributed.⁸ The report highlights how out-migration, unequal wage growth, and the connections among social systems are threatening the well-being of many families in Davidson County. We see this data play out in the child and youth experience through an increase in chronic absenteeism, stagnation in the college-going rate, and decrease in youth unemployment.

Child and Youth Master Plan Progress Tracker

While we have seen some progress on outcomes for children and youth since the 2010 Master Plan, other areas have seen little or no progress and some outcomes have been difficult to assess.

Outcome Area	Metric	2010	2022
OUTCOME 1: All children and youth will be provided a safe and stable home and a supportive, engaged family	Children living in poverty	30.7%	21.1%
	TNAF ¹	10.2%	1.3%
	WIC	41.8%	31.7% ²
	SNAP	47%	24.4%
	Food insecure-children under 18	21.6% ³	20.8%
	Fair Market Rent	\$1047	\$1587
	Child Abuse Cases reported	3%	4.7%
	Child Abuse Cases substantiated ⁴	4.3 ⁵	2.5
OUTCOME 2: All children and youth will be provided safe places in the community where they are welcomed and supported by positive adult relationships	No corresponding <i>KidsCount</i> measure		
OUTCOME 3: All children and youth will develop valuable life skills, social competencies, and positive values and become law abiding, productive citizens	Juvenile Justice referrals	4.6%	2.6%
	Youth on probation ⁶	47	113 ⁷
OUTCOME 4: All children and youth will have a positive sense of self and confidence in their future	Youth unemployment	29.7%	14.3% ⁸
	Graduation rate	76.2%	81.6%
OUTCOME 5: All children and youth will have opportunities to have their voices hear and positively impact their community	No corresponding <i>KidsCount</i> measure		
OUTCOME 6: All children will experience social equity regarding access to opportunities, resources, and information that are critical to their success	No corresponding <i>KidsCount</i> measure		
OUTCOME 7: All children and youth will experience a safe and caring school environment that supports social, emotional and academic development	Suspensions	14.8%	7.7%
	Expulsions ⁹	5.4	2.2
	Cohort dropouts	21.2%	11.6% ¹⁰
	Event dropouts	4.4%	5.7% ¹¹
OUTCOME 8: All children and youth will achieve academically through high quality, engaging educational opportunities that address the strengths and needs of the individual	Chronic absence	19.9% ¹²	29.8%
	College-going rate	51.50%	51.6% ¹³
	Regulated child care spaces	37,366	35,505 ¹⁴
OUTCOME 9: All children and youth will be physically healthy	Teen births	22.6	11.9 ¹⁵
	Low birth weight	8.7%	9.3% ¹⁷
	Infant mortality ¹⁸	7.6	7.6 ¹⁹
	Infant mortality disparities	Black babies are 3x more likely than white babies to die in the first year of life	Black babies are 4x more likely than white babies to die in the first year of life
OUTCOME 10: All children and youth will learn and practice healthy habits and have access to the resources that support these healthy habits	Teens with STDs ²⁰	20.8 ²¹	19.1 ²²
	Obese public school students	36.2%	35.9% ²³
OUTCOME 11: All children and youth will be mentally healthy and emotionally well	No corresponding <i>KidsCount</i> measure		
OUTCOME 12: All children and youth will have access to and participate in quality programs during out of school time	No corresponding <i>KidsCount</i> measure		
OUTCOME 13: All children and youth will have outdoor spaces in their neighborhood that provide opportunities for play and recreational activities	No corresponding <i>KidsCount</i> measure		
OUTCOME 14: All children and youth will have safe transportation options that allow them to engage in activities and access services and supports that the community has to offer	No corresponding <i>KidsCount</i> measure		

Source: Annie E. Casey Foundation "Kids Count Data Center"

¹ Program eligibility requirements have significantly decreased the number of families at the poverty line who receive benefits https://www.cbpp.org/sites/default/files/atoms/files/tanf_trends_tn.pdf

² 2021 reporting year

³ Data was first available in 2014

⁴ 1000 per child population under 18

⁵ 1000 per child population under 18

⁶ number of youth 12-19 on court-ordered supervision

⁷ Data is from 2021

⁸ Data is from 2021

⁹ per 1000 net enrollment

¹⁰ Data is from 2020

¹¹ Data is from 2020

¹² Data was first was available 2017

¹³ Data is from 2020

¹⁴ Data is from 2021

¹⁵ Data is from 2020

¹⁶ per 1000 live births of females of same age range

¹⁷ Data is from 2021

¹⁸ per 1000 live births

¹⁹ Data is from 2021

²⁰ per 1000 youth of same age group

²¹ Data is from 2014

²² Data is from 2021

²³ Data is from 2020

Where Can Nashville Go from Here?

At the conclusion of the 2021 documentary “By Design: The Shaping of Nashville’s Public Schools,” Judge Richard Dinkins, who represented the plaintiffs in Nashville’s decades-long desegregation lawsuit, challenged Nashville to remain focused on children and youth: “I know Nashville can do what it needs to do. There is no doubt in my mind that it can if it puts its collective mind to it, that we are not, we are truly not, going to let children fail.”

While we may continue to have isolated examples of students “overcoming the odds,” we will not see equity in education or significant success at scale unless we as a community prioritize the needs of children and youth. As evidence tells us and Judge Dinkins reminds us, it is the collective of a community – multiple institutions working together – that can ultimately help lead to success for our children and youth in school and out.⁹ While we vigilantly work to improve our public schools, we must also work to center children and youth in every aspect of decision-making in every institution in our city.



Our city can become the nation’s destination for raising a family, but only if we put our collective minds to it.

Here are three questions to help jump-start community conversations:

- 1] How can we, as a community, better understand the needs of our children and youth and publicly monitor and report changes in child well-being?
- 2] How should Nashville balance the needs of children and youth with an economic development agenda?
- 3] Where should we direct resources to improve Nashville’s child and youth experience?

Bright Spots from the 2010 Child and Youth Master Plan

While Nashville has some work to do to ensure all children and youth live in opportunity-rich neighborhoods and attend high-quality schools, we have seen some bold first steps come out of the 2010 Child and Youth Master Plan. Below are some highlights of programs making a difference for children and youth in Nashville.

Empowering Youth to Impact Their Communities

The Maddox Fund created a [Youth Philanthropic Advisory Board](#) composed of students from Antioch tasked with distributing \$100,000 in grants to local nonprofits, allowing youth a seat at the table in determining which organizations aligned with Maddox's program areas had projects worthy of receiving grants to help their community.

Caring for Families in Crisis

After the 2010 Child and Youth Master Plan advocated for a Family Justice Center, Nashville opened the [Family Safety Center](#) in 2019, one of the largest Family Justice Centers in the country. The center serves anyone in Nashville who has experienced child abuse, sexual assault, domestic violence, human trafficking or elder abuse by providing a safe space to crisis intervention services and supports from a variety of providers. This center was preceded by the Jean Crowe Advocacy Center, which opened in 2014 as the only fully court-based Family Justice Center in the country.

Supporting Youth Who are in Transition

The Oasis Center operates a number of programs for vulnerable youth or youth who are in transition. The [Room For You Home Host Program](#) provides alternative, short-term housing for young adults aged 18-24 who are experiencing homelessness, while the Street Outreach Program provides resources for youth who are living outside or at a shelter. The Oasis Center also offers other emergency shelter services that support youth in returning home safely or finding other safe living conditions outside of state custody, such as [Rapid Rehousing](#), which supports youth aged 18-24 who need support to be housed quickly, safely and permanently. Additionally, 13-17 year olds can find short-term housing at the Oasis House when living at home becomes too difficult.

Building Career Competencies for Youth

[POWER Youth](#), previously Opportunity Now, provides work experience and career exploration opportunities for youth within Nashville. Programs include experience work for 14-15 year olds, high school internships for 16-19 year olds, and an employment portal for external postings. These opportunities help students develop life skills, social competencies, and confidence for the youth in their futures.

Connecting School Time and Out of School Time

Based at the Nashville Public Library, [NAZA](#) is a partnership between the Mayor's Office, Metro Nashville Public Schools, and community-based youth development organizations to increase the access to high-quality out-of-school time programming. Founded in 2009, NAZA helps approximately 1,200 students annually to develop their full potential.

Increasing Youth Access to the City

The StriDe program allows all MNPS high school students to ride WeGo at no cost, as well as students in 5-8 who attend schools out of zone. In partnership with WeGo, the Mayor's Office, MNPS, and Metro Council, this program provides opportunities for youth to access safe transportation options to engage in activities and access services across Nashville.

REFERENCES

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- ² <https://health.gov/healthypeople/priority-areas/social-determinants-health/literature-summaries/housing-instability>
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- ⁴ <https://academic.oup.com/jn/article/135/12/2831/4669915>
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- ⁸ <https://www.nashville.gov/sites/default/files/2022-06/CNE-2021.pdf?ct=1656523128>
- ⁹ <https://www.edweek.org/leadership/scholars-identify-5-keys-to-urban-school-success/2010/01>



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