

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Introduction

This report on Monterey County youth surveyed in early 2015, is part of a nearly 2-year endeavor to collect and analyze data on the experiences and aspirations of residents of Monterey County. Researchers from California State University Monterey Bay's (CSUMB) Institute for Community Collaborative Studies (ICCS) worked with Impact Monterey County's (IMC) Data, Analysis & Research Team (DRAT) members to develop and then implement an Aspirations Survey of Monterey County residents as part of the Community Assessment of Monterey County (CAMC). The 86 question survey which was collected on 4,202 adults, was designed to collect information about the concerns and aspirations of Monterey County residents in the areas of education, economic self-sufficiency, and health in an effort to understand the most effective ways to improve the quality of life in the county. Likewise, and using the adult survey as a model, a survey aimed at youth was developed to tap into the perspectives and aspirations of this important subpopulation.

A total of 2,905 surveys were collected from January to March 2015 using online and paper survey instruments in English. Forty-eight percent (48%) of respondents are female, which matches the percent in the population; 93% were aged 16 and 17 years; geographically, 56% (pop:44%) were from Salinas; 8% (Pop:12%) were from Peninsula/Big Sur, 9% (Pop:13.5%) were from Seaside/Marina, 22% (Pop:18.2%) were from south County, and 5% (11.3%) were residents of north County. These small differences between the survey group of mostly 16-17 year olds and the population figures for 15-19 year olds did not warrant the application of weighting the survey responses geographically. Indeed, none of the demographic distributions differed from population to a degree that weighting was necessary or desirable.

The majority (78%) of survey respondents reported they have lived in Monterey County for at least 10 years (same percentage as that of the adult residents surveyed). Racial/ethnic identification² showed that 51 % consider themselves Hispanic, 23.6% identified themselves as white (not Hispanic), 3% as Black, 3.2% as Asian, 5.7% as Hawaiian/Pacific Islander, 2.1 % as American Indian or Alaskan, and 8.2% reported that they were multi-racial.

Findings: Education aspirations

Nearly all of the youth (93%) indicated they would like to attain some level of college education/schooling after high school, with a majority of those reporting a goal of Master's Degree. Interestingly, this goal also ranked highest among the adult respondents. The main obstacles to pursuing further education are the perceived *cost of education* (58.3%) and *having to work* (44%). It is important to note that 25% said transportation is an obstacle to their pursuing higher education.

² Race and ethnicity answers were combined when it was discovered that a large number of Hispanic students considered their Hispanic ethnicity a race category and answered the race question with "other". While this does not match the Census figures for race, it is a more authentic presentation of the way students perceive themselves.

The main motivations for seeking higher education were *personal satisfaction* (60%), *better job opportunities* (58%) and *higher pay* (67%). These percentages are also in line with those the adults reported, with slightly more emphasis of youth on higher pay.

Forty nine (49) respondents said they are parents. Of these, only 7% said their child was cared for by licensed child care; 21% said they had no child care or relied only on themselves; 21% relied on friends, and 66% said they relied on family for child care.³ Though a small group, the teen parents in the survey represent the expected rate of teen pregnancy and parenthood in our county; further study of their aspirations could be valuable to determining ways to prevent and intervene in this important area. The top ranked themes when these students responded to “What Support Do Teen Parents Need?” were *financial support* (49%), *love, comfort and advice* (10%), and *child care* (10%)⁴.

Looking at the top ranked ways for improving educational opportunities, it was found that students suggested *scholarships, financial aid, and support for students* (15% mentioned this first); *more and varied classes, including smaller class size and one-on-one* (12%); *programs and clubs (including tutoring)* (10%); *better trained and dedicated teachers* (9%), *community resources and connections to community (including transportation)* (6%); *activities, fields trips, fun events, music, art*, (6%); *more guidance and information on education and career* (5%); *“hands-on, real life classes and internships* (4%), *better social climate at school* (4%); *more money to schools* (3%); *everything is OK* (3%); and *better books, supplies, physical surroundings* (3%)⁵. Other themes that emerged (all less than 2% of responders), were *easier classes, special schools, alternative learning strategies, increased access to technology, and flexible schedules*.

Findings: Economic aspirations

When asked what their career goals are, the top 8 occupations mentioned were at the professional level (requiring 4 to 12 years education post-high school). 60% of the youth mentioned one of these 8 goals. Overall, the top four goals are *doctor, criminal justice professional, nurse, and engineer*. Young men placed engineer in 1st place (12%), young women reported doctor as their top ranking goal, 15% reporting this as their career goal.

The survey also revealed that 14% of the youth are currently working, most of them in *food service/restaurant, retail/cashier, agriculture work, child care or tutoring, labor/construction, non-profit work, lifeguarding, working on cars, cleaning/maintenance, and general office work*. Also, thirty-six percent (36%) report that they volunteer in some capacity, with the most commonly reported venues being *church, sports/recreation, tutoring children, community events (i.e. Air*

³ Thirty-eight of the 49 teen parents answered the question regarding child care.

⁴ It is likely that the teen parents were less likely to cite child care as a need due to the proportion of them living with family.

⁵ These top 12 themes accounted for 80% of the answers from 1760 students who answered the open ended question with valid information.

Show), community organizations (i.e. Scouts), hospitals, general community service, outdoor cleanups, school clubs/ROTC, helping teachers and school staff, helping the homeless or elderly, and assisting a non-profit organization. An interesting perspective on aspirations might be gained by further analysis of the youth who are working and volunteering crossed by their career goals, and educational obstacles.

Findings: Health aspirations

Youth survey responses about the most *serious health concerns facing their generation*⁶ include the following (shown in rank order): **Obesity/overweight** (23%), **Pregnancy/STDs** (21%), **Drug and Alcohol Use and Abuse** (14%), **Cancer** (11%), **Diabetes** (8%), **Infectious Diseases** (7%), **Mental Health** (i.e. anxiety, depression) (4%), **Lack of exercise, fast food, unhealthy food** (3%), **Heart, stroke, high blood pressure** (1.5%), and **unhealthy effects of technology** (1%). These 10 themes account for over 90% of the answers of the youth.⁷ As indicated in bold, in comparing these to the answers of the adults, it is seen that 4 of these themes also reside in the top 6 themes of the adults; also it is important to note that the adults included violence and bullying in their top themes, while they are absent in this category for the youth. This may be due to different wording and structure of the “Most serious problem” questions on the Adult and Youth surveys. It is likely that youth did not categorize violence as a *health* problem but do see violence as a major problem; indeed, they voiced their concern in answer to the question “What are the most *serious problems* in your community?” with a majority of them mentioning gangs and violence.

Pregnancy and STDs were cited as the second most serious health concern for their generation by youth surveyed. When asked what could be done to help teens delay pregnancy, “first” answers showed that 22.3% suggested *contraceptives, free and easily available*, as their number one priority, followed by *educate and inform (including health classes, etc.)* (18.4%). Seven percent (7%) thought nothing could be done, but other suggestions in the top 8 themes were: *talk to someone, abstain, community programs (clinics/Planned Parenthood), more positive, fun, future-focused activities, and getting parents involved*.

Healthy eating and clean water are key to preventing overweight and obesity, the top health concerns cited by youth. When asked whether they had access to free drinking water at school, the majority said yes (75%). However it is suggested that further examination of these data inspect the 25% who reported “no” or preferred not to answer. Regarding access to healthy food, 11th graders reported it as available at home (87%), grocery store (68%) and school (30%) with smaller percentages citing restaurants (26%), family members’ homes (23%), and friends’ homes (20%).

⁶ It is interesting to note that the adult question tapped these concerns within the *community*, while the youth question’s context was more of a “future” view within the context of *generation*.

⁷ It is important to remind the reader that while slightly different methods of content analysis were employed in tallying themes for the adult surveys and youth surveys, the processes produce equivalent results, in terms of ranking of top themes.

Youth were asked how safe they felt in their communities, i.e., firstly, had they or any member of their family been *threatened or harmed physically* and secondly, been *treated unfairly by someone in their community in the past 12 months*. **About one in seven** respondents reported that *they or someone in their family had been threatened or harmed*, and **about one in three** reported being treated unfairly because of *race/ethnicity* (63%), somewhat fewer because of *language* (42%) and others because of *income* (34%) and *age* (31%). These indicators of feeling safe were stronger in the youth survey group than the adults, perhaps reflective of the levels of violence and gang activity among the younger segments of the population in our county. Feeling safe and not harassed at school are important to daily life for youth. The survey asked them *In the past 12 months, have you or any of your friends been physically threatened, harmed, or bullied by someone at school?* The definition of ‘bullying’ was intentionally left out of this question. 26% or **about 1 in four** said yes, a percentage considerably higher than the 15% who reported harm in the community, indicating that the addition of ‘bullying’ broadened this perception of harm.

In terms of their physical health, interestingly, a majority (70%) of respondents indicated that the most important factor that *helps (or would help) them to exercise regularly* is their desire to *stay healthy*, followed by nearly that percentage who said they were motivated by their *body image*, and about half who said the motivating factor is *exercising with family and friends*. Having enough time was checked by 42%, followed by *having access and ability to afford gym facilities and classes* (40%). Differing in value to the adults (58%), 28% of youth said that having *a safe neighborhood* is a factor. The responses to this item may be blurred by the real risk youth perceive and have experienced, which is higher than adults. Perhaps more adults perceive that they have a safe neighborhood. The aspect of whether they “would” be motivated cannot be pulled apart from the aspect of whether they DO feel safe. This is an important area for further investigation.

Responses to questions about sources of health information are interesting. Youth report that *physician* (51%), *internet* (37%), and *family or friends* (35%) are their top sources for information. It is important to note that, although *education/information* is the #2 means suggested for preventing teen pregnancy, only 2% of youth said that is where they usually get health information, perhaps indicating that these sources are currently lacking in what is needed, or that the education and information efforts required need to be broadened.

Findings: Overall community experiences and aspirations of youth

Five open-ended questions concluded the survey. Youth were asked to express in their own words their views on *What are the most serious problems facing your community* and *What could be done to make your community a safer place?* In addition, more youth-focused questions tapped *What can be done to make school a safer place to be?*, *What can be done to give teens a voice in the community?*, and *What can be done to support teens?* (the latter two elicited some of the same themes).

Most serious problems were related by 90% of the respondents as *Gangs, Gang Violence, Shootings, Homicides* (58%), *Drugs and Alcohol* (7%), *no problems* (7%), *Crime, Robberies, Car*

accidents (6%), drought, weather, water (5%), lack of community resources (places for teens, public services), poverty, high cost of living (3%), and poor education (3%). Because of the presence of *No problems* in the top 8 themes of the overall group, and because we know these answers reflect a wide range of communities in our county, it would be useful to disaggregate these data by geographic area in order to target interventions or efforts where most needed.

This is also the case when examining the themes which emerged from *What can be done to make your community a safer place?*. The presence of *nothing can be done* and *safe enough now* compel us to want to dig deeper in order to take action in the “right” places”. Looking at youth responses to this latter question, top themes are: *more police and suppression, getting people involved, community action, programs, activities, neighborhood watch; prevention and suppression of gangs specifically; nothing can be done; more security equipment; improved physical environment in neighborhoods, reduced exposure to drugs; and safe enough now*. When these themes are examined in the subgroup of youth who reported being harmed in the past 12 months, a slightly different picture emerges— the theme *safe enough now* drops out and their top themes include *better qualified police who respond to community better and enforcing curfew*.

Answers to making school a safer place held similar themes, though all connected in some way to the school environment. Overall themes (in rank order) were: *Anti-bullying programs, teamwork and unity at school level; already safe; more and better school supervisors; enforce rules better and impose consequences; nothing can be done; more cops and security guards; more security equipment; teachers who listen and care (and don’t have favorites), people acting “nicer, friendlier, more respectful”; and removing violators from school setting*. When these themes are examined in the subgroup of youth who reported being harmed or bullied at school in the past 12 months, again, a slightly different picture emerges— the themes *safe enough now* and *removing violators* drop out and their top themes include *activities, speakers, clubs and counseling and support*, lending support to a more positive, ‘school climate’ approach to solving the problem.

Hearing the voices of youth, who comprise not only an important segment of our population currently, but also speak to our future as a community, is key to the kind of community assessment and action inherent in IMC. Two questions in the youth survey sought to provide our effort with teen perspectives and thoughts on how teens can be given a voice in the community and how they can best be supported. Two themes emerged in the responses to both of these questions: “*listen to us, show respect, treat us as equals*”; and “*teach us how to lead and give us decision making experiences*”. Emerging from the “voice” question was the important theme of *use media to create and distribute teen ideas*. From the ‘support’ question, the top themes are *improve, create and increase programs, activities and services for teens, (including clubs and sports); always be there to provide support guidance and caring; and give teens opportunities in education and jobs*.

As also seen in the adult survey, youth said they like their community because of:

- *People – family, friends, “friendly”, “kind”;*
- *Nature – “beach”, ‘beauty’, ‘weather’, ‘open space’;*

In addition the following themes emerged:

- *it's safe, peaceful, quiet, calm.*
- *(there is nothing I like)*
- *Places to go are nearby – parks, shops, restaurants, libraries*
- *It feels like a small town---everyone knows everyone*
- *School, sports, community activities and support, “ways to be active”*
- *It just feels good – “nice”, “comfortable”, “I love it”*
- *Agriculture is here – “rural”, “fresh food”*

In order to look at these assets and concerns in a more useful way, examining these themes by geographic region would be worthwhile.

Methods

In general, methods applied to the Youth Survey mirror those used for the Adult survey collection of primary data. A statistical package (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences - SPSS) was used to clean, edit, and label variables and generate frequencies of all items. Data transformations and recoding was conducted in SPSS. The full primary data analysis report provides an overview of responses to both the closed ended survey questions and the themes derived from content analysis of the open-ended items.

Questionnaire design, selection of participants, and data collection

The Youth Survey was based on the Adult Survey which had come into being under the oversight and leadership of the IMC DRAT Committee. To create a survey more appropriate to youthful respondents, IMC created a Youth Engagement Committee to oversee and modify the survey questions. With the assistance of MCOE and the superintendents of school districts in Monterey County, it was arranged that administration of the surveys would take place in the 11th grade classrooms of all districts between January and February of 2015. This time frame was extended to March, and the result was a collection of 2,905 surveys, a remarkable data collection success. All surveys were completed in English and were input to Survey Monkey. United Way staff converted the responses to Excel, which provided input to SPSS for analysis.

Recommendations

Neighborhoods and communities vary throughout our county, and most of daily life takes place at this local level. As mentioned in each section above, there are valuable trends in both experiences and aspirations that may emerge through further analysis of these data by area of residence. It may also be instructive to examine results by ethnicity, given the importance of cultural sensitivity to Education, Income, and Health, IMC's areas of focus.

Furthermore, these data are rich in information that has not yet been examined in a multivariate fashion. Because of the “overlapping” nature of education, health, and income -- that they are not mutually-exclusive -- and because the purpose of the next steps for IMC are aimed at collective impact, it would be useful to look at sub groups of youth across these three areas.

It should be noted that the response rate to open-ended questions was quite high for a survey of this type. It is recommended that this momentum be sustained and that feedback be provided to youth (and adults) in a widespread, timely, and accurate way.