

MOVING TO HIGHER GROUND

Community Targets for the Well-Being of Children and Youth in Arlington, VA

“The indispensable first step to getting the things you want out of life is this: decide what you want.” -[Ben Stein](#)

"Reasonable people adapt themselves to the world. Unreasonable people attempt to adapt the world to themselves. All progress, therefore, depends on unreasonable people." -[George Bernard Shaw](#)

INTRODUCTION

In this report, the Partnership on Children, Youth, and Families presents the results of taking the indispensable first step – establishing selected targets for the health, safety and well-being of young people in Arlington. Over seventy members of the community participated in the process for setting these targets. These individuals met two to three times during May and June of 2004 in one of four working groups. Each group focused on selecting an initial set of three or four “indicators” from those presented in the Community Report Card (listed in Figure 1 below). Then the group identified specific targets for the community to achieve in three and ten years.

Why did we ask for two sets of targets?

- The ten-year targets represent what can be accomplished if the entire community embraces these targets and works aggressively to achieve them. In Shaw’s words, they represent our attempt to adapt the community to fit the needs of our young people. But they are not impossible targets. Whenever possible, the groups took into account the experiences of communities that had accomplished significant change.
- Members of the work groups recognized that three years is a short time to make community-wide changes in things such as teen alcohol use or preschool attendance of four year olds. The three-year targets are more modest than the ten year ones but ambitious enough that a “business as usual” approach is unlikely to achieve them. The three-year targets also recognize that the community is not equally ready for change in each area.

Fig. 1 Indicators Selected for the First Round of Target Setting

(See the Community Report Card on the Status of Children, Youth, and Families for the full set.)

| Health | Family | Education | Community |
|-------------------------|--|--|--------------------------------------|
| Depressive symptoms | Keeping teen mothers in school | Preschool experiences for 4 year olds | Youth viewed as resources* |
| Regular exercise | Child abuse and neglect | Caring school climate* | Sense of safety* |
| High-risk drinking | Positive family communication* | Differential enrollment in advanced math classes | Participation in youth programs* |
| Early onset of drinking | Families in housing need (paying over 40% of income) | Parent involvement in schooling* | Peaceful conflict resolution skills* |

* These indicators are all “developmental assets” or experiences, skills, and characteristics that research shows all young people need to become caring, responsible adults.

TARGETS RELATED TO STARTING AND STAYING HEALTHY

Depressive symptoms

In 2001, about 34 percent of 10th graders and 39 percent of 12th graders reported feeling sad or hopeless for a period of several weeks or more, compared to 27 percent of young people in those grades nationwide.

Targets:

- In three years, decrease depressive symptoms (frequently sad and hopeless for extended periods of time) by 10 percent so that 31 percent of 10th graders and 35 percent of 12th graders report these feelings.
- In ten years, decrease depressive symptoms by 20 percent to 27 percent for 10th graders and 31 percent of 12th graders. This will bring Arlington County's rates much closer to the 2001 national average.

Regular exercise

In 2001, about three-quarters of 10th graders but only half of 12th graders reported engaging in vigorous physical exercise three or more times per week. For the combined grades, young men were much more likely to report this pattern than young women (71 percent compared to 50.)

Targets:

- In three years, increase physical activity by high school girls from 50 percent to 70 percent.
- In ten years, increase vigorous physical activity for all middle and high school students to 85 percent. This is consistent with the Healthy People 2010 goal.

High-risk Drinking

In 2003, 21 percent of 10th grade students and 35 percent of 12th grade students reported repeated high-risk use of alcohol (i.e. using alcohol three or more times in previous month or getting drunk once or more in previous two weeks).

Targets:

- In three years, decrease high-risk drinking to 18 percent for all high school students.
- In ten years, reduce high-risk drinking to 5 percent for all students.

Onset of Drinking

Prior to the publication of the community report card and work group process, the Partnership Data Committee identified the early onset of drinking alcohol as an important priority to address. A target was established to increase the age of drinking onset by 2 years.

Immunization for two-year-olds

In the 2002/03 school year, 72 percent of students entering kindergarten had shot records indicating that they were fully vaccinated at age two. Across elementary schools, this rate varied from 41 to 84 percent.

Targets:

- In three years, increase the immunization rates in the highest risk schools to 72 percent.
- In 10 years, increase the immunization rate to 90 percent for all Arlington children.

TARGETS RELATED TO STABLE AND SECURE FAMILIES

Outcome for teenage mothers

In the 2002/03 school year, just over half of pregnant teens who were referred to the schools' Family Education Center enrolled or stayed in school.

Targets:

- In three years, 70 percent of teens referred to the schools' Family Education Center who remain Arlington County residents, will enroll, if they are not already enrolled, or stay in school.
- In ten years, 85 percent of teens referred to the schools' Family Education Center who remain Arlington County residents, will enroll, if they are not already enrolled, or stay in school.

Child abuse

Targets:

- In three years, the number of founded cases of abuse or neglect per 1,000 children living in Arlington will not increase. (Increased reporting of potential abuse is expected from upcoming awareness training.)
- In ten years, the number of founded cases of abuse or neglect per 1,000 children living in Arlington will fall by 10 percent from 3.9 to 3.4 per 1,000 children.

Positive family communication

In a March 2003 survey, 47 percent of sixth graders attending Arlington middle and high schools reported positive family communication, but only 20 percent of twelfth graders did.

Targets:

- In three years and ten years, the percentage of 6th, 8th, 10th and 12th graders reporting positive family communication will increase according to the chart below.

| Grade | 2003 | 2007 | 2014 |
|--------------------------|------|------|------|
| 6 th graders | 47 | 55 | 60 |
| 8 th graders | 25 | 40 | 50 |
| 10 th graders | 21 | 30 | 40 |
| 12 th graders | 20 | 30 | 40 |

Families who pay too much for housing

Twenty-two percent of Arlington families pay more than 40 percent of their income in rent or mortgage, which leaves them with too little money for other needs such as food or health care.

The targets below reflect the group's belief that affordable housing has been shrinking so that no change in this indicator would be a positive development.

Targets:

- In three years, the percentage of families with children paying more than 40 percent of their income on rent or mortgage will not increase..
- In ten years, the percentage of families with children paying more than 40 percent of their income on rent or mortgage will decrease by 5 percent.

TARGETS RELATED TO EDUCATIONAL READINESS AND SUCCESS

Pre-school experiences for four-year-olds

According to information collected in the 2000/01 school year, 80 percent of Arlington children have some kind of pre-school experience (such as Head Start, community preschools, and programs run by Arlington Public Schools) before entering kindergarten.

Targets:

- In three years, increase the percentage of Arlington children in some kind of preschool experience before entering kindergarten to 88 percent.
- In ten years, increase the percentage of Arlington children in some kind of preschool experience before entering kindergarten to 96 percent.
- In ten years, increase by 20 percent the number of Arlington free and reduced lunch children in some kind of preschool experience before entering kindergarten.

Caring school climate

In a 2003 survey, 31 percent of all middle and high school students report a caring school climate. Forty-two percent of students in grade 6 reported this asset, compared to the 28 percent for grade 12.

Targets:

- In three years, 51 percent of all middle and high school students will report a caring school climate.
- In ten years, 75 percent of all middle and high school students will report a caring school climate.

Differential enrollment in advanced math classes

In the 2001/02 school year, less than 10% of Black and Hispanic students took advanced math classes, compared to almost 1/3 of White students.

Targets:

- In three years, increase the percentage of Black and Hispanic students taking advanced math classes until the ratio of Black (or Hispanic) participation to participation of White students is half its current size. Given current participation of 6 percent for Hispanic students and eight percent (and assuming that the rate for White students remains at 32 percent) then the rate for Black and Hispanic students would need to increase to 16 and 13 percent respectively.
- In ten years, eliminate the gap between the percent of Black and Hispanic students taking advanced math classes, compared to White students.
- In ten years, 60 percent of all students will take and successfully complete 8th grade Algebra.

Parent involvement in schooling

In 2003, 48 percent of 6th graders, 27 percent of 8th graders, 25 percent of 10th graders, and 14 percent of 12th graders report that their parents are actively involved in their school or take an interest in their schoolwork.

Targets:

- In three years, there will be a 10 percent increase in the percentage of students at each grade level reporting this asset (53 percent of 6th graders, 30 percent of 8th graders, 28 percent of 10th graders and 15 percent of 12th graders.)
- In ten years, there will be a 30 percent increase in the percentage of students at each grade level reporting this asset (62 percent of 6th graders, 35 percent of 8th graders, 32 percent of 10th graders and 18 percent of 12th graders.)

TARGETS RELATED TO A SAFE, SUPPORTIVE COMMUNITY

Youth as resources

Twenty-six percent of middle and high school boys and 29 percent of middle and high school girls surveyed in Arlington Public schools reported the “youth as resources” asset, indicating that they feel they have a voice in decision-making and opportunities to make the community a better place.

Targets:

- In three years, raise the percentage of youth having the Youth as Resources Asset from 27 to 33 percent.
- In ten years, raise the percentage of youth having the Youth as Resources Asset from 33 to 50 percent.

Safety

Fifty-nine percent of boys but only 41 percent of girls reported the “Safety” asset, indicating that they feel safe at home, at school, and in their neighborhood.

Targets:

- In three years, increase from 59 to 64 the percentage of males reporting the Safety asset, and increase from 41 to 51 the percentage of females reporting that same asset.
- In ten years, increase from 64 to 70 the percentage of males reporting the Safety asset, and increase from 51 to 65 the percentage of females reporting that same asset, thus almost eliminating any gender disparity in that asset.

Youth programs

About 60 percent of young people in 2003 reported the asset of “Youth programs,” indicating that they spend three or more hours per week in sports, extracurricular activities after school, or clubs and programs outside of school.

Targets:

- In three years, reduce the percentage of students reporting 0 hours per week spent on school clubs and organizations from 51 to 46 percent.
- In three years, reduce the percentage of students reporting 0 hours per week spent on activities outside of school clubs and organizations from 68 to 63 percent.
- In ten years, reduce the percentage of students reporting 0 hours per week spent on school clubs and organizations from 46 to 36 percent.
- In ten years, reduce the percentage of students reporting 0 hours per week spent on outside of school clubs and organizations from 63 to 53 percent.

The targets for this category focus on the youth who report no activities. Even if these efforts are successful, it’s possible that the percentage of youth reporting this asset will not change. Why? It’s because the definition of the asset requires the young person to participate for at least 3 hours per week. (Similarly, increasing participation in activities for those young people who already spend 3 or more hours per week on youth programs would not have an impact on the asset.) However, we will be able to track progress on these underlying changes and verify if any progress is taking place.

Our expectation is that encouraging inactive young people to participate in sports, clubs, and extracurricular activities will increase the overall asset from 5 to 10 percentage points in three years and 10 to 20 percentage points in ten years. The low estimates are based on the idea that once students become active, they participate at varying levels similar to those of already-active youth. The high estimates are based on the idea (probably over-optimistic) that the young people will go from 0 hours to 3 or more (and also assumes that the non-participants in say sports are a distinct group from those who are non-participants in school clubs.)

Peaceful Conflict Resolution

What would students do if another student unexpectedly hit them for no apparent reason? Sixty percent of 6th graders but only 48 percent of 12th grade students report that they would try to resolve the conflict using peaceful means such as ignoring it, talking it out, or telling an adult. The others chose “hit back” or “hurt them worse.”

Targets:

- In three years, reduce the number of 6th grade students who would ‘hit back’ from 30 percent to 20 percent, the number who would ‘hurt them worse’ from 10 percent to 7 percent, and the number who would ‘ignore it and do nothing’ from 16 percent to 12 percent. This would raise the percentage of 6th grade youth reporting the asset from 60 percent overall to 73 percent.
- In ten years, reduce the number of all students who would ‘hit back’ from 40 percent to 20 percent, the number who would ‘hurt them worse’ from 12 percent to 3 percent, and the number who would ‘ignore it and do nothing’ from 19 percent to 10 percent. This translates into 77 percent of youth using a nonviolent method of dealing with conflict.

Note: Search includes “walking away and ignoring it” as a method of peaceful conflict resolution. That means that if students stop using this method and instead try to talk it out or get help from an adult, the asset would be unchanged. But the group felt that the other two peaceful alternatives are better and more assertive than just ignoring it, particularly in the scenario used in the questionnaire (someone hits or pushes you for no reason).

Summary of Report Card Targets

(All numbers are percentages, unless otherwise noted)

| Measure | Baseline (Source) | 3-Year Target | 10-Year Target |
|---|--|--|--|
| Depressive symptoms: % of youth feeling sad and hopeless for several weeks or more | 34 (10 th grade) 39 (12 th grade) | 31 (10 th) 35 (12 th) | 27 (10 th) 31 (12 th) |
| Regular exercise: % of youth who exercise vigorously 3 or more times per week | 75 (10 th), 50 (12 th) 50 (girls), 70 (boys) | 70 (girls) 70 (boys) | 85 for all groups |
| High-risk drinking: % of youth reporting heavy or repeated use of alcohol | 21 (10 th grade) 35 (12 th grade) | 18 (all students) | 5 (all students) |
| Immunizations: % of 2 year olds fully immunized (as indicated in school records) | 72 (range: 41 to 84 by school attendance area) | 72 (or better), all areas | 90 (all areas) |
| Keeping teen mothers in school: % of referred pregnant teens who stay or enroll in school | 55 | 70 | 85 |
| Child abuse and neglect: cases of founded abuse | 140 cases (2002) | No increase | 10 percent decline |
| Positive family communication: % of youth reporting this asset (frequent, supportive communication with parents; willingness to discuss difficult issues) | 6 th grade – 47 8 th grade – 25 10 th grade – 21 12 th grade – 20 | 50 40 30 30 | 60 50 40 40 |
| Families in housing need (paying over 40% of income in mortgage or rents) | 22 | No increase | 5 percent decline |
| Preschool experiences: % of 4-year-olds attending some form of preschool in year before entering kindergarten | 80 | 88 | 96 (with 20 % increase for F&RL) |
| Caring school climate: % of youth with caring and encouraging teachers and peers | 31 | 51 | 75 |
| Differential enrollment in advanced math classes (e.g. algebra taken in middle school; all AP, intensified, and IB classes) | 32 (white students) 8 (Black) 6 (Hispanic) | 32 (or more) 16 (or more) 13 (or more) | Eliminate gap; 60% of 8 th graders take algebra |
| Parent involvement in schooling: % of youth with parents who attend school events, talk about lessons, help with homework | 48 percent (6 th grade) 27 percent (8 th grade) 25 percent (10 th grade) 14 percent (12 th grade) | 53 30 28 15 | 62 35 32 18 |
| Youth viewed as resources: % of youth who report that community | 27 | 33 | 50 |
| Safety: % of youth who report feeling safe at home, school, neighborhood | 59 (boys) 41 (girls) | 64 51 | 70 65 |
| Participation in youth programs: % of youth who report 3 hours per week or more | 60 | 65-70 | 70-80 |
| Peaceful conflict resolution skills: % of youth who use nonviolent means to resolve differences with others | 6 th grade 60 12 th grade 48 | 73 (6 th grade) | 77 (all grades) |