

CHILD-FRIENDLY CITY: LA MESA

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Society and Space



ABOUT THE PROJECT

The Child Friendly Cities Initiative (CFCI) was created in 1996 by the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF). The initiative encourages local governments to assess how well children’s rights are protected in their cities. The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UN CRC) outlines the rights of young people (0-17 years old). The 5 goal objectives in CFCI are based on the four articles derived from the Convention: non-discrimination (Article 2); best interest of the child (Article 3); the inherent right to life, survival, and development (Article 6); and respect for the views of the child (Article 12).

EVALUATIVE DOMAINS FOR GOAL AREAS:

Goal 1

SAFETY AND INCLUSION

- Children's Protection
- Children's Social Participation

Goal 2

CHILDREN'S PARTICIPATION

- Children's Civic Participation
- Quality of Children's Participation

Goal 3

EQUITABLE SOCIAL SERVICES

- Equitable Access to Essential Services
- Quality of Essential Services

Goal 4

SAFE LIVING ENVIRONMENT

- Children's Right to Housing
- Children's Right to Healthy Environments

Goal 5

PLAY AND LEISURE

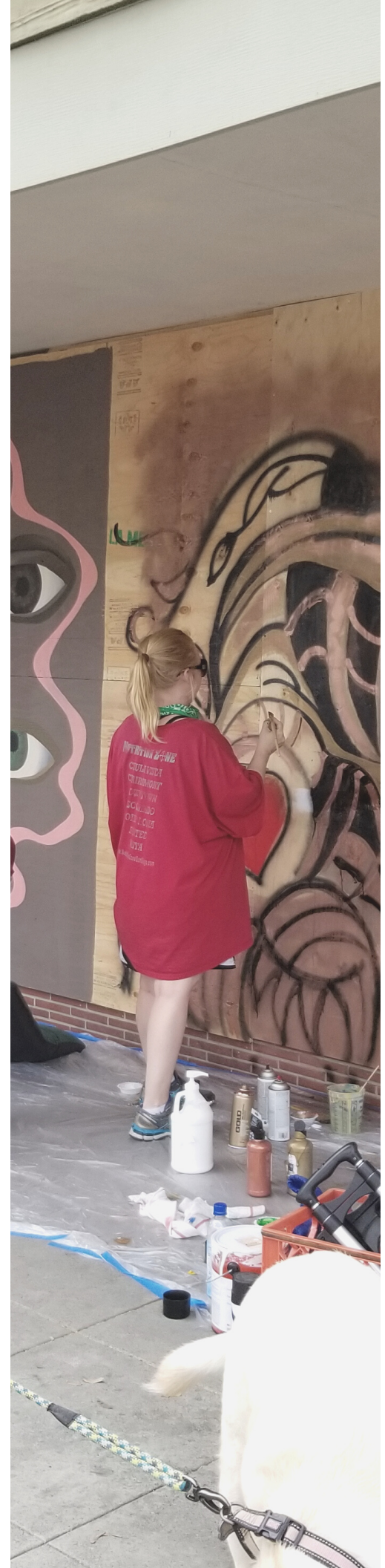
- Play and Leisure Opportunities
- Young People's Independent Mobility



PURPOSE

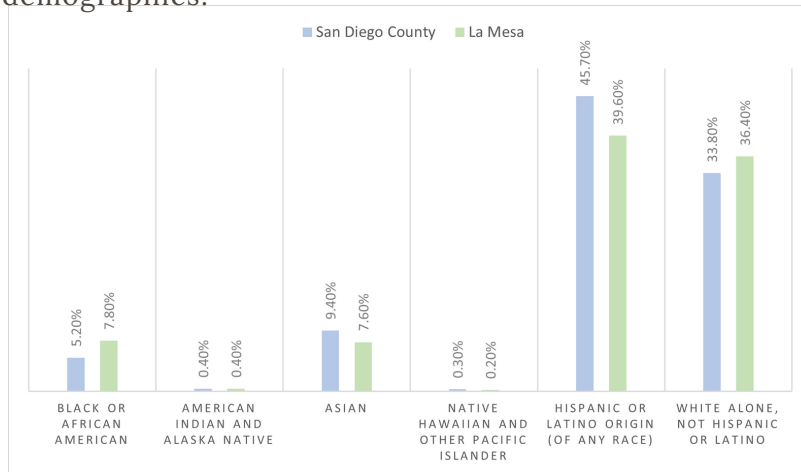
There are about 45 countries and about 3,000 municipalities currently listed on UNICEF's CFCI website that are participating and waiting to be recognized as a Child-Friendly City. Countries, like Mongolia, Bulgaria, Guinea, Israel, and Jordan, have already experienced positive results after the implementation of CFC policies. In the United States, a handful of cities (e.g. Minneapolis, Houston, San Francisco, and Johnson City) have started the CFCI recognition process.

The purpose of this report is to serve as a baseline for the community members of La Mesa, as a precursory to the UNICEF CFCI process. We utilized the framework created by UNICEF to compile aggregated data for the community. We discovered which data were open and easily accessible to the public and which ones required assistance from our community stakeholders. This report is a compilation of indicators that were publicly available and some that were created for the report. We hope that this data can assist and empower stakeholders to identify which areas they would want to monitor and evaluate.



COMMUNITY PROFILE

Children and young people (under the age of 17) make up about a quarter of the city’s population. The table below is a compilation of the demographics of children living in La Mesa, compared to San Diego county's demographics.



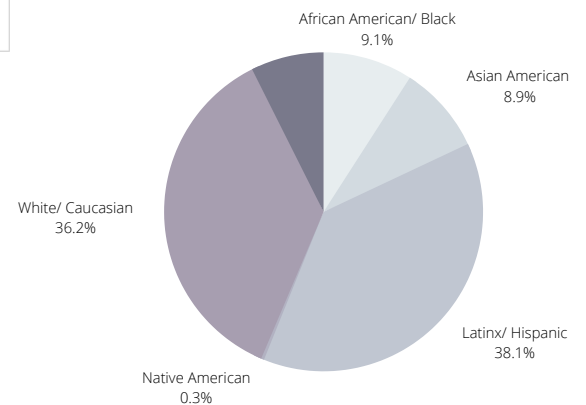
CHILD/ YOUTH DEMOGRAPHICS

Nearly three percent of children in La Mesa are immigrants. About 29% live in a household with at least one foreign-born parent. Within the child population, 3.5% of them have disabilities. La Mesa has a total of 12, 301 households with children. Ten percent are living with a single male parent and 21.8% are living with a single female parent.

TOTAL NUMBER OF CHILDREN IN LA MESA:

It is estimated that the population of the City of La Mesa will grow to 65,984 by 2030 and 77,780 by 2050.

Children make up about 21% of La Mesa's population. The pie chart demonstrate the different demographics by ethnicity and race.



21%

Of La Mesa population are children

COMMUNITY PROFILE

Based on the Census Bureau's poverty threshold, 24% of children in La Mesa live in poverty. Children who identify as Latinx or Hispanic have a higher rate of living in poverty (see Figure 9).

Children Living in Poverty

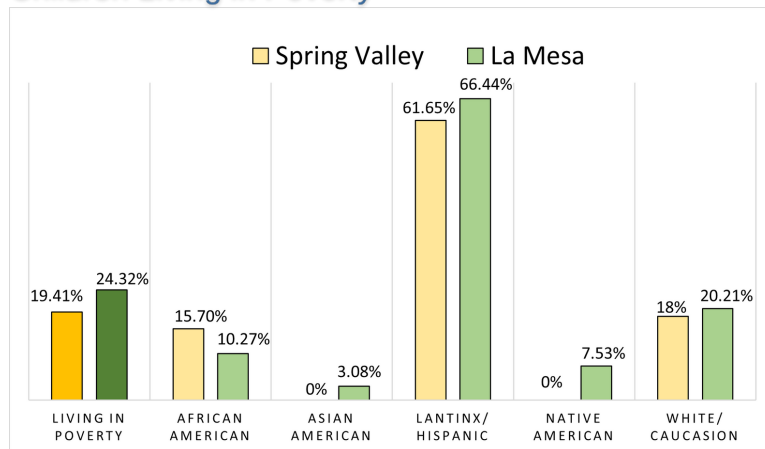
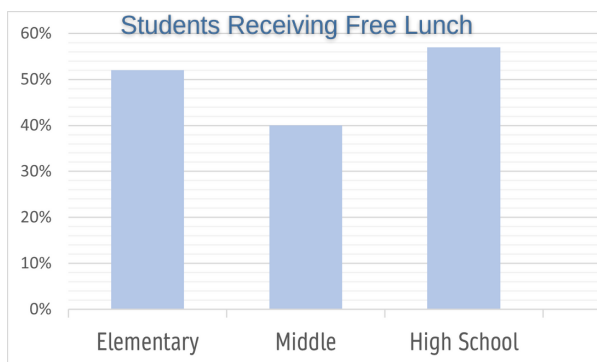


Figure 9. This bar graph highlights the percentage of children living in poverty disaggregated by community and race. Data Source: U.S. Census 2010

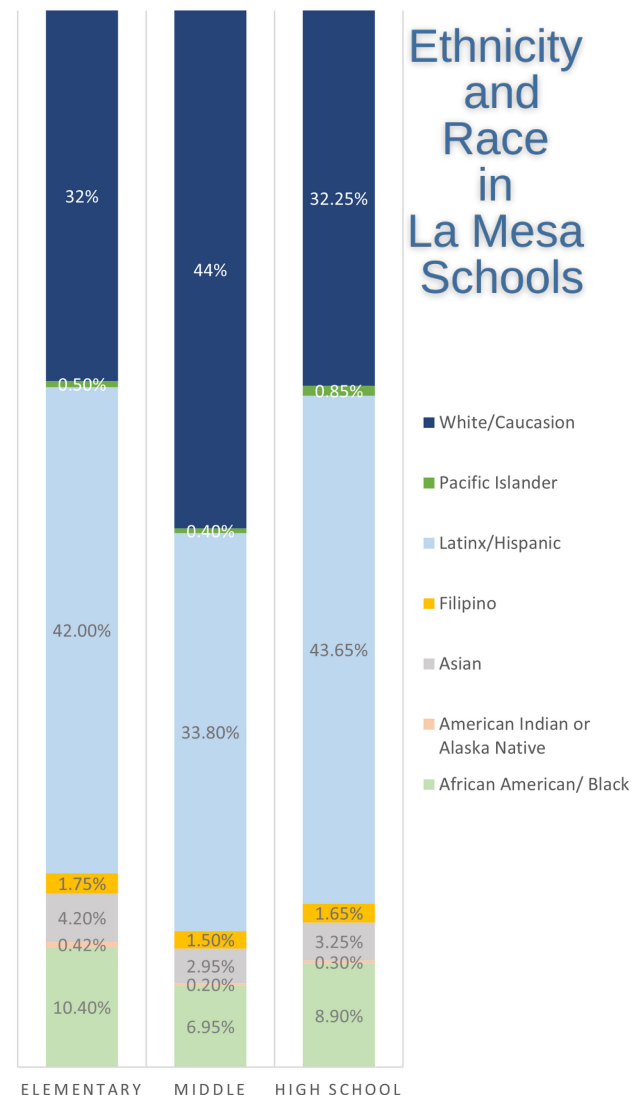
INSTITUTIONAL DEMOGRAPHICS

La Mesa has 9265 children enrolled in school (87%public/13% private) and 808 not enrolled. There are a total of 7 Elementary Schools, 2 Middle Schools, and 2 High Schools that are located in La Mesa. School Accountability Reports (SARs) for 2019-2020 were extracted from California’s Department of Education database. There are 5,667 students enrolled in elementary and middle schools and 4710 total students enrolled in Helix High and Grossmont High.



COVID-19 IMPACTS

San Diego County's COVID-19 Dashboard tracks cases by region, age, and hospitalized patients. The dashboard updated on the 9th and 13th of January 2020 displays a total of 3316.6 (per 100,000 residents) children has been tested positive in La Mesa City, 136 children were hospitalized in San Diego County, and 5 deaths in California.





GOAL 1: SAFETY AND INCLUSION

WHAT'S BEING MEASURED:

- Children's Protection
- Children's Social Participation

“Children have the right to protection from abuse and neglect, the right to safe communities and schools, and the right to fair treatment under the law” (UN Rights of the Child)

INDICATORS FOUND:

- Youth Mortality and Suicide
- Children in Foster Care
- School-Based Violence
- Corporal Punishment
- Juvenile Justice
- Child Labor

INDICATORS IN PROGRESS:

- Violence Against Children
- Child Sexual Abuse and Trafficking
- Gender-based Violence

INDICATORS NOT FOUND:

- Children's Inclusion
- Opportunities for Social-Emotional Learning

Youth Mortality and Suicide

From 2000 to 2019, San Diego County's medical examiners documented 34 accidents, 6 homicides, and 5 suicides in La Mesa and Spring Valley. Between the two communities, Spring Valley had more suicides and accidents than La Mesa and La Mesa had more homicides listed by the medical examiners.

From 2000 to 2019, there was 1 suicide in La Mesa and 4 in Spring Valley for ages 18 and younger. Four of them were identified as male and 1 female. The most recent suicide incident occurred in 2019 in Spring Valley.

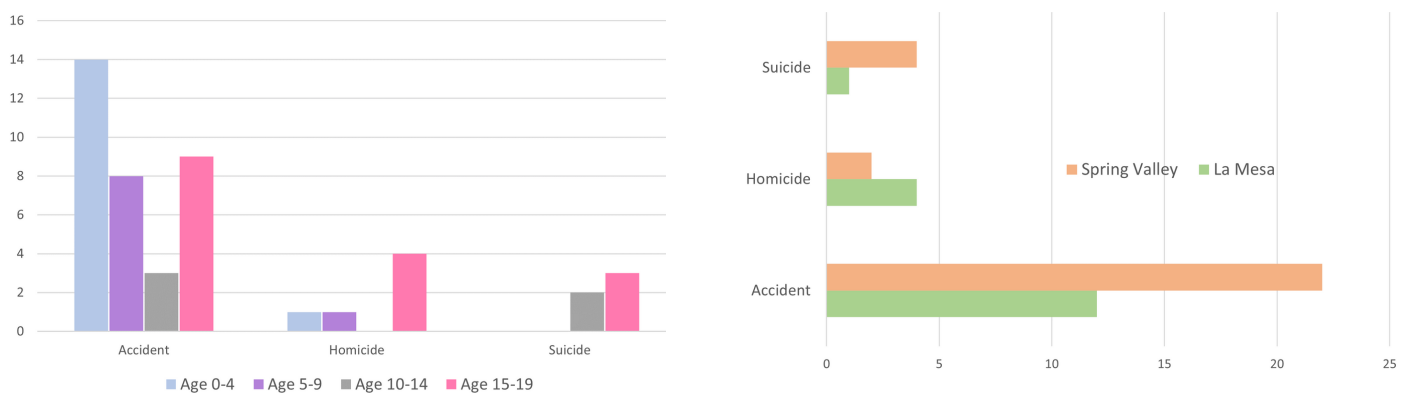


Figure 6. Manner of Death categorized by age group and zip code. This dataset was derived from San Diego County's Medical Examiner's database.

Figure 7 represents the percentage of Grossmont Union District students who felt depressed, while Figure 8 shows the percentage of students who thought about committing suicide. Female students in non-traditional, 9th grade and 11th grade felt more depressed than male students. Students who self-identified as part of the LGBTQ+ community were more inclined to suicidal tendencies.

Feeling Depressed

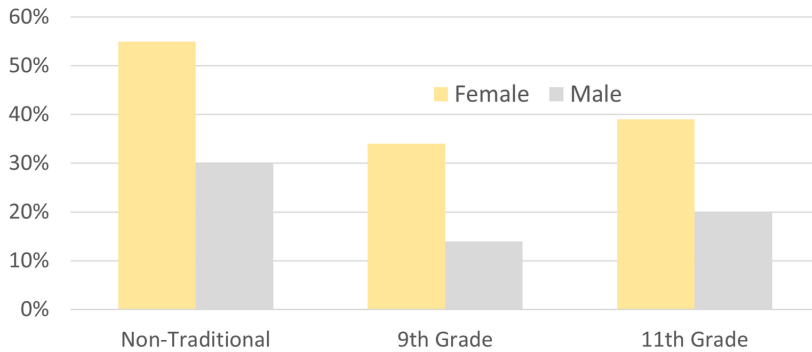
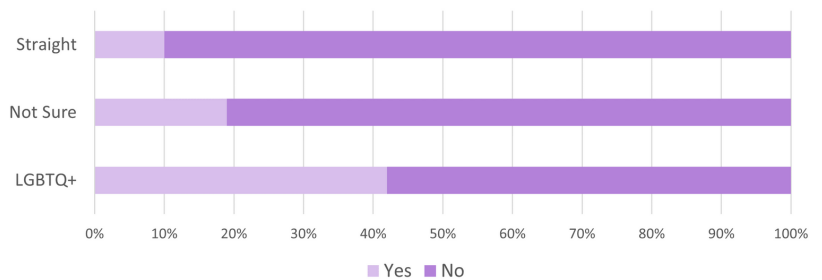


Figure 7. Surveys from Grossmont High School categorized by grade and gender. Data source: Kidsdata.org

Figure 8. Surveys from Grossmont High School reveal the percentage of students who have had suicidal thoughts. Data Source: Kidsdata.org

Suicide Ideation



Children in Foster Care

U.S Census estimated that 2.8% of children in La Mesa are in foster care. SARs for 2019-2020 show that 35 students (about 0.32% of students) in La Mesa Public Schools are in foster care.

School-Based Violence and Corporal Punishment

According to 2018-2019 Staff Surveys from Grossmont Union High School District, about 35% of staff believed their school provided conflict resolution programs for their students and about 33% of staff believed their school promoted restorative practices. Similar data are unavailable for La Mesa-Spring Valley School District and private schools.



Juvenile Justice

In 2018, La Mesa had 47 juvenile arrests, which was slightly less than the regional arrest rate. From 2014 to 2018, the total number of juvenile arrests per year decreased by 57%. However, disaggregated data show a higher arrest rate for juveniles self-identified as Black rather than White and Hispanic.

Child Labor

Eighty-five percent of La Mesa's 16 to 19 year-olds are unemployed or not in the labor force. Eleven percent are both unemployed/not in the labor force and not enrolled in school.

	La Mesa
Percentage of teens who want to work	42.59%
Percentage of teens in labor force (employed and unemployed)	20.94%
Percentage of teens outside of labor force (not looking for employment)	79.06%



GOAL 2: CHILDREN'S PARTICIPATION

WHAT'S BEING MEASURED:

- Children's Civic Participation
- Quality of Children's Participation

“Every child and young person has their voice, needs and priorities heard and taken into account in public laws, policies, budgets, programmes and decisions that affect them.”

(UN Rights of the Child)

INDICATORS FOUND:

- Establishing a Legal and Policy Environment

INDICATORS IN PROGRESS:

- Creating Opportunities for Participation
- Acting on Children's Views

INDICATORS NOT FOUND:

- Addressing Social Norms and Barriers
- Promoting Awareness of the Right to Participate
- Building Skills and Capacity

Legal and Policy Environment

La Mesa has a Youth Advisory Committee that consists of 9 members and 6 alternate members appointed by La Mesa's Mayor. Members' ages range from 13 to 20 years. They serve as advisors to the city council to provide input on projects, programs, and issues involving youth in their community.

GOAL 3: EQUITABLE SOCIAL SERVICES

WHAT'S BEING MEASURED:

- Equitable Access to Essential Services
- Quality of Essential Services

“The right to health care services, the right to a standard of living adequate for the child’s development and the right to education.”
(UN Rights of the Child)

INDICATORS FOUND:

- Access to Healthcare
- Access to Quality Education

INDICATORS IN PROGRESS:

- Nutrition and Access to Healthy Foods
- Children's Mental Health

INDICATORS NOT FOUND:

- Maternal and Newborn Health
- Early Childhood Education

Access to Healthcare

In 2015, two percent of children did not have health insurance. Thirty-four percent of children in La Mesa had public healthcare coverage. Nearly 30% of those with public health insurance were living in poverty.

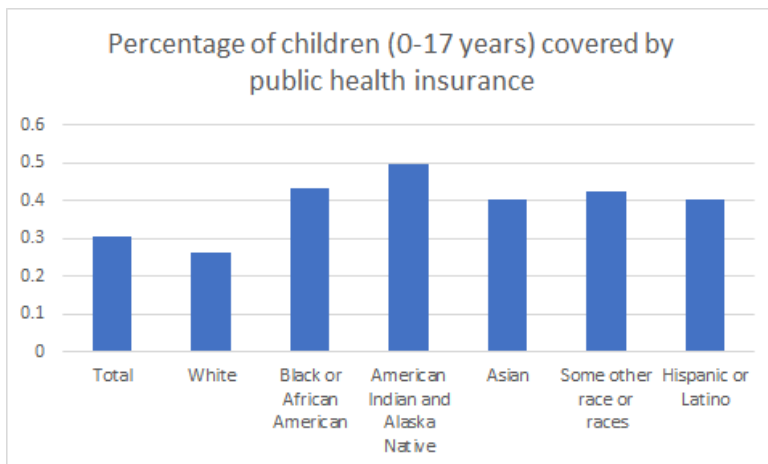


Figure 9. This bar graph highlights the percentage of children with public health insurance, disaggregated by race and ethnicity. Data Source: 2015 American Community Survey

Data for the number of children who are overweight or obese was collected by La Mesa-Spring Valley District and Grossmont Union District and accessed through kidsdata.org.

In the five year trends, we compare the different grade levels. From 2014 to 2018, we see an increase in overweight or obese students in grade 5 (see Figure 10). In 2018, Hispanics, African American/Blacks, and Multi-racial students had a higher percentage of being overweight in Grades 5 and 9 (see Figure 11). Hispanics, African American/Black, and Filipinx had the highest percentage for Grades 7.

Overweight and Obesity Trends: 2014-2018

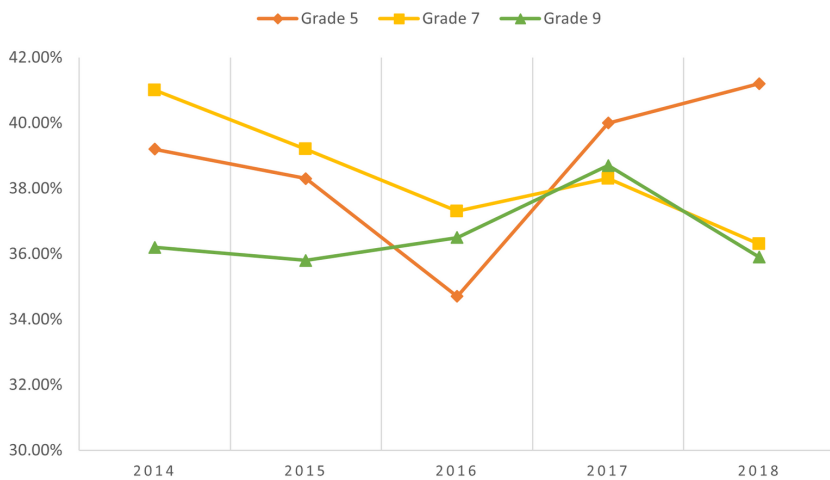
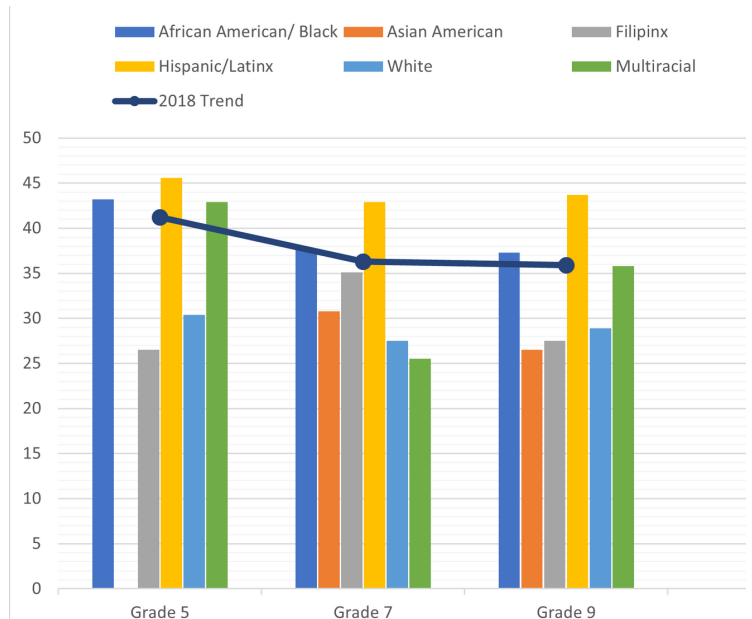


Figure 10. This line graph displays the percentage of students by grade that were identified as overweight or obese. Data Source: kidsdata.org

Overweight and Obesity By Race: 2018

Figure 11. This line graph displays the trend of overweight or obese students in 2018. The bar graph shows data disaggregated by grade and race/ethnicity. Data Source: kidsdata.org



The indicator for children's mental health was listed as “children who experienced an adverse childhood experience in the last year”. For this initial stage, we found data about bullying in schools. We hope the involvement of children and other stakeholders in the next stages of our analysis will provide a clearer understanding of adverse childhood experiences in the La Mesa community.

Children who experienced bullying in school

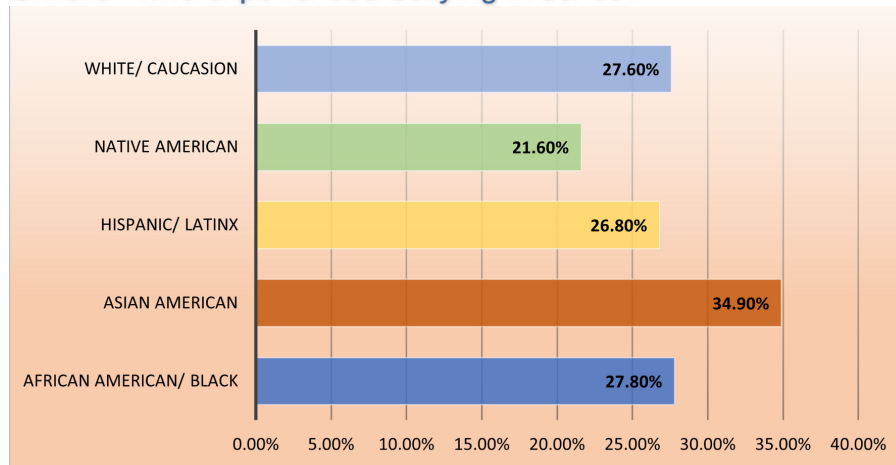
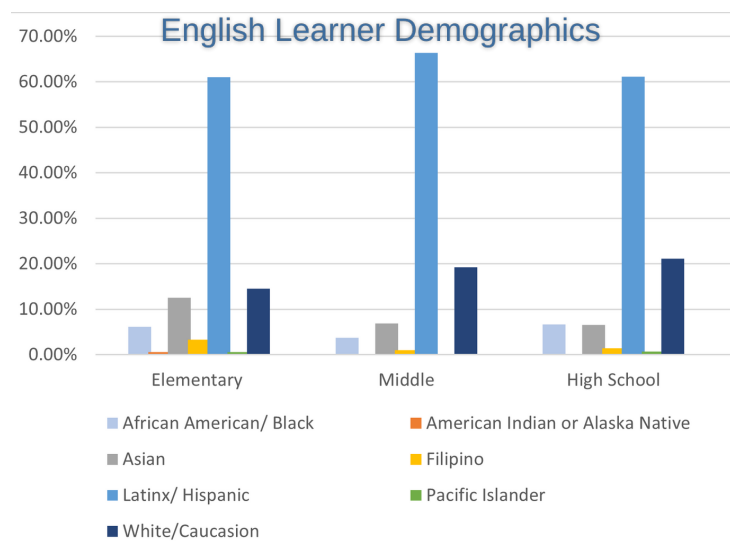


Figure 12. This bar graph shows the percentage of students who experienced bullying disaggregated by ethnicity. Data Source: kidsdata.org

Access to Quality Education

According to 2019 SARs, 85.3% of youth attending in Grossmont Union High District graduated. Helix High's graduation rate is 12.1% higher than the district average and Grossmont High is 2.2% lower. There is a total of 1034 English Learners and given English Language Proficiency Assessments (ELPAC). About 29.62% of students in elementary scored Proficient, 33.51% in middle school, and 7.42% in High School.





GOAL 4: SAFE LIVING ENVIRONMENTS

WHAT'S BEING MEASURED:

- Children's Right to Housing
- Children's Right to Healthy Environments

“Every child and young person lives in a safe, secure and clean environment.”

(UN Rights of the Child)

INDICATORS FOUND:

- Access to Affordable Housing
- Safe Housing

INDICATORS IN PROGRESS:

- Environmental Hazards

INDICATORS NOT FOUND:

- Family Displacement
- Emergency Preparedness

Affordable Housing

In La Mesa, 26% of family households spend fifty percent or more of their income on rent. Census Bureau defines housing as overcrowded if there is more than one person per room. In La Mesa, 6.58% of households experience overcrowdedness.

We do not have an estimate of families from La Mesa who are housed in homeless shelters; however, data from the California Department of Education indicate that 610 students from LMSV School District, 574 students from Grossmont Union High School District and 52 students from Helix High School are homeless (i.e. living in temporary shelters, living in hotels/motels, temporarily doubled up or temporarily unsheltered).

Safe Housing

According to the Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), lead exposure can affect a child's IQ and ability to pay attention. There is no safe blood lead level. Instead, the CDC "uses a blood reference level of 5 micrograms per deciliter to identify children with blood levels that are higher than most children's levels."

The California Department of Health has identified 1.63-1.99% of children under 6, living in La Mesa and Spring Valley, with Blood Lead Levels (BLL) equal to or greater than 4.5mg in 2012. Recent data for each zip code for 2018 are not available due to insufficient amounts of tests. In comparison, 1.37% of children under 6 years in San Diego County had BLL equal or greater than 4.5mg.



Environmental Hazards

In 2019, Helix Water District, which is responsible for the water supply in La Mesa, Spring Valley, Lemon Grove and El Cajon, released a report that stated 98% of customers had safe drinking water.

There are no air quality monitoring stations in La Mesa but there are four stations in the surrounding areas (e.g. El Cajon, Chula Vista, San Diego, and Kearny Villa). We extrapolated air quality values from EPA monitoring stations for the two communities and compared the average air quality for the years 2019 and 2020 (see figure 14).

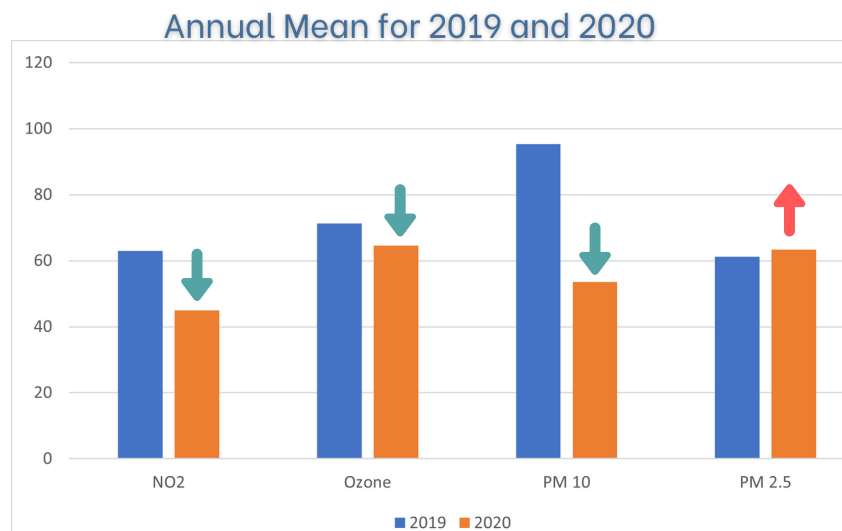


Figure 14. This bar graph displays AQI annual means for NO2, Ozone, and PM 10 are decreasing. AQI annual mean for PM 2.5 has slightly increased. Data Source: EPA



GOAL 5: PLAY AND LEISURE

WHAT'S BEING MEASURED:

- Play and Leisure Opportunities
- Young People's Independent Mobility

“Every child and young person has opportunities to enjoy family life, play and leisure.”
(UN Rights of the Child)

INDICATORS FOUND:

- Government Provision of Public Spaces for Play and Leisure
- Access to Safe and Affordable Public Transportation

INDICATORS IN PROGRESS:

- Safety and Inclusiveness of Public Spaces for Play and Leisure
- Community Walkability

INDICATORS NOT FOUND:

- None

Government Provision of Public Spaces for Play and Leisure

Every year, the City of La Mesa regularly organizes events for children and families. These events include:

- 3 movies in the park
- 6 summer concerts
- 2 environmental events (ex: tree planting)
- 2 safety fairs (ex: bike safety)

The City manages 15 public parks, covering 135 acres of park land and 56 acres of public open space.

Access to Safe and Affordable Public Transportation

San Diego's Metropolitan Transit System (MTS) provides public transportation in La Mesa. Children ages 5 and under could ride for free with each paying passenger (limit of 2 children per adult). Reduced fares (\$1.25) and passes are given to youth ages 6-18 that present their school ID, transit identification, or government-issued photo ID. The cost per ride for an adult parent is \$2.50.

MOVING FORWARD

For the most part, our conclusion from these preliminary data suggest that La Mesa is friendly towards children, and their rights are protected. As a baseline summary, the report also suggests areas for improvement, particularly in child and youth participation. This finding is no different from the cities already in the pipeline for CFCI certification. There are also clear disparities in the well-being for children and youth from different ethnic and migratory backgrounds, as well as those who identify as LGBTQ+. As we continue to compile data for a robust baseline, the next stage is to invite children and young people to join this project. It is our firm belief (and UNICEF's) that when young people participate in programs and policy-making, the community becomes a better place for children and adults alike.



COMMUNITY RESOURCE MAP FOR LA MESA:

The community resource map was created to assist youth and locate child/teen programs, clothing resources, domestic violence resources, food resources, health services, housing resources, employment, and recreational areas.

Access the Resource Map here: [Community Resources](#)