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New Housing Can Help School Districts Avoid Challenges of Declining Enrollment

[A report](#) developed to help residents engage in their city's process of planning for more housing through the Housing Element Update uncovered an important finding about the relationship between new housing, school district stability and financial security.

"New housing can actually help many districts with declining enrollment - avoiding revenue losses and associated staffing cutbacks and facility closures," said Stephen Levy, Director of the Center for Continuing Study of the California Economy and the report's author.

The report found that widespread enrollment declines of over 15% are expected throughout Santa Clara and San Mateo counties in the next decade driven by declining birth rates and the shortage of new homes. Additional research from Silicon Valley at Home showed that enrollment declines were already occurring in most districts prior to the pandemic, with elementary schools experiencing a 10% decline from 2014-15 to 2019-2020.

"In recent years, schools throughout Santa Clara County have been struggling with declining enrollment, which is incredibly destabilizing to our schools, our families, and our neighborhoods," said Peter Ortiz, President of the Santa Clara County Board of Education. "Additional housing that is affordable to young families would bring more children back into our communities and help stabilize our schools."

This new finding challenges the older narrative that new housing places burdens on schools. The report argues that school boards and parents would benefit from reexamining the relationship between housing and schools, and becoming actively engaged in their city's plan for new housing through the Housing Element update.

The study was commissioned by Silicon Valley Community Foundation, with community partners Palo Alto Forward and Silicon Valley at Home, and focuses on the Housing Element update processes in five Mid-Peninsula cities: Cupertino, Menlo Park, Mountain View, Palo Alto and Sunnyvale. These cities were chosen because they were identified regionally as places where low-income families and their children will benefit the most from good schools, services and proximity to major job sites with good transit and automobile access.

“More housing for low-income residents in these cities can support the region’s equity and environmental goals,” said Gina Dalma, Executive Vice President of Community Action, Policy and Strategy at Silicon Valley Community Foundation. “The benefits for low-income families of high-resourced areas are supported by decades of social science research. We need local commitments to create housing opportunities here.” The report also notes the large increase in the number of people with commutes of three or more hours, and how adding housing close to jobs reduces congestion and GHG emissions and helps workers have more time with their families.

The report outlines the update process and the new standards cities must work within. It explains how the increased regional and city housing goals reflect state legislation to reduce the number of people living in overcrowded homes and those facing affordability challenges, and to improve the overall supply of housing. As a result, more than half of the new housing goals are to increase housing for low- and moderate-income residents.

Mathew Reed from Silicon Valley at Home explained why the report was important to the process. “We believe that the more people get involved in the process the more we will understand that committing to more affordable housing is critical to our people who are struggling and to the stability of our schools and communities.”

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Available for phone comments/media inquiries -

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Local contacts for Menlo Park, Palo Alto, Mountain View, Sunnyvale, and Cupertino may be made available through Mathew Reed (408) 799-4349

Jurisdiction specific quotes

Palo Alto -

"Our school districts are regularly losing members of our community because they can no longer afford housing in the districts they have long called home. The diversity of our school district is one of our most valued assets and it's a tremendous loss when the housing crunch negatively impacts our ability to serve our students and families."

Jennifer DiBrienza, Board Member, Palo Alto Unified School District

Sunnyvale

"The housing crisis is also leading to the decline in school programs and youth sports; all the things that make a community a community. Without kids and parent volunteers, these traditional experiences and institutions cannot survive. That's one more reason why producing more housing is so important in places like Sunnyvale."

Galen Kim Davis, Sunnyvale resident and a father of two who also co-chairs the local organization, Livable Sunnyvale.

Jurisdiction School Enrollment Historical Data - See attached PDF

Report

[The Implications for Low- and Moderate- Income Housing: A Guide to Encourage Participation in the Housing Element Update Process Bay Area Cities Update Their Housing Elements in 2022](#)