

CITY OF COMMERCE CITY YOUTH MASTER PLAN

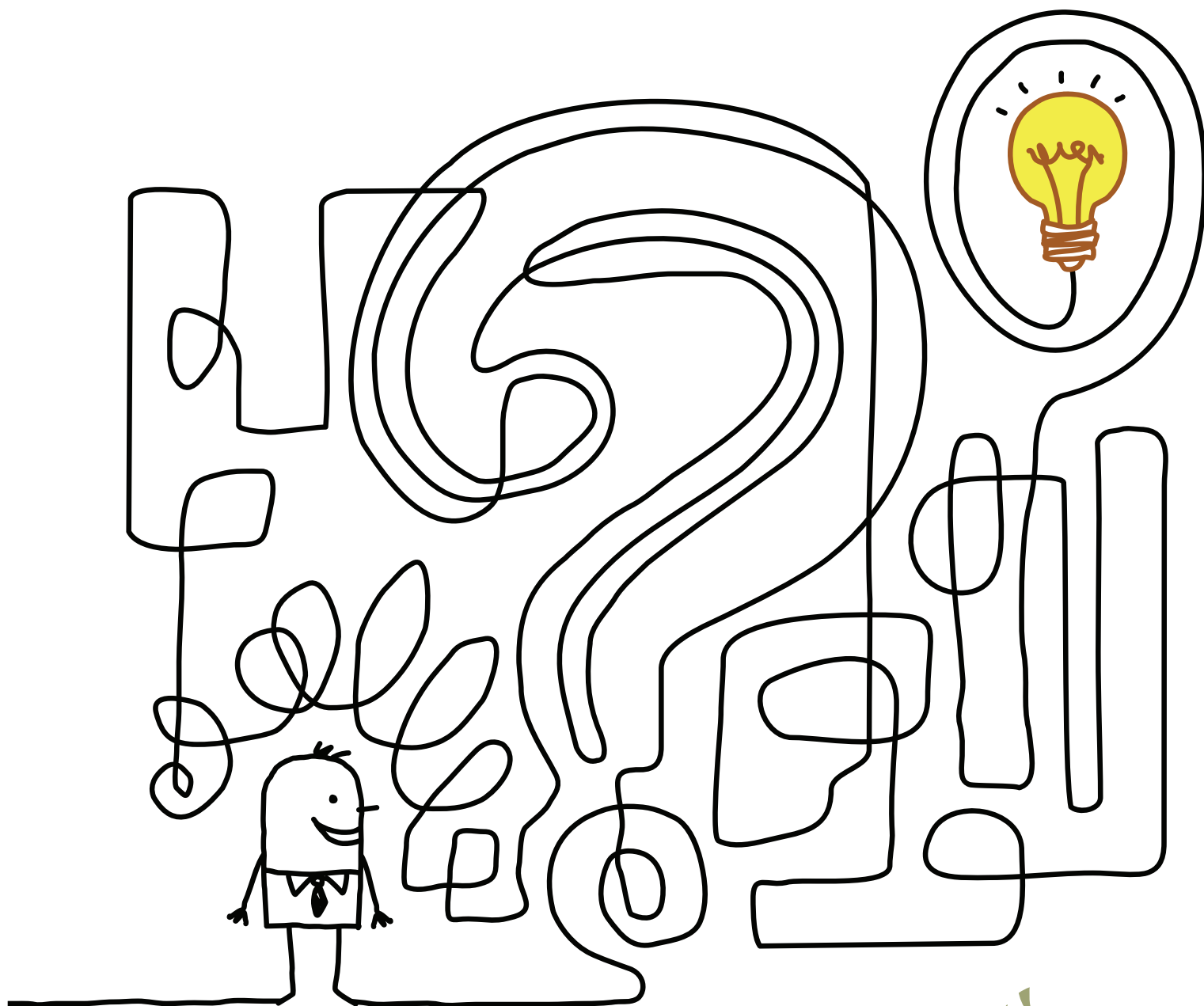
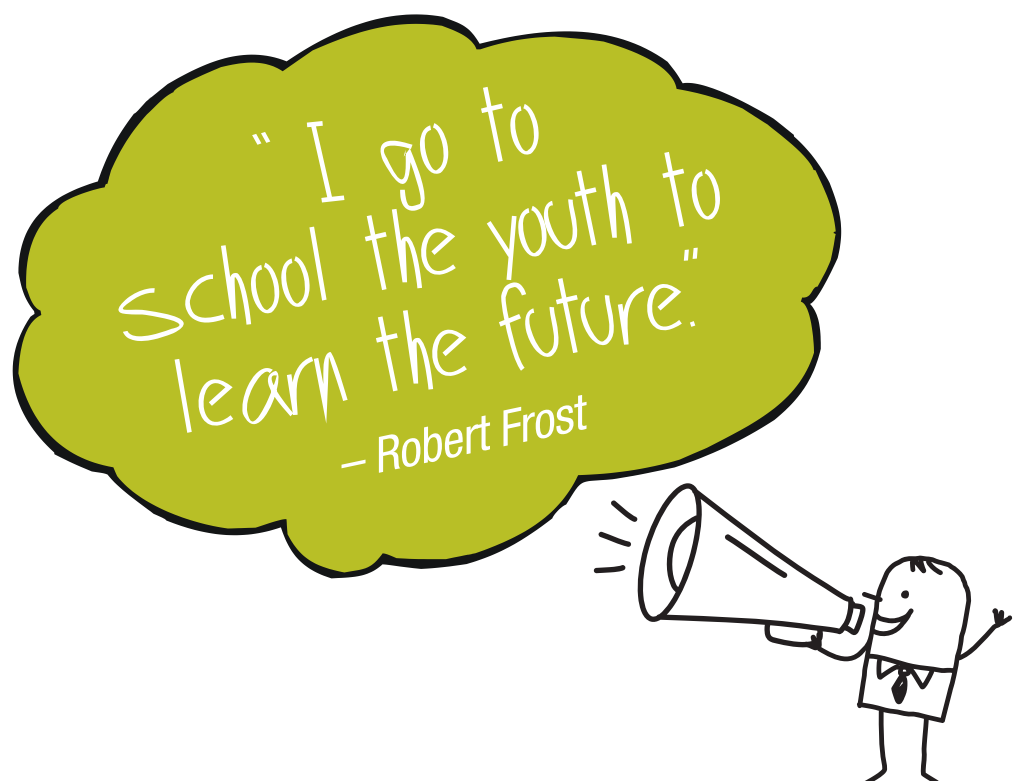


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INTRODUCTION

The City of Commerce City is dedicated to improving the lives of youth in Commerce City. Governments big and small have a social responsibility to provide the services and resources necessary for residents to be healthy and productive in the community. By investing in its youth, the city is positioning itself to have a stronger, more contributing population for generations to come.

The Commerce City Youth Master Plan is a major milestone in solidifying the city's commitment to its youth. The master plan is a roadmap to assess and guide city-driven youth programming and services, supporting youth success in the city. The plan specifically examines ways in which the city can have a positive effect on its young population.

The National League of Cities, a leader in strengthening cities to its fullest potential, defines youth master plans:

"As a product, youth master plans carry many different labels (including a children and youth agenda, city blueprint, or children's bill of rights), but they almost always offer a vision for the future, an assessment of current resources and needs, and a roadmap for moving forward that seeks to ensure accountability and sustainability over time. As a process, the development of a youth master plan advances a strategy in which municipal leaders – working together with school officials, and with input from young people as well as community organizations, parents, and other residents and stakeholders – craft a comprehensive and effective agenda for children and youth."

The plan also recognizes that existing education, health agencies, and other community resources in Commerce City all play important roles in youths' lives; cultivating success is a shared responsibility. This plan captures those resources so the city can continue its partnerships in a more thoughtful and strategic manner.

For many years, the city has implemented programs and initiatives that support youth, ranging from safe routes to school grants, recreation programs, parks and open space, to youth commission, school resource officers, nonprofit partnerships and more. While individual program objectives exist, the city has not adopted a programmatic approach to youth program investments, with identified measures of success.

The Commerce City Youth Master Plan can harness the city's existing efforts and align future activities with an eye toward addressing five key issue areas of importance to the city's youth. The intent is that the plan is realistic, achievable and manageable and does not overextend or overpromise its role in youth success.



VISION

The vision of the City of Commerce City's Youth Master Plan is to identify community and social investments in youth so current and future generations can have meaningful livelihoods; this contributes to creating a sustainable community.

Through city council's goals, the city strives to achieve its vision of creating a "Quality Community for a Lifetime." The youth master plan harmoniously ties to the city's mission to provide valuable services and programs, create a sustainable community, and enhance the quality of life in the community.

Much of what has been identified as youth issues/needs during the master plan development process have also been identified in the city's comprehensive plan and is being addressed through existing programs, projects and plans. Some overlapping goals include:

- Use land in a wise way, creating affordable housing for vibrant neighborhoods; develop spaces for employment, services and shopping.
- Connect neighborhoods and community with varied modes of transportation.
- Increase healthy living, medical facilities and public safety.
- Provide recreation facilities, parks and open spaces.

Aligning the youth master plan with the city's vision is an important piece of its success.

COMMERCE CITY AND ITS YOUTH

Commerce City is Colorado's fourth-fastest growing community, building on its historic values of community, industry, agriculture and family. With a population of nearly 50,000, the city covers 41 square miles and is expected to grow to a 64-square-mile area during the next 20 years.

Centrally located along Colorado's bustling Front Range, Commerce City lauds itself as being a safe, diverse, and welcoming community with 25 miles of trails, a championship golf course, 700 acres of open space and parks, 1,600 thriving businesses, one of the country's largest soccer complexes, and the nation's largest urban wildlife refuge.

Between two school districts and state charter schools, the city is home to about 25 schools and more than 12,000 students. There is currently no higher or continuing education facility and day care centers are at a minimum.

Compared to the state of Colorado, **Adams County has the highest proportion of children to adults**, about 4.3 percent higher than the state . It is also more ethnically diverse, with about half of the city's population identifying as Hispanic.

Adams County youth generally face many of the same challenges regardless of what school they are in²:

- Lower household incomes (25 percent lower than Colorado)
- Almost half population of students on reduced or free lunches
- Higher teen births (43.5 per 1,000 births vs. 27.8 for Colorado)
- Higher births to single women (27 percent vs. 24% for Colorado)

Given the city's demographic makeup, these numbers are likely higher in Commerce City. The data also suggests that students in the Adams 14 school district struggle a bit more in most areas. For example, they experience higher gang involvement and substance abuse, are less likely to reach out to an adult for help, and report less parent engagement.

¹ Adams County Youth Initiative website, <http://acyi.org/>.

² Adams County Youth Initiative Student Survey, County Results, 2012-2013.

PLANNING PROCESS

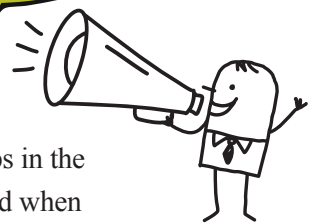
Relentlessly working toward the greater good for its people, city council annually sets goals and objectives to move the city forward in achieving success. To focus on youth, city council specifically established an objective to develop and implement a youth-in-government initiative. Thus, in October 2012, city council approved the establishment of the city's first youth commission. A month later, the city's inaugural youth commission was appointed.

The youth commission is comprised of youth, 13-19, who either live or attend school in the city. At any given time, there is a maximum of 20 youth members and four adult members, including two council representatives.

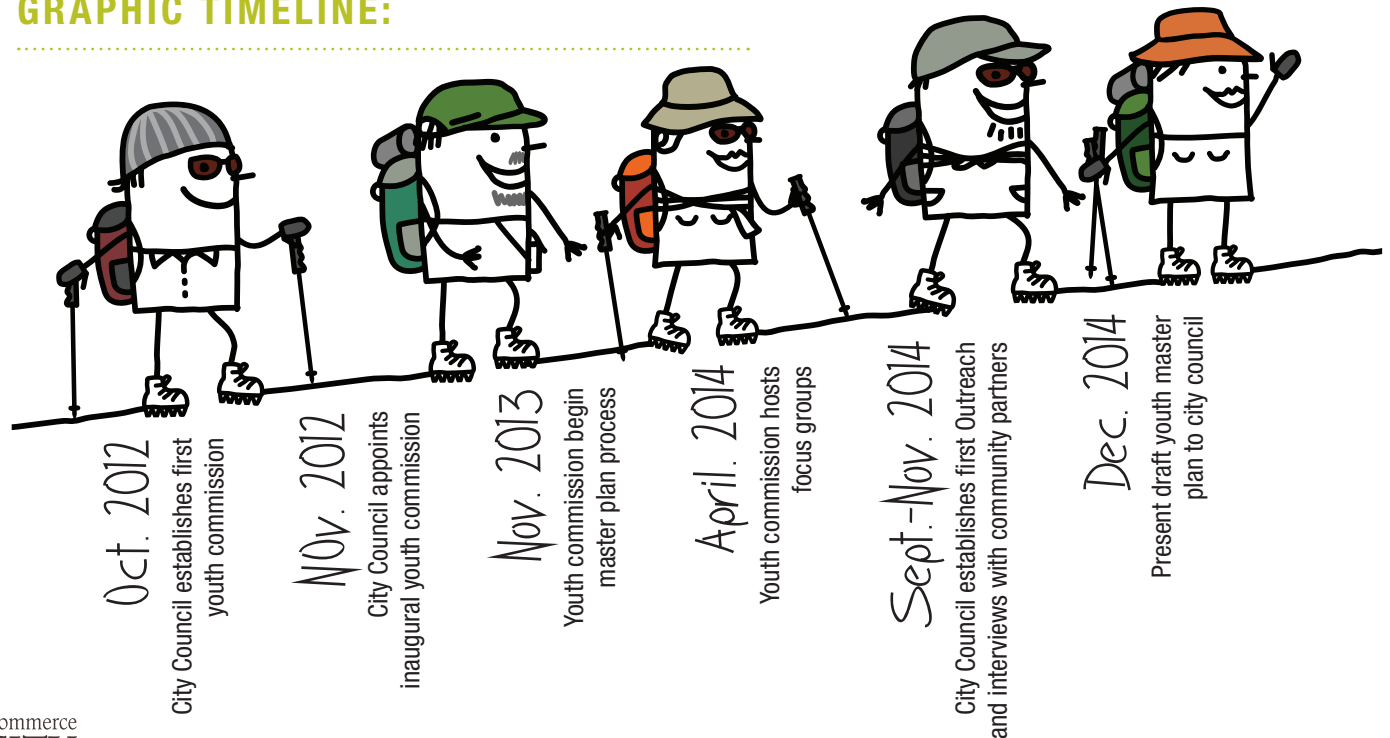
Recognizing the need for greater alignment among internal and with external organization's to advance youth success, the process for creating the city's first youth master plan began with the youth commission in November 2013. Under the youth commission's code, Sec. 2-3005, the youth commission shall work with city council to develop policies, advice city council on issues that relate to youth, and help build partnerships in the community that impact both youth and families. Creating a youth master plan was anticipated when the commission was established by city council.

YOUTH COMMISSION MISSION:

Serve as the voice of Commerce City youth by generating and acting on ideas to inspire a better community today and tomorrow.



GRAPHIC TIMELINE:



An initial roundtable discussion was facilitated with the youth commission. Commissioners shared the many issues they see facing Commerce City youth. Through this initial brainstorming and further discussions, the commission identified five main areas of focus to provide the framework for the city's youth master plan:

- Early Childhood Development
- Youth Development
- Education
- Health and Safety
- Neighborhoods and Community

To better understand specific needs in these five areas, the commissioners held focus groups at local high schools. The focus groups were facilitated by youth commission members instead of adults to gain more genuine feedback. About 40 students between Adams City High School and Prairie View High School participated.

In addition to the youth feedback, which provides for stronger advocacy for youth needs and is an essential piece of developing the youth master plan, a combination of community and student data was used in developing specific goals for the master plan.

The Adams County Youth Initiative is an essential source for youth data. The non-profit conducts annual surveys with middle and high school-aged students to measure the success and well-being of youth in the county. The most recent survey results included 2,292 students from Adams 14 and 2,441 from 27J districts, providing a significant snapshot of youth issues³.

One-on-one interviews with community partners and city departments provided additional supporting information from those who work directly with youth in Commerce City. Feedback from these interviews contributes to specific areas of focus and goals in the youth master plan.

The National League of Cities' Institute for Youth, Education, and Families has been a guiding source in developing the youth master plan, providing a framework for the entire process.

³ For purposes of this plan, data representing Adams County as a whole will be used as it generally reflects the Commerce City's socioeconomic and demographic makeup.

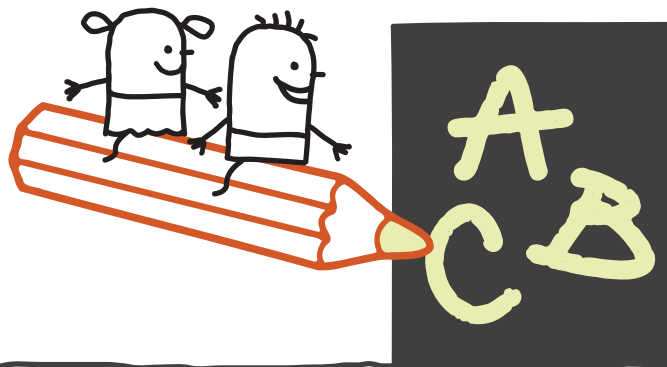
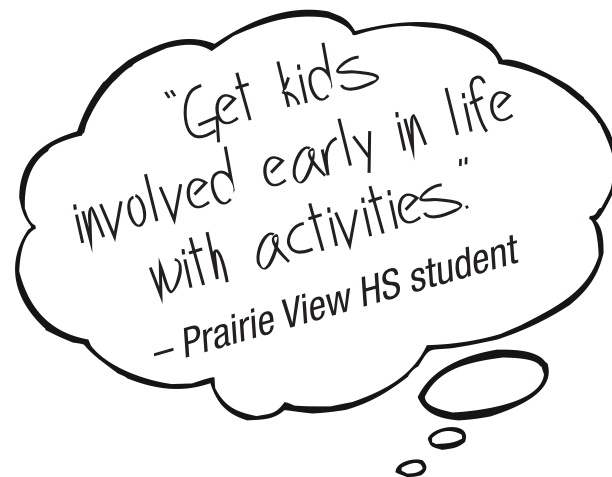
AREAS OF FOCUS

The five identified areas of focus for addressing youth needs in the city are organized to provide a summary of the issue importance, a brief assessment of common themes and issues identified during the data collection process, and specific goals to address these themes. By identifying existing programs and resources within each of these focus areas, the city can complete further analysis for policy discussion on how to improve strategic partnerships, programs and investments, consistent with recommended plan actions.

Early Childhood Development

Early childhood development focuses on the development of children birth to 8 years old as it relates to health, education, family support and other systems required during these rapid years of growth so they can be successful upon entering school.

Establishing positive development in young children may be one of the strongest ways to contribute to lifelong success. For example, experts connect the level at which a child reads to their overall success in life. Poor reading proficiency in third grade relates to high school graduation, future earning potential, crime rates and many more societal cornerstones.



Assessment

- About half of kids are not ready for kindergarten; they lack the preschool education needed to be successful before entering school.
- Low number of affordable, licensed day care centers in city. There is a high number of in-home day care, which is hard to control the quality of learning.
- Parents may not have the skills or time to properly develop their own children.
- Lack of voter support for investing in early childhood expansion

Goals

- Foster an environment for affordable and quality child care facilities.
- Continue promoting city's state-licensed preschool programs and help raise awareness of the importance of early childhood development.
- Evaluate and implement ways current city services can promote and leverage early childhood resources when engaging with the community.
- Promote external resources available to families, ranging from mental, health, education, housing, food, etc.
- Support school districts on early childhood development efforts.

Existing programs and resources

- Commerce City Recreation Center preschool programs
- Early Childhood Partnership of Adams County
- Adams County Human Services
- Adams County Head Start
- Stars Early Learning Center
- Schools and school districts
- Community Reach Center
- Community Enterprise

Youth Development

Youth Development focuses on preparing those ages 9 to 18 to meet the challenges of becoming successful adults so they can achieve their full potential. This includes social/emotional development, adult support, and meaningful participation in the community. Schools, families, peers, civic leaders, and other community resources play a role in youth development.

Being engaged in the youth development process is an important way to build mutually beneficial relationships between a city and its community. This may be a last chance for a city to positively influence youth in the way they approach their individual, family and community actions before they become an adult.

Assessment

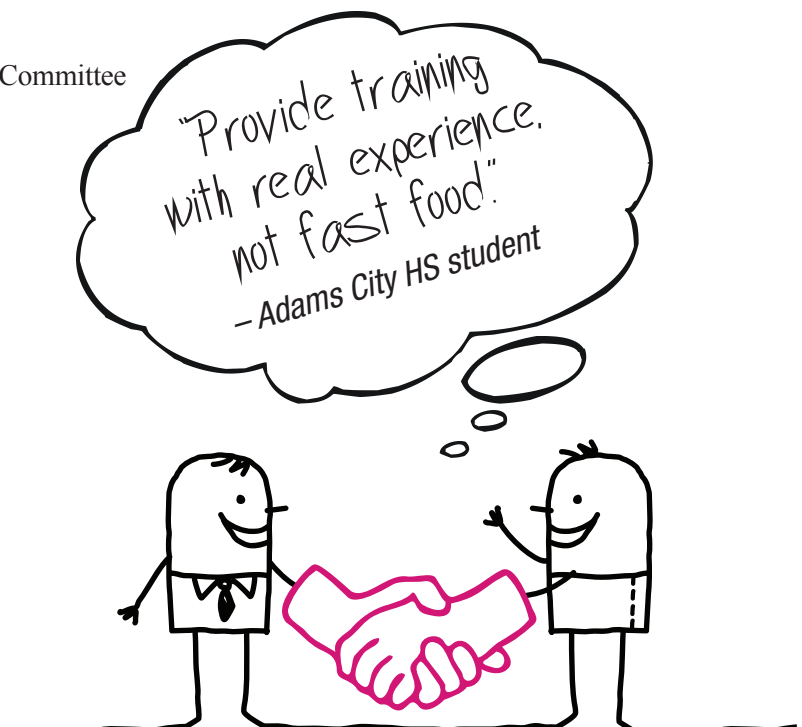
- City youth need resources and guidance on college and/or career options.
- Lack of parent involvement and/or adult role models.
- Shortage of programs/opportunities that engage youth during out-of-school time.

Goals

- Promote and provide opportunities for youth to gain guidance on continuing education, workforce readiness and life skills training.
- Identify effective ways to increase parent involvement and promote adult role models and mentorships.
- Continue strategic partnerships with non-city services such as Boys and Girls Club, school districts, YMCA, etc. to develop and promote positive out-of-school activities.

Existing programs and resources

- Boys & Girls Club
- Parks and Recreation Youth Advisory Committee
- Commerce City Youth Commission
- Commerce City Teen Court
- Schools and school districts
- Adams County Youth Initiative
- College in Colorado
- The ARC of Adams County
- Various mentoring programs
- Community Enterprise
- Commerce City Recreation Center



Education

Whether a student graduates or not is a solid indicator of his future success. Adams County has a 70 percent graduation rate compared to 77 percent for the state. This is 68 percent at Adams City High School and 83 percent at Prairie View High School.

While schools typically take the lead on K-12 education, there are plenty of opportunities for cities to provide its community with the resources for desired educational outcomes. The master plan is a tool that can strengthen partnerships between the city and educators.

Assessment

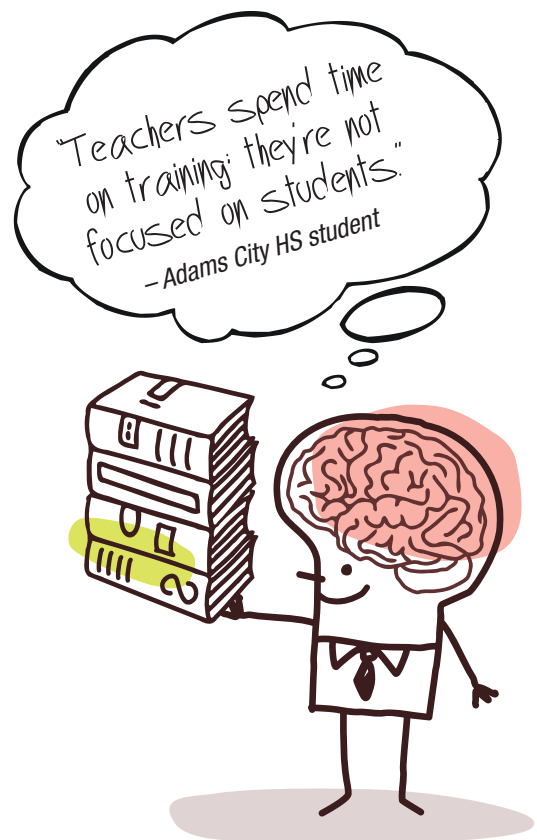
- Students feel like there's a lack of access to college and career resources such as scholarships, internships and general guidance.
- Lack of voter support for needed facility improvements
- Attendance and truancy is an issue. At Prairie View High School, 33.3 percent of students indicated they've skipped school while 41.3 percent at indicated skipping at Adams City High School. These are both higher than the county average (33 percent).
- Fourth grade students not proficient in reading is about 10 percent higher in Adams County than the state (41.5 percent in the county)

Goals

- Promote and provide opportunities for youth to gain guidance on continuing education, workforce readiness and life skills training.
- Support school districts on education initiatives.
- Better understand truancy and attendance issues and work with schools on way to improve.

Existing programs and resources

- Schools and school districts
- College in Colorado
- Community Enterprise
- Police Department Explorers
- Anythink Library



Health and Safety

Health and safety focuses on the physical, mental and emotional well-being of youth in the city. This includes youth substance abuse, sexual health and teen pregnancy, gang prevention, bullying and the overall feeling of being safe.

Feeling safe and security and having access to health services are part of what human beings require as basic needs. Public health and safety are foundational pieces of a civilized community.

Assessment

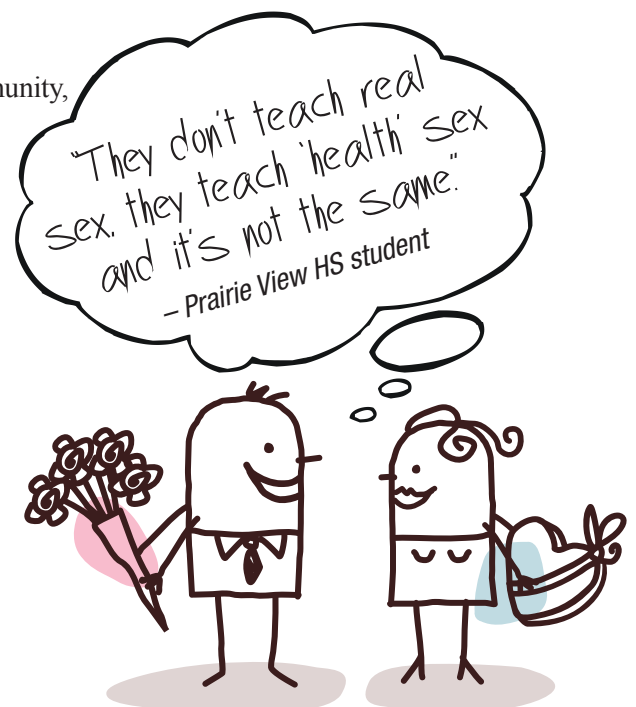
- There is a substance abuse problem with city youth. About a quarter of high school students have ridden in a vehicle driven by someone else who had been smoking marijuana.
- Students feel unsafe walking to and from school. This may be because of traffic or other unsafe situations with people.
- Lack of trust in law enforcement is prevalent and may stem from the parents, especially in the Hispanic community and youth.
- Access to mental health and support groups for teenagers is important.
- Sexual health and teen pregnancy education needs more attention. In Adams County, 38.6 percent of women between the ages of 15-18 given birth. The state average is 24.3 percent.

Goals

- Help promote partners' existing anti-drugs and alcohol campaigns.
- Identify ways in which the city can support teen pregnancy prevention programs.
- Promote mental health services.
- Continue with safe routes to schools.
- Develop and implement a formal plan to build positive relationships between the police department and the community, with special attention paid to the Hispanic community.

Existing programs and resources

- Adams County Sheriff's Office
- The Link
- Salud Family Health Center
- Commerce City Police Department
- Kids First Health Care
- VOIHCE
- Commerce City Recreation Center
- Community Enterprise



Neighborhoods and Community

The way in which residents perceive and experience their neighborhood and community effects the overall satisfaction in quality of life. City planning, civic engagement, jobs, economic vitality and togetherness all contribute to youths' success and community well-being.

Creating a sustainable, quality community through neighborhoods and development is addressed in the city's comprehensive plan. Much like health and safety, developing a community that provides essential needs (affordable housing, jobs, safe spaces, etc.) is a core function of city so it is no surprise that items identified here have already been identified in the comprehensive plan.

Assessment

- Youth identified a need for safe spaces and activities for youth to gather together specifically as it relates to physical activity and entertainment (movies and music).
- Lack of parent involvement and adult role models.
- Affordable housing and access to public transportation is important.
- Low community interaction among residents.

Goals

- Continue building a community that provides safe spaces for youth to gather such as parks, recreation, and retail and entertainment areas.
- Identify effective ways to increase parent involvement and promote adult role models and mentorships.
- Continue focusing on affordable housing and public transportation for the entire community.
- Cultivate meaningful ways for youth and families to interact.

Programs and resources

- Boys and Girls Club
- Commerce City Recreation Center
- Community Enterprise
- Neighborhood associations and community groups



NEXT STEPS

Below is a consolidation of area focus goals into overarching plan actions the city can collectively work toward. Ongoing activities can be refined and formatted to ensure strategic alignment with the master plan actions, while others can be addressed over the next 1-6 years. Some plan actions require additional policy direction and further discussion by City Council to provide specific focus for staff activities or meaningful investments. One of the most important actions pertinent to the plan is to review and update the youth master plan to meet current youth needs every 4-6 years. This allows the city an opportunity to measure success and adjust its focus accordingly.

SEE CHART ON NEXT PAGE

There are a variety of ways to measure success of the youth master plan. Being intentional in city investments, aligning actions with focus areas, tracking program participation levels, reductions in indicators and engagement of community youth are all metrics that will be used to refine and adapt city activities.

YOUTH MASTER PLAN ACTIONS

<i>Actions</i>	<i>Who is responsible?</i>	<i>Is this part of another plan or program?</i>	<i>What areas of focus does this support?</i>	<i>Years 1-3</i>	<i>Years 4-6</i>	<i>Ongoing</i>
Identify funding for a full-time, dedicated staff to focus on all youth and family services throughout the city.	City Manager's Office	No	All	X		
Strengthen collaboration and partnerships between city and school districts so they are mutually beneficial and supportive.	City Manager's Office	Yes. City Council priorities.	Education	X		
Develop and implement a plan to build positive relationships between the police department and the community, with special attention paid to the Hispanic community and youth.	Police Department	Yes. Police Youth Services Priority List	Health and Safety	X		
Evaluate and implement ways the city can promote and leverage existing early childhood education both internally and externally.	Parks and Recreation	No	Early Childhood	X		
Review and update youth master plan to meet current youth needs.	City Manager's Office	No	All		X	
Identify effective ways to increase parent involvement and promote adult role models and mentorships.	City Manager's Office	No	Youth Development		X	
Follow legislative trends and engage Youth Commission on specific topics that affect the city's youth	City Manager's Office	No	All			X
On an annual basis, the youth commission selects at least one topic from the master plan to advocate for.	City Manager's Office	No	All			X
Continue developing a quality community by providing affordable housing, quality services (day care, medical, mental), workforce readiness skills, continuing education, safe routes to school, safe spaces for play and social gathering, public transportation and more.	Community Development	Yes. Comprehensive Plan.	All			X
Support overall promotion of youth activities, programs and services from outside agencies aligned with the city's youth master plan.	City Manager's Office	No	All			X
Continue strategic partnerships with non-city services such as Boys and Girls Club, school districts, YMCA, etc. to develop and promote positive out-of-school activities.	All departments, but mostly PRG and CMO	No	Youth Development			X
Cultivate meaningful ways for youth and families to interact.	All departments	No	Neighborhoods and Community			X

IN SUMMARY

With Adams County having such a high proportion of children to adults, it's critical the city continue its efforts in supporting youth success. It is a long, continual commitment that requires some nimbleness and flexibility in its approach. Issues and factors affecting today's youth may look very different from just five years from now.

Successful implementation of the youth master plan should leverage the positives and be aware of its challenges. Implementation also will require further policy discussions, deepening partnerships and consistent program alignment throughout the city.

Positives:

- City council commitment
- Existing programs and services in place
- Upward movement
- Creation of Youth Master Plan

Challenges:

- Youth and parent lack of trust in government and other agencies
- Lack of parent engagement and community support
- Not cohesive approach or strong partnerships with organizations
- Funding

Just in the last decade, and through its many city council-approved plans and programs, the city has taken significant steps to improve the quality of life for all residents. The youth master plan is an essential tool to assure that the elements important to the city's youth, do not fall to the wayside.