MCLENNAN COUNTY CHILD WELL-BEING COMMUNITY ACTION PLAN

An initiative by

The McLennan County
CHILD WELL-BEING MOVEMENT

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INTRODUCTION

When children are well, families and whole communities are well.

In 2021, the McLennan County Child Well-being Movement released *Are the Children Well?*, a report which showed the conditions in our community that make it difficult for children and families to flourish in certain neighborhoods of our county. Our findings revealed that intentional effort must be made to ensure all necessary resources are available throughout area communities that can support child and family success. The report, which underscored the importance of using a holistic, two-generational approach when responding to matters of child well-being, emphasized that children thrive when their families are thriving in supportive community environments that meet their needs.

The *McLennan County Child Well-being Community Action Plan* has been crafted as a response to the findings of the *Are the Children Well?* report. Community-defined strategies and action steps shared here reveal a grander vision for this county that includes rethinking how our local systems, policies, and community investments impact children and their families. This plan is designed to serve as a road map for improving many of our county's current conditions so that we see an increase in positive outcomes for more children and families living in communities across McLennan County.

No one entity can do this work alone. With a commitment to take action from residents, city and county governments, nonprofit and for-profit sectors, and philanthropic partners, we can make meaningful change for generations to come.

This is just the beginning of our collective journey to ensure local families are supported so that all children flourish. Expect more community conversations, continued strategizing, and most importantly, continued action until more children and families thrive.

When every child and their family can pursue and realize their aspirations, our entire community is better for it.

MOBILIZING FOR ACTION

COMMUNITY ACTION PLANNING TEAM

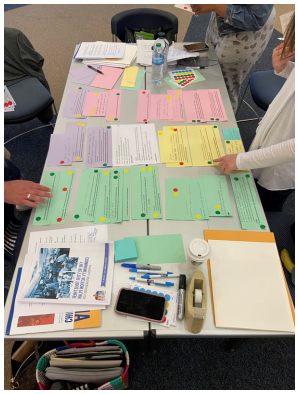
This plan is the product of a continued collaborative effort between local residents and organizations working together for the betterment of our community. The McLennan County Child Well-being Movement Community Action Planning Team consisted of a Community Advisory Board of grassroots leaders who are long-time McLennan County residents committed to the success of their neighborhoods and the community as a whole, as well as a Core Partner Team of organizational leaders representing expertise across the education, healthcare, city government, and nonprofit sectors. This planning team spent countless hours gaining residents' insights in small group conversations and larger community forums. Together, in a series of meetings hosted over nearly one year, the team utilized this resident feedback and responded decisively with the following strategies and action steps which make up this community action plan.

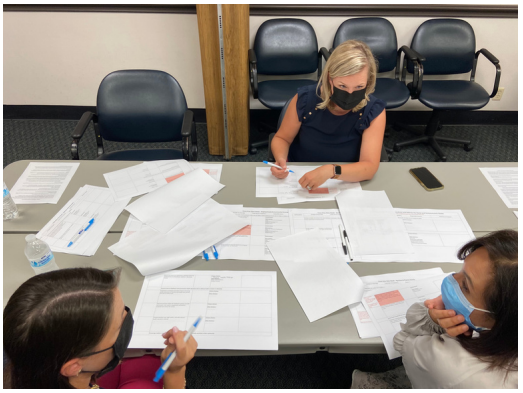
To date, the voices of over **825 residents** have informed both the *Are the Children Well?* report and this community action plan.

466 resident survey responses

46 community conversations hosted across 14 zip codes

26 hours of community action planning meetings





A CALL TO ACTION

FOCUS AREAS

Seven Key Themes rose from community conversations that informed the *Are the Children Well?* report. These key themes were further condensed into **five Focus Areas** that make up this action plan aimed at better supporting McLennan County's ***children, families, and communities.***

- ENSURE ACCESS TO HIGH-QUALITY CHILDCARE AND EDUCATIONAL OPPORTUNITIES
- MEET THE BASIC NEEDS OF CHILDREN AND FAMILIES
- INCREASE ACCESS TO RESOURCES
- CREATE MORE CONNECTEDNESS & ADDRESS THE RACIAL DIVIDE
- TAKE ACTION

SHARED COMMITMENTS

Throughout the entirety of this process, we held fast to four **Shared Commitments** as guiding principles for the work and we believe they are critical to the continued success of this movement. It was with great intentionality that the movement partners ensured all strategies and action steps in this community action plan reflect these fundamental principles. **We commit to:**

1. **CONTINUOUS ENGAGEMENT**
   Sharing decision-making power and centering the voices and lived experiences of residents in all phases of this work as it grows and evolves.
2. **EQUITY**
   Working toward changing mindsets, practices and systems that do not adequately serve all children and families in our county.
3. **A HOLISTIC APPROACH**
   Acknowledging child well-being as multi-dimensional, and seeking to better support both children and the adults in their lives.
4. **CROSS-SECTOR COLLABORATION**
   Creating collaborative partnerships that achieve impactful change.

FOCUS AREAS & STRATEGIC PRIORITIES

The goal of this community action plan is to prioritize residents' aspirations for change so that more children and families thrive throughout area communities. Below is an overview of resident-identified strategic priorities that have been crafted to address each **Focus Area**.

FOCUS AREA: ENSURE ACCESS TO HIGH-QUALITY CHILDCARE AND EDUCATIONAL OPPORTUNITIES

Strategies & Action Steps: High Quality Childcare

Provide non-traditional childcare options

- Ensure the availability of center-based care that offers flexible and extended hours of operation to accommodate a variety of caregiver needs (e.g. drop-in service, late or overnight hours and weekend hours).
- Ensure the availability of center-based care that offers inclusive childcare options to families with special circumstances (e.g. caregivers of foster children, children with disabilities).
- Expand the availability of licensed childcare homes by subsidizing start-up costs and providing capacity-building support to obtain and maintain licensure.
- Encourage local employers to provide high-quality, on-site childcare for employees' children.

Increase affordability of childcare and increase wages and benefits for childcare staff

- Advocate for state and local policies that support affordable childcare and promote higher pay for childcare workers.
- Invest in public-private partnerships that provide financial and other resources to support childcare centers as small businesses.
- Implement a local shared services model to lessen the burden of operating costs on individual childcare centers.
- Encourage local employers to adopt policies that provide financial assistance to employees to lessen the burden of childcare costs.

Increase access to high-quality childcare centers

- Advocate for state and local policies that support and encourage quality ratings and accountability standards such as Texas Rising Star and the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) in local childcare offerings.
- Publicly promote Texas Rising Star and the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) accredited centers to parents as high-quality childcare options.
- Increase the retention of highly trained childcare staff by incentivizing their participation in ongoing professional development.

Gain a commitment from city and county leaders to provide resources that improve access to high-quality childcare

- Provide incentives to area companies that commit to contributing to the accessibility of high-quality childcare (e.g. provide on-site childcare, enter into a cooperative agreement to provide offsite childcare, etc.).
- Require local childcare centers applying for city/county funds to prioritize salary increases and professional development in grant requests.

Promote the inclusion of multi-lingual communication in childcare centers and schools to encourage language achievement in young children

- Prioritize recruiting and hiring bilingual/multi-lingual certified teachers to work in childcare centers and other educational settings.
- Expand bilingual/multi-lingual programs in school districts beginning in Pre-Kindergarten so that every student experiences an immersion in language learning and culture.
- Expand the Grow Your Own Teacher Program throughout county school districts to retain diverse and bilingual/multi-lingual local talent reflective of area communities.
- Provide training and study support to assist immigrants with passing examinations necessary to obtain Texas educator certification (e.g. training for TOEFL and other testing).

Strategies & Action Steps: Education & Extracurricular Activities

Ensure equitable access to educational opportunities for kids across all communities

- Provide a variety of innovative extracurricular programs (with bilingual options) that are responsive to the needs of all kids across all county school systems.
- Identify and remove barriers to children attending existing community programs by offering a variety of free or low-cost quality programming for children.

- Implement targeted marketing strategies to promote existing community programs to families across all communities.

Include more creative and affordable out-of-school activities for children

- Prioritize ensuring access to out-of-school activities (including the arts, physical activities, and other culturally-affirming programming) for children of color.
- Gain a commitment from city & county government to support and fund out-of-school activities.
- Host more full-day summer programming sites across the community.

Ensure access to free or low-cost educational opportunities for the whole family within community programming

- Promote and expand two-generational approaches to programs that allow parents to participate in their own educational pursuits and simultaneously engage children in early learning activities.

Strategies & Action Steps: Healthcare & Mental Health

HEALTHCARE

Address maltreatment of people of color and women in healthcare systems

- Train and mobilize individuals such as promotoras and community health workers in the local healthcare systems to serve as patient advocates on matters such as cultural awareness and patient rights.
- Educate and empower individuals to advocate for themselves when receiving healthcare services.
- Train healthcare staff (in all roles) in health equity, implicit and explicit bias, motivational interviewing, customer service, patient autonomy and informed consent to reduce unintentional bias affecting patient health outcomes.
- Encourage healthcare systems to analyze disaggregated data (at minimum by gender and race) to assess patient outcomes in relation to the care received from providers.
- Ensure that there is a system for anonymous reporting of patient maltreatment at all healthcare facilities in McLennan County.

Increase awareness of healthcare services and preventative health education available to individuals regardless of their health insurance or citizenship status

- Implement a marketing campaign aimed at increasing public awareness of free and low-cost healthcare services.
- Provide high-quality, culturally relevant health education material.

Increase representation of local communities of color in the healthcare systems

- Encourage local people of color to pursue healthcare careers to begin building a pipeline of future providers of color in McLennan County.
- Encourage medical institutions to recruit, hire and retain personnel that represent local communities of color.

MENTAL HEALTH

Expand local mental health services

- Provide free or low-cost, language-inclusive counseling services.

- Create partnerships that integrate counseling services within community programming.
- Implement targeted marketing strategies to promote counseling and mental health services (in English and Spanish).
- Provide early education and interventions that address cultural stigma associated with the pursuit of mental health services within communities of color.
- Conduct intentional recruitment of Black and Hispanic, Spanish-speaking, male and female mental health professionals to practice in McLennan County.
- Provide scholarships to local people of color to pursue mental health careers.
- Implement a fast-track Spanish language course for non-Spanish speaking counselors.
- Increase the number of Licensed Clinical Social Workers working one-on-one with students to meet mental healthcare needs in schools.
- Increase local resources available for adult substance abuse (e.g. OSAR services, outpatient treatment, treatment beds, and drug courts).
- Encourage expansion of police referrals to Waco Connect for individuals with identified mental health needs.

Strategies & Action Steps: Nutrition & Physical Activity

NUTRITION

Provide high-quality, free, healthy food at schools and childcare centers

- Eliminate processed foods from school and childcare center menus and implement preparation and cooking of fresh, quality foods that are attractive to students and reflective of their cultures.
- Ensure all local school districts have a District Nutritionist or Registered Dietician that works collaboratively with the Director of Cafeteria Services to plan school meals.
- Develop partnerships with local culinary programs, urban farms and community gardens to source fresh, healthy foods.
- Provide educational programs and food demonstrations to teach families and students how to cook easy, healthy and affordable meals.

Create a supportive community environment for breastfeeding women

- Encourage employers to implement policies to support breastfeeding women.
- Increase public and private spaces to accommodate breastfeeding women.

PHYSICAL ACTIVITY

Expand opportunities for physical activity across communities in the county

- Provide free, facilitated sports activities to families.
- Provide access to school playgrounds after hours and on weekends.
- Build parks in neighborhoods without access to green spaces and play areas.
- Provide mobile recreation activities at city parks.

Strategies & Action Steps: Neighborhoods & Community Housing

Invest in neighborhoods in such a way that preserves culture, does not displace families, and brings amenities that are helpful to existing residents

- Improve access to grocery stores and transportation in neighborhoods that lack access.
- Market resources to assist with home ownership and improvement (e.g. lead removal, repairs, down payment assistance).
- Provide a legacy advantage to long-time residents to secure low tax rates and increase affordability of their current property.
- Create avenues for long-time residents to be financial investors in their own community.
- Create steering committees in neighborhoods to provide resident input on new development projects.
- Work to make neighborhoods, sidewalks, and parks safer with security & lights.

Strategies & Action Steps: Workforce Development & Financial Stability

WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT

Provide resources that allow individuals to participate in adult education and job skills training courses and access job opportunities upon completion

- Place adult education programs in neighborhoods across the county and ensure intentional marketing and recruitment within each community.
- Use libraries, community facilities, and other community services to host and connect individuals to fast-paced job skills courses (6-8 weeks) that allow them to quickly access jobs.

- Form partnerships between local educational institutions and childcare centers to increase access to educational programming for adults.
- Partner with childcare centers to serve as a communication hub to share information and resources about educational opportunities with parents.
- Provide virtual or self-paced options for training courses.
- Provide transportation to training locations.
- Provide childcare at training locations or provide reimbursement to participants to cover childcare costs while attending training courses.
- Connect course participants with local employers who are actively hiring to increase employment after graduation.
- Ensure educational and job skills courses are culturally inclusive and welcoming for all participants.

Encourage local employers to expand employee benefits and resources to increase workforce recruitment and retention

- Encourage local employers to implement family-friendly workplace policies and practices such as flexible scheduling and remote working.
- Encourage local employers to offer transportation assistance to employees living in communities that lack transportation access.

Improve job accessibility for McLennan County residents

- Expand resources available for organizations providing immigration support and education.
- Strategically market services that assist with citizenship classes and applications.
- Train employers on how to navigate the employment visa process.
- Provide education to immigrants about the risks associated with using Public Notary.
- Provide education to immigrant workers about the American tax system and documentation of income.
- Implement programs to assist residents with gaining employment after incarceration.

Implement workforce training for high school students

- Expand job shadowing and paid internship opportunities for high school students through partnerships with local businesses and organizations.
- Educate high school students about career opportunities and local certification programs available to provide career pathways after graduation.

- Implement soft skills training for high school students to support workforce entry.
- Expand the availability of technical programs for graduating high school students.
- Educate on topics such as what is needed for college applications and completing the FAFSA process.

FINANCIAL STABILITY

Create opportunities for residents to build savings

- Work with local employers to increase wages in proportion to the cost of living.
- Provide utility assistance to residents on an income-based sliding scale.

Provide community financial education

- Host financial education drives in community spaces and at elementary schools for our youngest residents and their families.
- Educate immigrants about how to obtain their Individual Taxpayer Identification Number (ITIN).
- Educate community members on topics such as managing personal finances, taxes, and starting a small business.

FOCUS AREA: INCREASE ACCESS TO RESOURCES

Strategies & Action Steps:

Provide local resources (staff, programs, information) in Spanish throughout community services

- Ensure more bilingual people are hired for publicly-facing positions.
- Include bilingual staff in recruitment and hiring processes.
- Create a language justice plan which identifies prominently spoken languages of the community, details community needs, and provides ideas for implementation within local organizations and services.
- Build awareness for the importance of language justice and create buy-in from community organizations to implement strategies.
- Provide interpreter/translator certification classes with opportunities for scholarships to participate.
- Provide language interpretation (by individuals or devices) during community gatherings to ensure effective communication with people speaking languages other than English.

Expand access to and utilization of English language learning classes for adults

- Provide classes at convenient locations and times throughout the day.
- Include on-site childcare for participating families.

Ensure local resources are accessible to vision impaired, hearing impaired and non-reading residents throughout community services

- Develop a comprehensive communication equity plan with strategies to increase accessibility to local services for residents with communication impairments.

Provide a "one-stop-shop" community hub where families can gain access to information about available local resources

- Create a community resource center that is easily accessible to area residents.
- Staff the community resource center with bilingual navigators who conduct outreach and connect residents to resources within the facility and throughout the community.
- Create a community resource website that has information available in English and Spanish and is well-promoted through local communication platforms.

Make a collaborative effort to increase hours of operation across all community-based organizations

- Encourage entities who do not have extended hours to assess the needs of their clients and make changes accordingly.

Ease the financial burden on families with income too high to qualify for community programs, but too low to support children's needs

- Create a local subsidy program that assists low-to-moderate income families who are ineligible for social services with meeting their basic needs.

Provide supportive classes and groups for caregivers of children

- Host groups for caregivers of children that cover topics related to (but not limited to) breastfeeding, parenting, pregnancy and postpartum, fatherhood, teen parenting, caregivers of children with disabilities, and mental health support.

Increase access to community-specific news outlets

- Designate a central place and method for communicating neighborhood and/or community-specific news in a culturally relevant way, and ensure it is accessible in primary languages spoken throughout area communities.

- Support the sustainability of community-specific and BIPOC-led/centered informational outlets.

FOCUS AREA: CREATE MORE CONNECTEDNESS & ADDRESS THE RACIAL DIVIDE

Strategies & Action Steps:

Bring about a culture shift by promoting equitable and culturally competent practices as the standard way of serving the public

- Expand availability of race equity trainings to public-facing professionals across various sectors of the community (include a Spanish equivalent).

Host community gatherings and activities to promote connection and belonging

- Coordinate collaborative community efforts planned and led by leaders of color and local organizations.
- Ensure opportunities are available for people with similar interests across the community to gather regularly (i.e., coffee for new caregivers, family park playdates, neighborhood events, etc.).
- Expand availability of free community meeting spaces in neighborhoods that allow for opportunities to gather.
- Strategically market events and activities to various communities across the county ensuring to communicate in local languages and with appeal to all cultures.

FOCUS AREA: TAKE ACTION

Strategies & Action Steps:

Ensure community resources are directed toward community-identified needs

- Integrate a resident feedback process in city, county, and organizational decision-making efforts.
- Develop a group of "community connectors" who serve as liaisons between residents, city/county government, and local organizations.

Grow leaders and work toward greater diversity in local leadership

- Provide regular opportunities that inform residents of ways to become involved in various forms of civic engagement.
- Diversify leadership programs by recruiting local grassroots leaders and ensure to connect them to various leadership opportunities throughout the community.

THANK YOU

The McLennan County Child Well-being Movement would like to thank every resident and community partner that participated throughout this process. This work could not be done without your unwavering dedication and steadfast commitment to working towards ensuring all children and families of McLennan County have the resources and supports they desire and that they are indeed,

well.

The McLennan County
CHILD WELL-BEING MOVEMENT

is powered by:

United Way of
Waco-McLennan County
Local Giving. Local Impact.

mclennancountychildwellbeing.org