



STUART FOUNDATION

ADOLESCENTS IN CALIFORNIA

Creating the Conditions for Thriving

Adolescents are building knowledge, skills, relationships, and agency.

- 🧠 Significant **brain development** and growth, equivalent to early childhood.
- 🤝 Profound **social learning**: relationships take center stage.
- 🦋 Developing **sense of self** — identity, values, goals, and aspirations.
- 🙋 Growing **ability and desire to contribute** to families, schools, communities.

“The adolescent brain is thirsty for exploration, learning, and social relationships.”

— Dr. Adriana Galván, UCLA Center for the Developing Adolescent

Essential developmental needs of adolescents:



Ways to explore, take healthy risks, and test new ideas



Avenues to contribute to their community



Experiences that build personal values, goals, and identity



Practice grappling with complexity (transcendent thinking)



Practice decision-making and emotional regulation



Respect and social status among peers and adults



Warmth and support from parents and other caring adults

Adolescents are
dynamic
contributors to
their schools,
families, and
communities.



LEARNERS



EARNERS



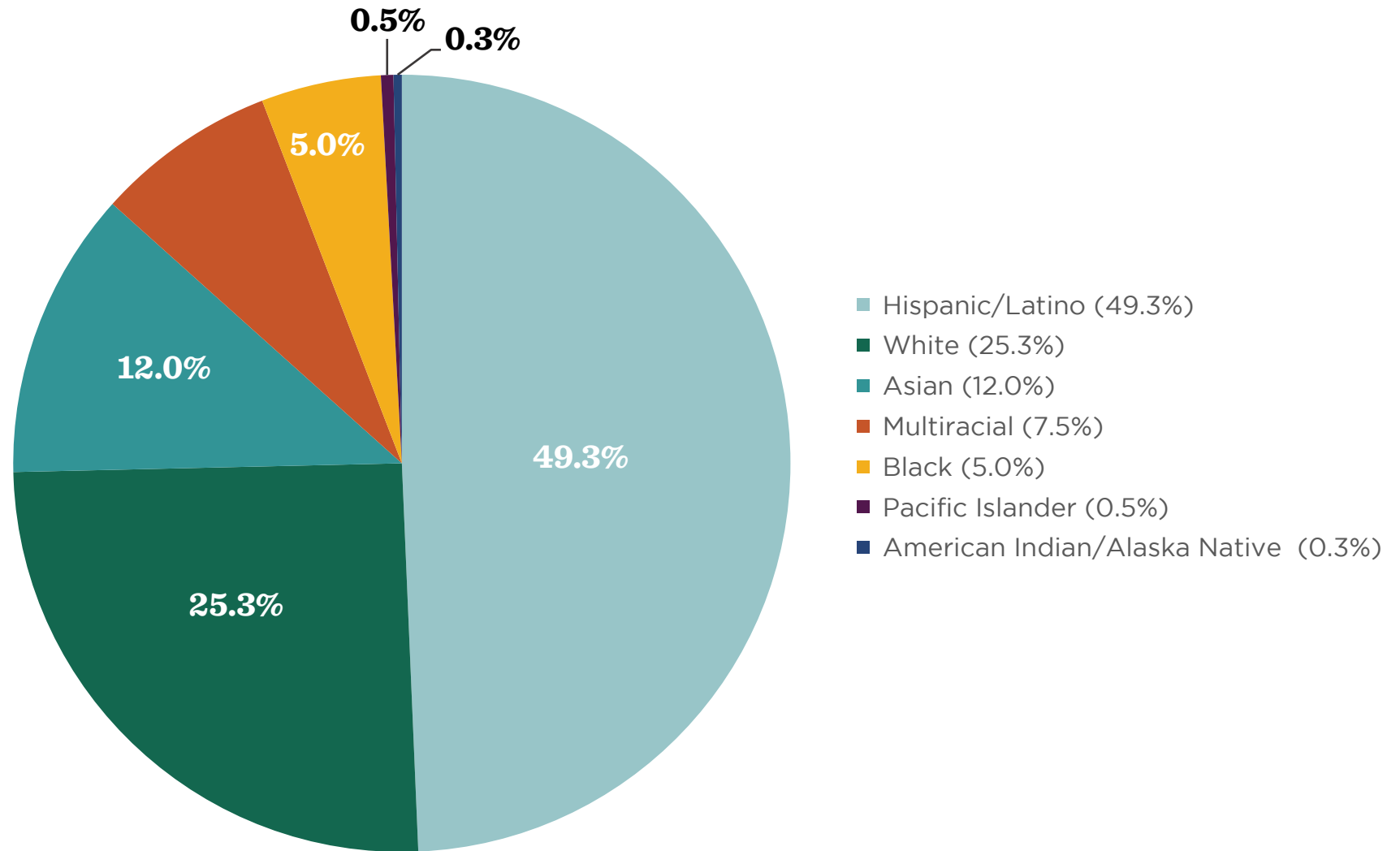
CREATORS



LEADERS

**California is
home to nearly
5.25 million
adolescents.**

Adolescents in California, 2023 (10–19 year-olds)



Source: California Department of Public Health



Adolescents are primed for learning, exploration, and development. They are most engaged when learning is inquiry-based and grounded in real-world challenges.

LEARNERS

California's adolescents attending public schools

Among 7th to 12th grade students:

13%

English language
learners,
2023-24

12%

in public charter
schools,
2020-21

11%

of 10th to 12th graders
are in alternative
schools,
2021-22

3.8%

experiencing
homelessness,
2022-23

20,984

in foster care,
2020-21

16.5%

of 11th graders identify
as LGBTQ,
2019-21

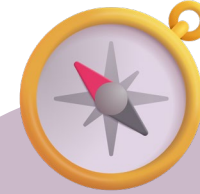
California's Down Payment on Adolescent Learning



More equitable
and holistic
**accountability
and funding
systems**



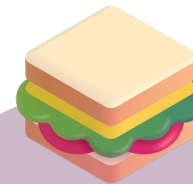
\$4.1 billion
investment in
**community
schools**



Expanded **dual
enrollment and
career
pathways**



Free **public
college for
foster youth**



**Universal free
meals** for all
public school
students



\$4.6 billion
investment to
support **youth
mental health**

**California public schools are showing signs of improvement...
...but aren't where they need to be.**

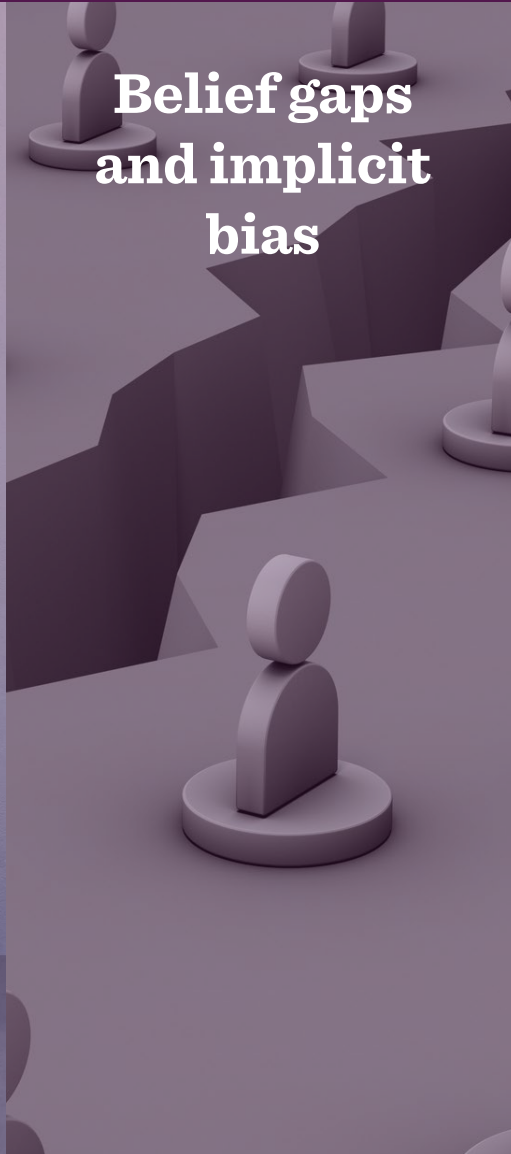


Five key drivers of inequitable learning outcomes

**Inadequate
state funding**



**Belief gaps
and implicit
bias**



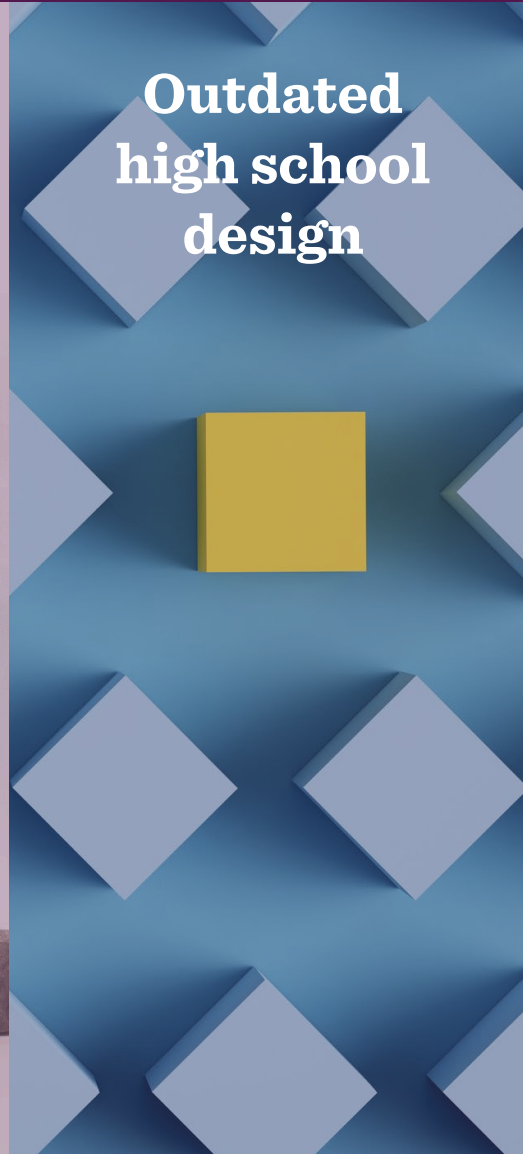
**Inequitable
community
conditions**



**Economic
pressures**



**Outdated
high school
design**





Adolescents are working part- and full-time jobs to supplement family income, pay the bills, and gain critical skills and experience. Their work helps fuel the state's economy.

EARNERS

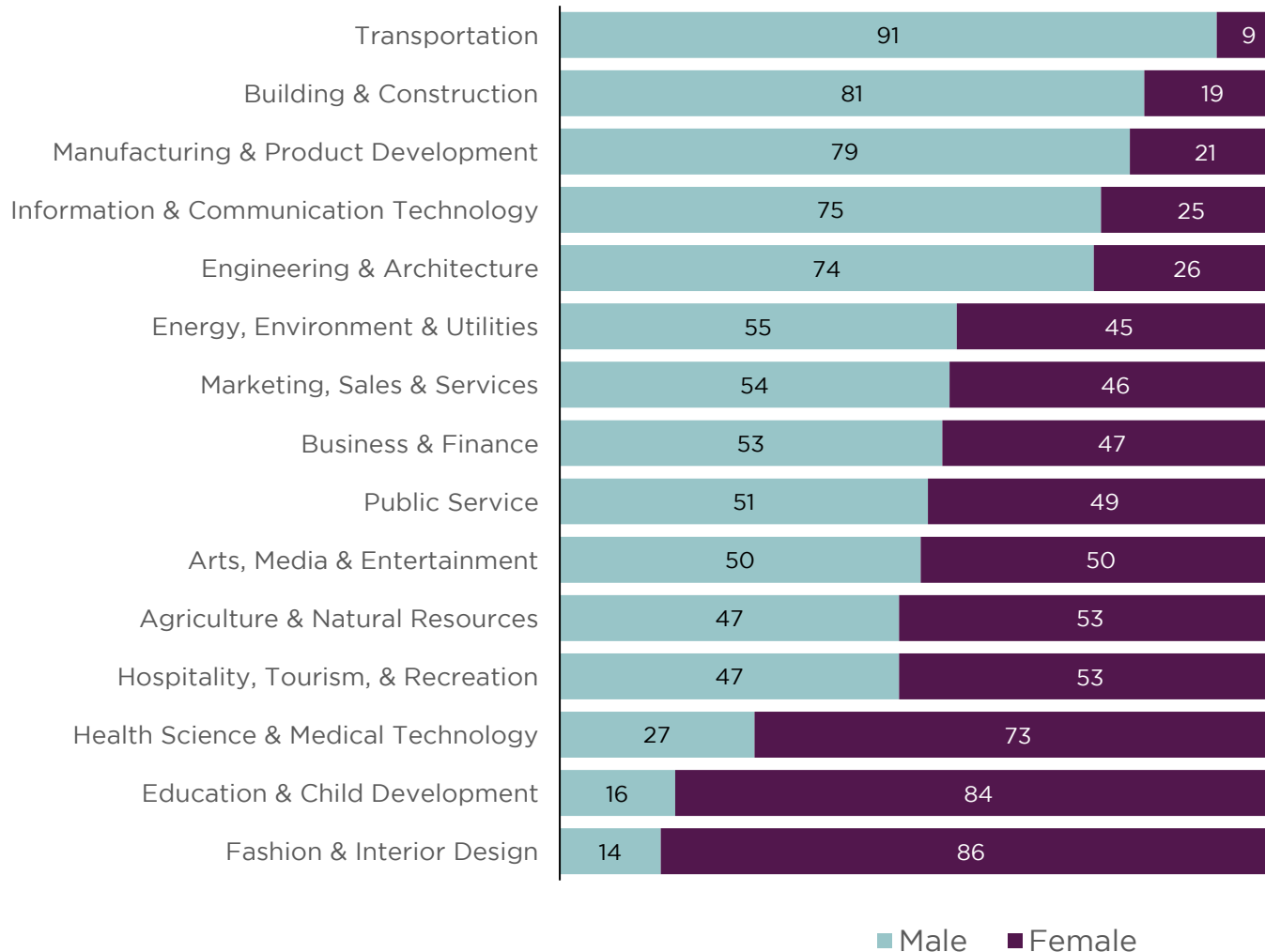
Adolescents juggle responsibilities of work, school, and family.

45% of Californians ages 16-24 are working

- **72%** are young **people of color**
- **61%** work “**front-line**” jobs
- **Nearly 70% struggle** to pay expenses



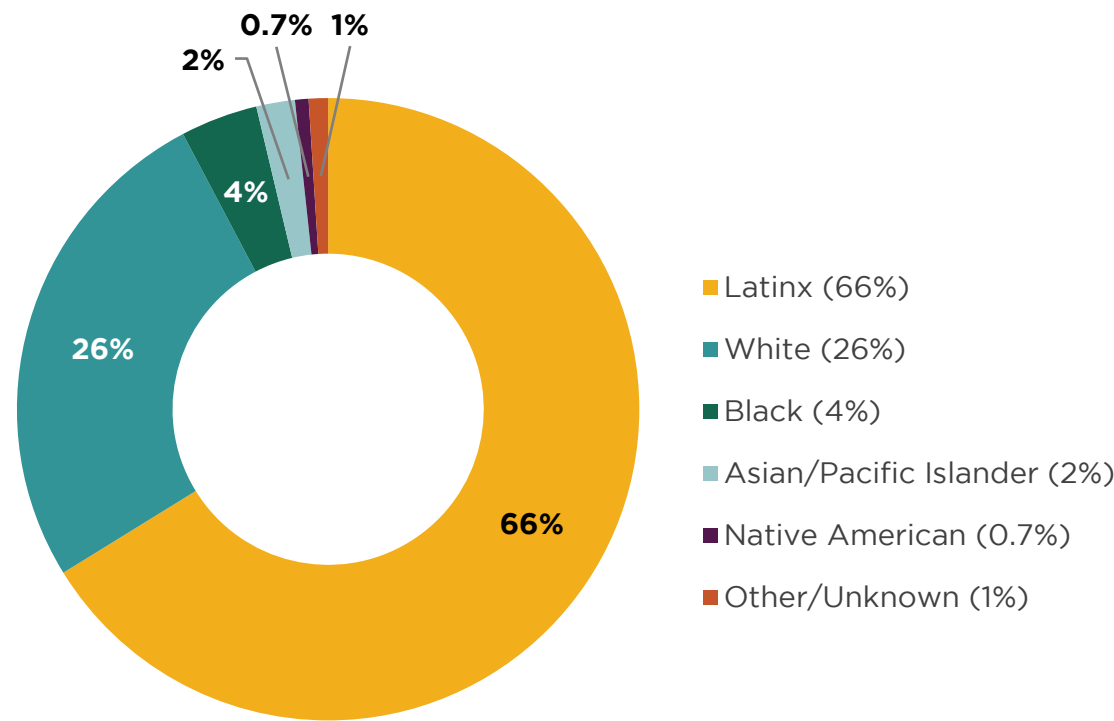
College and career pathways unlock opportunity.



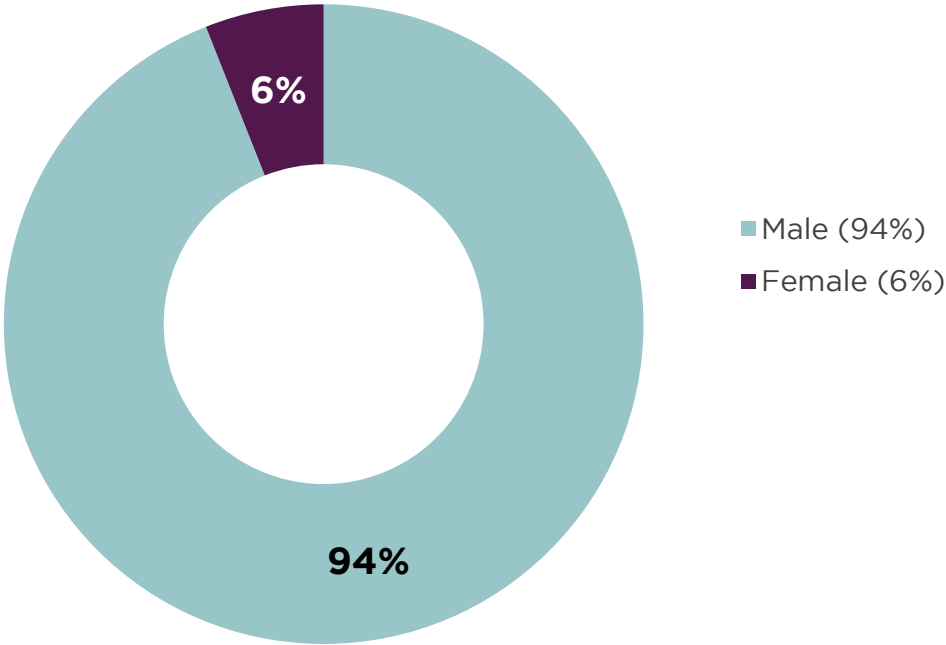
Participation in high school college and career pathways by gender across industry sectors.

Apprenticeships pay a 25% higher median hourly wage for young workers.

California Apprenticeships by Race/Ethnicity for Workers 24 and Under, 2022



California Apprenticeships by Gender for Workers 24 and Under, 2022





Young artists, writers, and designers are tapping into their creativity and speaking to the present moment. Their creative energy is poured into the arts, technology, and civic life and discourse.

CREATORS

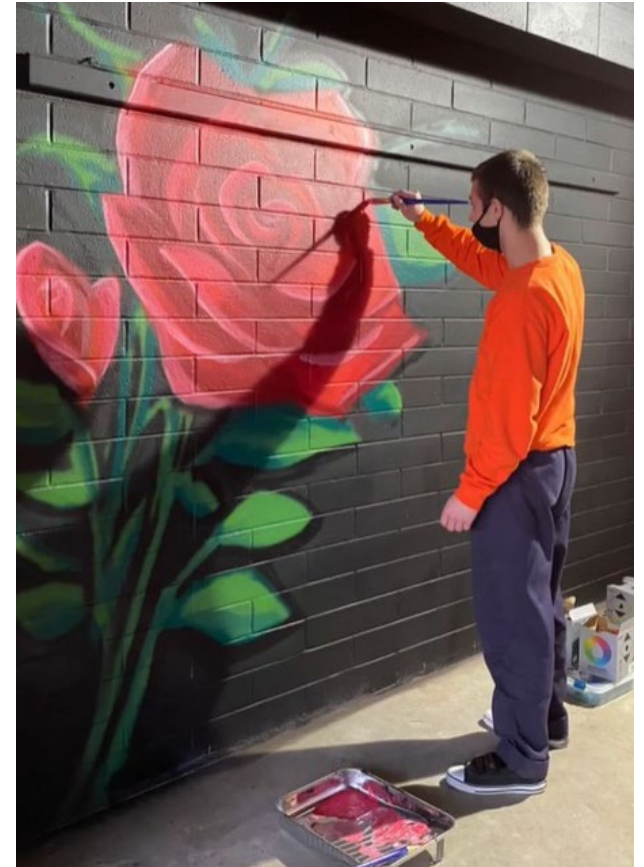
Adolescents are reclaiming public spaces with their art.



Ocean Bloom Utility Boxes by teen artists through Youth Art Exchange, San Francisco



Resilient Agency's *Rise to Resilience* mural in South Los Angeles



Kern County Creative Crossing's *Concrete Rose* at Kern County Detention Facility

Through their art, adolescents comment on “what is” and explore their vision for “what could be.”



Chapter 510
Oakland, California

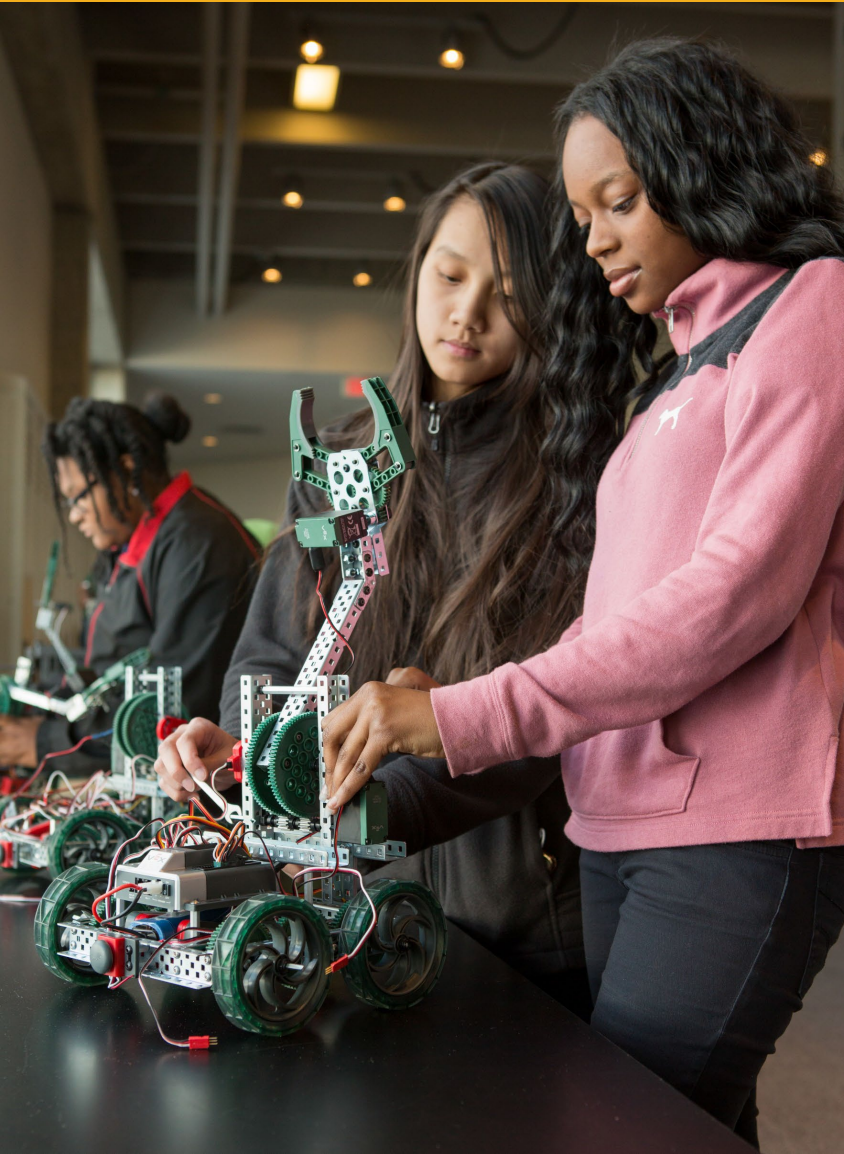


Boyle Heights Beat
Los Angeles, California



Inner-City Arts
Los Angeles, California

**Adolescents are not just consumers of technology and applications.
They're creators and shapers of it.**

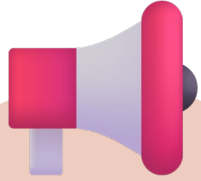




Adolescents are stepping up as leaders in their schools and communities. They're team captains, peer mentors, student researchers, and organizers solving tough problems.

LEADERS

Adolescent leaders are engaging today for a more just tomorrow.



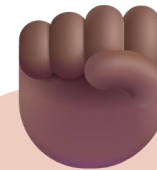
12,559
students earned the
**CA Seal of Civic
Engagement**
in 2022-2023



Young voter turnout
among 18-24-year-
olds rose from
36.6% in 2016 to
47.7% in 2020



134,052
16- and 17-year-olds
**pre-registered
to vote** as of
February 2024



73%
of young Black
Californians polled
in 2023 believe in
**running for
office**



16- and 17-year-
olds won the right
to **vote in
school board
elections** in two
CA cities

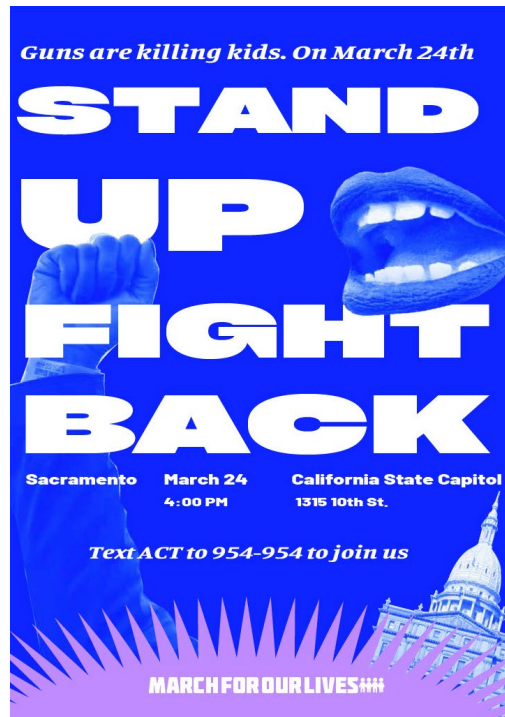
California is home to more than 120 youth organizing groups.



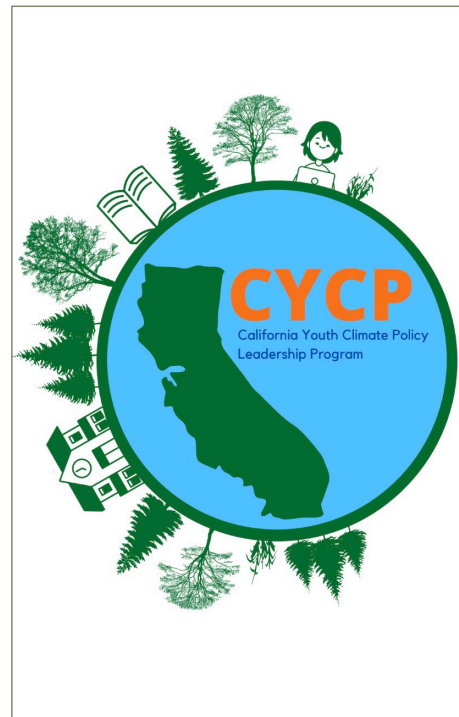
Youth are leading across a range of issues, from education to climate change to gun violence.



Reimagine & Rebuild: A Vision for Racially Just Schools



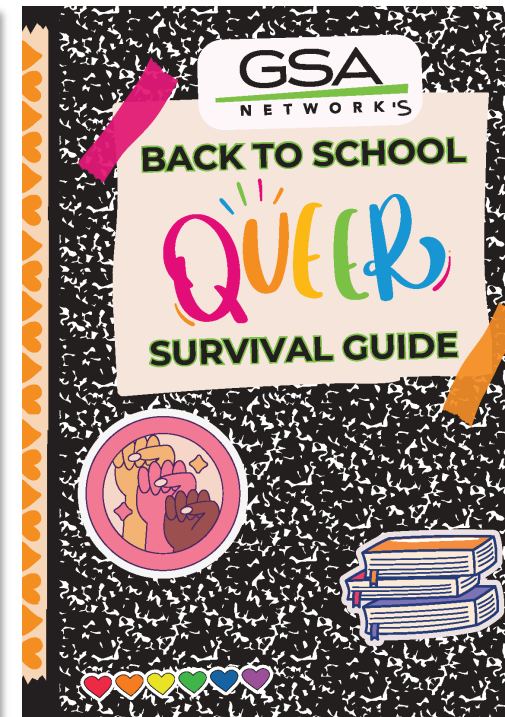
California March for Our Lives



California Youth Climate Policy Leadership Program



San Diego County Youth Bill of Rights



Back to School Queer Survival Guide

Leadership takes many forms in schools and in communities.



We can
move toward
adolescent
thriving.



LEARNERS



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CREATORS



LEADERS

Join us as we continue to explore the unfolding story of adolescents in California.



Share examples of places and spaces where adolescents are being supported to thrive.



Ask young people what matters to them. Engage and empower them to re-imagine public systems.



Join the conversation and collective effort to create the conditions for adolescents to thrive.

Send us your thoughts at **stories@stuartfoundation.org**