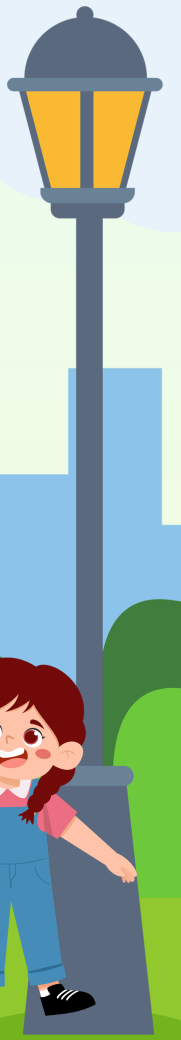


ADVANCING YOUTH OUTCOMES: COMMUNIVERCITY AND THE CITY OF SAN JOSÉ CHILDREN AND YOUTH SERVICES MASTER PLAN

We serve future generations, harnessing the power of hope and community action within our local neighborhoods.



CommUniverCity · SJSU
— engage — learn — build —



CommUniverCity · SJSU

— engage — learn — build —

ADVANCING YOUTH OUTCOMES: COMMUNIVERCITY AND THE CITY OF SAN JOSÉ CHILDREN AND YOUTH SERVICES MASTER PLAN

CommUniverCity

May 2026

Capriotti, M. R., & Jimenez-Floyd, M. K. (2026, May). *Advancing Youth Outcomes: CommUniverCity and the City of San José Children and Youth Services Master Plan*.

Content

Executive Summary	1
Alignment with Master Plan Strategic Priorities	2
Meaningful and Sustaining Jobs	3
Safe, Clean, and Connected Communities	5
Health and Mental Wellness	7
Learning and Empowerment	9
Early Learning & Child Care	11



Executive Summary

CommUniverCity is a unique three-sector partnership between San José State University (SJSU), the City of San José, and the local community. Since 2005, it has served as a vital bridge to strengthen downtown communities by deploying the expertise of faculty and the "people-power" of students to address resident-identified needs. By integrating academic coursework with neighborhood service, CommUniverCity explicitly advances the City of San José Children and Youth Services Master Plan, creating opportunity pathways for area youth, families, and communities.

Twenty Years of Impact

Over two decades of service, CommUniverCity has established a proven track record of community transformation (measured from 2005 to 2025):

- Community Participants: 134,379 residents engaged in educational and neighborhood projects.
- Community Engaged SJSU students: 25,649 students trained in high-impact service learning.
- 315,664 hours contributed in the past decade alone.
- Total Cumulative Investment Value: \$12.62 million in investment value contributed to San José neighborhoods.



Alignment with Master Plan Strategic Priorities : Over \$6.1 Million In Value Invested Across 10 Years

CommUniverCity's work is strongly aligned with the City of San José Children and Youth Services (CYS) Master Plan of 2024-2027. While CommUniverCity has touched on all CYS Master Plan priorities in its 20-year existence, the organization does deep work around four CYS Master Plan focus priorities: Learning and Empowerment, Meaningful and Sustaining Jobs, Safe, Clean, and Connected Communities, and Health and Mental Wellness.

In the past 10 years, CommUniverCity projects have contributed to these priority areas:

- \$2,715,821 toward Meaningful & Sustaining Jobs
- \$2,065,732 toward Safe, Clean, Connected Communities
- \$1,010,155 toward Learning & Empowerment
- \$396,167 toward Health & Mental Wellness

By matching university expertise with neighborhood and community infrastructure, the partnership uplifts and empowers children and young people toward successful futures. Continued support for CommUniverCity is a direct investment in the CYS Master Plan's vision for a vibrant, equitable San José.

Total investment in these priority areas: \$6,187,875
Representing a 6x return on investment in city dollars toward CYS-aligned goals during this 10-year period.



SEGWAY, 2024



Great American Litter Pickup, 2017



Urban Garden Field Trip, 2022

Meaningful and Sustaining Jobs

Impact

- **37,432 community participants engaged** in career readiness and workforce exploration.
- **112,430 total hours of service contributed** by SJSU students and faculty.
- **5,036 community-engaged SJSU students** trained and deployed.
- **\$2,715,821 in total investment value** generated for career pathway initiatives.

The CYS Master Plan defines this priority as ensuring youth have the "mastery of essential skills for successful entry into meaningful, gainful employment" that provides a living wage in Silicon Valley. CommUniverCity advances this goal by creating opportunity pathways that connect career-related skills to educational pathways, creating programming for youth in underserved neighborhoods where high-paying jobs and postsecondary educational pathways can often feel out of reach. CommUniverCity's work in this area largely centers on early career exposure, engagement, and interest-building, reaching youth earlier in their education than typical career-focused programming.

A cornerstone of this effort is CommUniverCity's project from their "Learn" branch, **Engineering in Action**. Over the past decade, Engineering in Action has engaged 8,443 K-12th grade students in career-oriented learning experiences related to well-paying jobs in tech and other STEM-related sectors. This program addresses the significant socioeconomic and racial disparities in these workforces. Engineering in Action bridges this gap by pairing SJSU engineering students with K-12 learners for hands-on workshops in physics, computer programming, and aerodynamics. Participant surveys show clear impacts on their career and educational intentions; for example, 88% of participants in the 2022–2023 cycle indicated an increased interest in STEM careers. One youth participant reflected this inspired mindset by sharing "I want to build buildings and cars when I grow up!"

The **Young Entrepreneurs Academy**, active since 2019, further supports empowerment by "planting the seeds of possibilities" for future economic success, with a focus on business career options and related work skills. SJSU students lead interactive workshops for youth in grades 3-8 on topics like ideation (generating business ideas), operations and logistics, finance, and conflict resolution. During the COVID-19 pandemic, the program pivoted to prevent learning loss by distributing family-focused entrepreneurship kits and budget board games for independent home learning. The program has had wide reach, engaging over 850 elementary and middle school students since its inception. The program has a demonstrable impact on students' future career goals. In recent surveys, 81% of students said they learned more about how to become an

entrepreneur, and 67% expressed interest in starting their own business in the future. One parent praised the initiative, noting, "Projects like these give the opportunity for children to realize they can become entrepreneurs and much more!"

College Day serves as a vital precursor to the workforce by advising youth on how to navigate the academic, social, and economic rigors of higher education. This annual event assigns SJSU student mentors to K-12 classrooms for near-peer mentorship conversations that demystify the path to a college degree. During these sessions, high school students learn about the application process and approaches to financing their college degree. The program has high reach, having served over 18,600 students in the past decade. One student noted, "I learned about the importance of planning financially for college...money to support our education is out there, we just need to apply for it." This exposure is reinforced through events like **SJSU Campus Tours** and **College Fairs**, which further build a college-going culture in the community and increase students' sense of belongingness in higher education spaces.

The **Record Clearance Project (RCP)** serves as a critical intervention within the Meaningful and Sustaining Jobs priority area by dismantling one of the most pervasive structural barriers to employment: a criminal record. Through student-led education and support, RCP empowers Santa Clara County resident adults of all ages to utilize their legal rights to expunge (clear) their records of criminal charges. Because the vast majority of employers run background checks on potential hires, clearing one's criminal record can be a vital lifeline to meaningful, sustaining work and economic stability. However, do-it-yourself processes can be challenging to navigate alone, and private legal representation—often costing between \$2,000 and \$3,000 for simple cases—is financially prohibitive. By engaging SJSU students to provide free legal assistance, the RCP has supported over 2,000 successful expungement (record clearance) petitions in its 15-year history. The RCP was founded in its early days with the partnership of CommUniverCity, and CommUniverCity continues to partner with RCP to provide add-on project support. This work directly supports the CYS Master Plan's goal of ensuring young adults reach their full potential and achieve self-sufficiency through gainful employment, effectively providing them with a "clean slate" and a path to a more secure financial future.

"When the kids were filling out the surveys and saying bye I could really tell they learned what they did today because they were talking about it and when they asked to spell words they knew what words to ask for."

-SJSU student, 2024



Engineering in Action, 2022

Safe, Clean, and Connected Communities

Impact

- **12,946 community participants engaged** in neighborhood planning and celebrations.
- **75,010 total hours of service contributed** by SJSU students and faculty.
- **2,282 community-engaged SJSU students** trained and deployed.
- **\$2,065,732 in total investment value** generated for neighborhood infrastructure and social capital.

The CYS Master Plan emphasizes that children and families thrive when they live in safe, beautiful neighborhoods with accessible public spaces like parks and libraries. Yet, historical factors have led to a stark difference in the quality of infrastructure and amenities from neighborhood to neighborhood. These differences in neighborhood elements can have downstream impacts that complicate neighbors' ability to congregate, build community, and gather in shared spaces. CommUniverCity addresses these issues through both **seasonal celebrations** that create fun, family-focused community-building activities, **community enrichment collaborations** that make immediate physical improvements and empower residents, and **community planning** work that paves a path toward more long-term changes toward more workable, resident-centered community design and planning. Furthermore, these activities can promote positive community relationships that reduce the likelihood of youth violence and gang involvement.

To support community cohesion and pride, CommUniverCity partners with residents to produce **seasonal celebrations** that bring neighborhoods together, such as Park Activation, the SUN Fall Social, the Spartan Keyes Egg Hunt. These events are designed to be "family fun" gatherings with a range of activities, food, and social opportunities for residents. Attendees report appreciating the chance to connect with neighbors in this atmosphere. At a recent SUN Fall Social, 71% of surveyed neighbors reported they definitely met a new neighbor. Another participant reflected that such festivals allowed them to "feel like they belong and are a part of a thriving community".

CommUniverCity also organizes tangible neighborhood improvement efforts through **community enrichment collaborations**. This includes seasonal Litter Pick-Ups to beautify sidewalks and parks, and placemaking projects like Paint the City SJ, which contributed to new murals highlighting cultural roots in Downtown San José. This holistic approach aims to create beautiful neighborhoods and empower local families to shape the future of their area. One resident summed up their feelings about this work by stating, "I'm happy and grateful that someone cares enough about my neighborhood to put on an event like this."

In CommUniverCity's **community planning** efforts, SJSU Urban Planning students and faculty work directly with residents to envision more walkable and vibrant communities. In the Northside Neighborhood effort, students used feedback surveys from over 300 residents to design a temporary curbside café that slowed traffic and provided a gathering space. One resident noted, "[The curbside café is] a great way to attract business and provide pedestrians with refreshments and a place to chat." In the Reimagining the Civic Commons and Alum Rock project, SJSU students surveyed hundreds of residents using Guadalupe River Park to design the park to be a physical green asset to provide continuous green space across a highway that formerly divided it. Through these initiatives, CommUniverCity amplifies community voices to inform a future of more workable, community-sustaining public spaces in San Jose.

"[Community events are] good to have because unfortunately some of the adults did not have the luxury of having a childhood, but by having them participate in an Egg Hunt, it really makes it all more meaningful and impactful for them."

- Spartan Keyes neighborhood leader, 2024



Seasonal Celebrations, 2026

Health and Mental Wellness

Impact:

- **22,040 community participants** engaged in health-focused programming.
- **13,455 total hours of service** contributed by SJSU students and faculty.
- **882 community-engaged SJSU students** trained and deployed.
- **\$396,167 in total investment value** generated for neighborhood health initiatives.

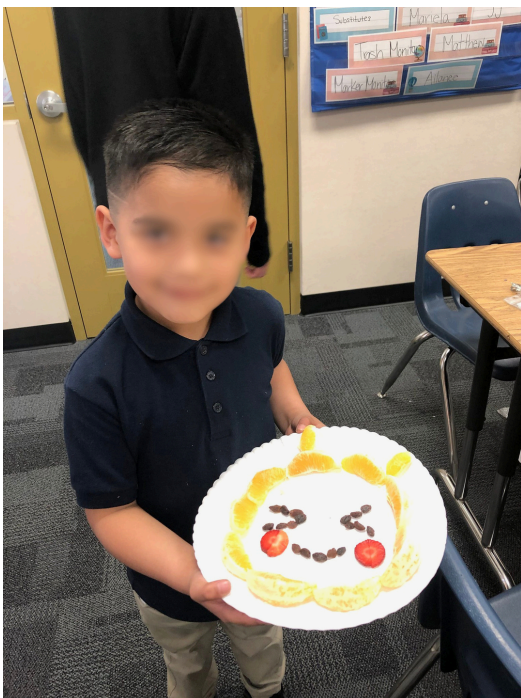
The CYS Master Plan identifies a growing mental health crisis, noting that post-pandemic, schools face severe challenges including chronic absenteeism, learning loss, and campus violence. Data from California Department of Education surveys indicate that approximately one-third of Silicon Valley middle and high school students experience persistent feelings of sadness or hopelessness. CommUniverCity addresses these trends by providing programming to support holistic wellness and health. With a focus not only on physical health, but also on social-emotional wellness, nutrition, and structural barriers to health, CommUniverCity's approach aligns with the trauma-informed "ACEs Aware" model that aligns with state priorities and research-supported practices for promoting comprehensive wellness.

A cornerstone of this work is **SEGWAY (Social-Emotional Growth with Area Youth)**. This initiative equips elementary schoolers with skills to display positive behavior in the face of stress, bullying, and peer pressure. SJSU students from Psychology and Child & Adolescent Development partner with classrooms at Washington, Grant, Empire Gardens, Olinder, and McKinley Elementary schools for a day of social-emotional learning through fun, interactive activities. Students learn child-friendly emotion-regulation techniques like "dragon breaths" (as a way to calm and release tension), and practice healthy communication skills through games and roleplays. Following the 2024–2025 cycle, 95% of youth reported they could apply these emotional regulation techniques in real-life situations. One McKinley Elementary student summed up their learning by saying: "I learned that you should treat people the way you want to be treated".

CommUniverCity has also played an active role in addressing health and social disparities during the **COVID-19 pandemic response** and the post-pandemic recovery. In the summer of 2021, CommUniverCity partnered with the City of San José to deploy COVID-force public health outreach interns in a tried-and-true culturally responsive *promotores* model. Early work focused on disseminating timely information about vaccination clinics as well as other medical and social resources. Over time and with continued community dialogue, efforts broadened to address a wider range of health, wellness, and basic needs of these communities.

This work evolved into a multi-year **promotores program** focused on three priorities: stabilizing families, supporting small businesses, and aiding workers. A major milestone was the launch of a *promotores* hotline and dedicated email system, which allowed residents to reach out directly for support beyond organized events. Operating from their McKinley headquarters, the team of 14 *promotores* successfully addressed community questions and provided referrals to critical services. Reflecting on the necessity of this work, team members noted that community members often "need more" than a single interaction; they require ongoing reconnection to ensure a "substantial impact." By building this specialized skill set within the neighborhood, the *promotores* reached thousands of residents, ensuring they remained connected to vital resources.

From 2015- 2022, the CommUniverCity provided culturally responsive health literacy intervention to combat childhood obesity through a program known as **Cooking Matters**. Facilitated by CommUniverCity staff and SJSU Nutrition and Public Health students, the initiative provided six-week interactive workshops to elementary school students. Participants worked together on hands-on activities about a wide range of topics related to nutrition and health, including "eating a rainbow" of diverse produce, practicing kitchen safety, and learning to interpret nutrition labels. The program clearly moved the needle on young participants' nutritional awareness and health empowerment. In the 2018–2019 cycle, 86% of students reported an increased preference for fruits and vegetables, and 83% said they felt empowered to talk to their parents about healthy eating. Working virtually during the pandemic, Cooking Matters' impact on children's advocacy remained high, with 92% of participating youth reporting they could help their families make healthier lifestyle choices. This focus on intergenerationally impactful health education directly aligns with the CYS Master Plan's objectives to foster health and wellness from a young age.



Cooking Matters, 2020

“I really liked the snack, it was really good! The combination of peanut butter and honey. I really want to try making new healthy things at home.”

-Spartan Keyes CORAL student, 2021

Learning and Empowerment

Impact:

- **7,123 community participants engaged** in educational enrichment and empowerment programming.
- **43,684 total hours of service** contributed by SJSU students and faculty.
- **3,059 community-engaged SJSU students** trained and deployed.
- **\$1,010,155 in total investment value** generated for youths' educational development.

The CYS Master Plan defines Learning and Empowerment as ensuring all youth "graduate from high school and are empowered to access opportunities that enable them to realize their educational goals." CommUniverCity advances this priority through a range of activities including direct learning supports, career exposure activities, and numerous projects aligned with its longstanding, community-nominated priority of "creating a college-going culture" through high-impact service learning projects.

A flagship initiative is **Writing Partners**, a pen pal program that pairs SJSU students with local 4th-8th graders to practice language skills and foster mentorship. Since 2010, Writing Partners has provided academic and mentorship support to over 1000 area youth. Students exchange three handwritten letters throughout the semester, culminating in an SJSU campus visit where elementary and middle schoolers meet their college-student writing partners in person. This program is specifically designed to enhance academic skills related to high school graduation and to future career success, especially for students who are English-language learners. Beyond academic growth, the project provides youth with trusted adults to share their feelings. One elementary participant reflected on the emotional impact, stating, "I think writing to pen pals improved my writing because I can feel comfortable about writing about myself. It also made writing more fun for me." One elementary school teacher summarized the program's impact as follows: "I definitely see improvement in my students' writing. I would say something even more powerful than that, it has provided these students with



Writing Partners, 2018

more 'trusted adults' to share their thoughts and feelings with. Especially after the last two years, I think that providing the students with opportunities to interact with more safe people has really opened them up and increased their overall confidence in expressing themselves.”

CommUniverCity’s **Green STEM Fairs**, held annually since 2023, serve as environmental literacy and related career exposure initiatives for K-12 youth. These events build on many years of prior CommUniverCity **Sustainability Fairs** that engaged young people and families in fun, activity-based learning about environmental and sustainability topics. The Green STEM Fairs model uses a “science fair” approach and incorporates emphasis on educational and career pathways towards jobs such as renewable energy technician, environmental engineer, hydrologist and more. Surveys of participating youth show that these experiences move the needle on career interests and empowerment: In the 2024-2025 program, 80% of students expressed interest in two or more environmental careers, with "Environmental Scientist" being the most popular choice. This initiative directly supports the CYS Master Plan by providing engaging learning opportunities and fostering career-driven empowerment.

“I learned that flooding happens from heavy rainfall and overflowing rivers, and wildfires spread quickly when it is dry and hot.”

–Olinder Elementary School student, 2024



Green STEM Fair physical exercise activity, 2025

Early Learning and Child Care

CommUniverCity’s projects align with the Early Learning and Child Care priority area by connecting elementary-aged children with SJSU students who serve as mentors. CommUniverCity activities relate to early social-emotional and literacy development through projects like SEGWAY, Writing Partners, Social Issues Theater, among others. For purposes of this report, we captured CommUniverCity’s activities and numbers in the other four CYS Master Plan Priorities listed previously.

CommUniverCity partners with community residents in licensed and license-exempt settings involving childcare services by embedding structured, relationship-based learning experiences into after-school settings for children. While CommUniverCity is not a direct-service childcare provider, CommUniverCity’s work with this priority area helps advance the CYS Master Plan’s development of a seamless “no wrong door” system of care by expanding access and opportunities to early education and help build critical developmental skills. CommUniverCity objectives include positively shaping children’s development trajectories, lifelong learning, and building a skilled future workforce here in Silicon Valley.



SEGWAY, 2025



Social Issues Theater, 2019



Sustainability Fair, 2014



For more info, please visit cucs.org