



Klamath Promise Neighborhood

2025 Report



Prepared by
The California Center for Rural Policy



Cal Poly
Humboldt.



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Introduction

The Klamath River Promise Neighborhood (KPN) is a federally funded initiative dedicated to strengthening educational and life outcomes for children and families in the Klamath River region of Northern California, encompassing both tribal and rural communities. Modeled after the Harlem Children’s Zone, Promise Neighborhoods are holistic, place-based efforts that provide cradle-to-career support, ranging from early childhood education and family engagement to health services and community development. KPN focuses particularly on communities located within the Yurok Tribe’s ancestral territory and nearby rural areas that continue to experience the effects of geographic isolation, limited infrastructure, and longstanding inequities.

The purpose of this report is to present an aggregated overview of key educational and community indicators relevant to the Klamath River Promise Neighborhood. Drawing on both primary and secondary data sources, the report synthesizes quantitative and qualitative evidence to assess progress toward Promise Neighborhood results across the cradle-to-career continuum. By integrating administrative data, survey findings, and community-based insights, this report aims to document patterns of change over time and to illustrate how coordinated, place-based strategies are contributing to improved outcomes for children, families, and the broader community.

Methodology

The findings presented in **Part I** of this report are based on the systematic analysis of secondary data obtained from multiple state- and community-level educational data sources. These sources include publicly available datasets and reports produced by the California Department of Education, the California Assessment of Student Performance and Progress (CAASPP), and statewide and regional surveys such as the California Healthy Kids Survey. In addition, locally generated data sources, including the Klamath Promise Neighborhood (KPN) Neighborhood Survey and the Kindergarten Readiness Report, were incorporated to ensure that the analysis reflects the specific demographic, geographic, and educational context of the KPN service area.

Secondary data were selected to align with federally required Promise Neighborhood indicators as well as locally prioritized outcomes related to early childhood education, K–12 academic achievement, school engagement, and family well-being. Data from these sources were reviewed, synthesized, and analyzed to identify trends, disparities, and patterns across time and population groups.

Part II of this report complements the quantitative data with qualitative insights derived from in-person meetings with community partners who are active participants in the Klamath Promise Neighborhood initiative. These meetings were conducted to capture contextual knowledge, lived experiences, and community perspectives that are not fully represented in administrative or survey data. The qualitative component emphasizes narrative accounts and practitioner insights related to program implementation, community needs, and perceived challenges and successes across the cradle-to-career continuum.










Community partners engaged in these conversations represent a broad cross-section of organizations working in education, health, family support, and community development within the KPN footprint. The full list of KPN partner organizations included in this qualitative data collection effort is provided in **Appendix 1**. Together, the integration of secondary quantitative data and primary qualitative input creates an approach, strengthening the validity of the findings and providing a more comprehensive picture of educational and community conditions in the Klamath Promise Neighborhood.

PART 1 – GPRA Measures

Government Performance and Results Act (GPRA) Measures. GPRA's are standardized indicators developed by the U.S. Department of Education to assess the effectiveness of federally funded initiatives like Promise Neighborhoods. They provide a framework for accountability and continuous improvement by tracking measurable progress in children's and families' outcomes across a cradle-to-career continuum, including early learning, K-12 education, postsecondary success, and family and community well-being. The full list of GPRA measures is attached at the end of this report.

The table on the next page outlines how the Klamath River Promise Neighborhood (KPN) addresses the GPRA indicators and presents specific measures that illustrate the program's progress since 2021. These data highlight the extent of work completed under each outcome area and track changes over time. While several indicators show notable improvement, others have remained relatively stable, reflecting both the program's achievements and areas requiring continued attention.



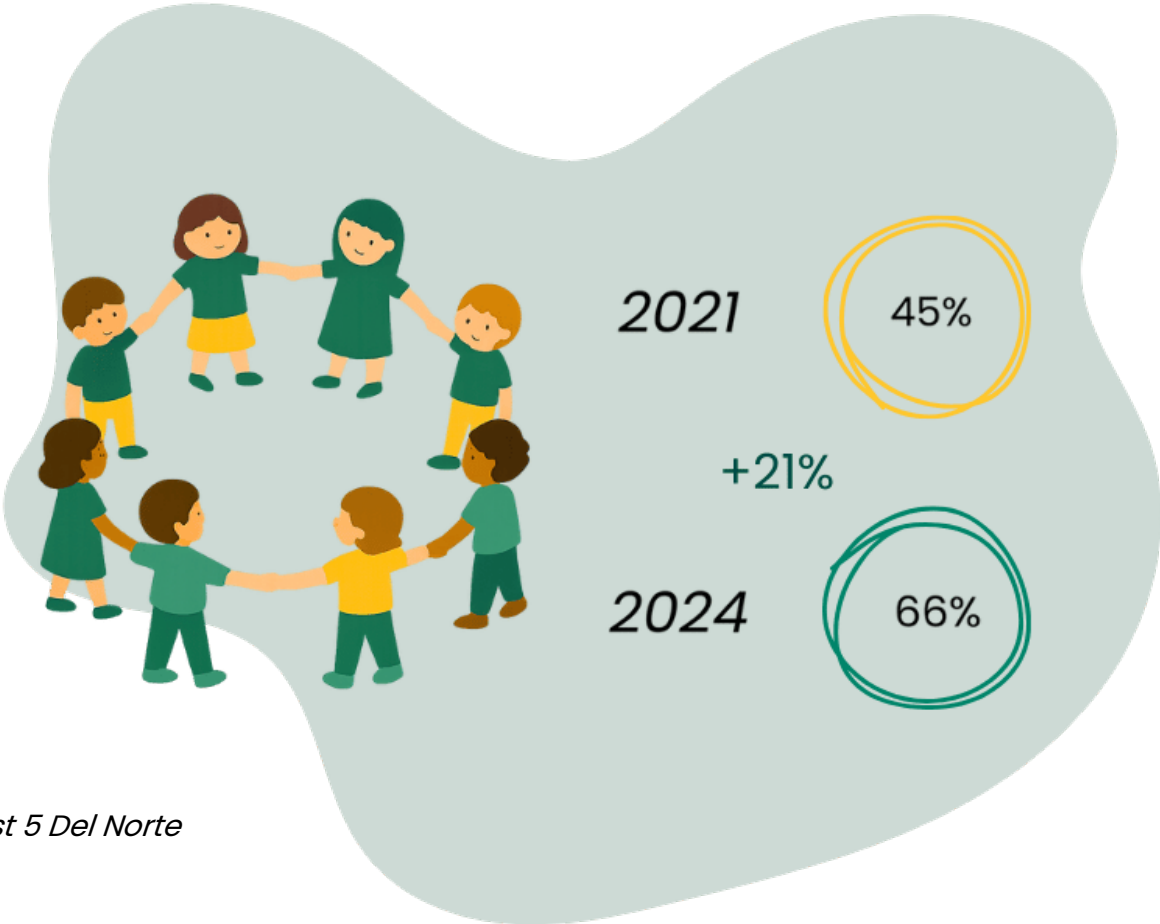
	GPRAs	4 Year Status
1	Children enter kindergarten ready to succeed in school.	 Improved
2	Students are proficient in core academic subjects.	 Mixed
3	Students successfully transition from middle grades to high school.	 Improved
4	Youth graduate from high school.	 Improved
5	High school graduates obtain a postsecondary degree, certification, or credential.	 Declined
6	Students are healthy.	 Mixed
7	Students feel safe at school and in their community.	 Improved
8	Students live in stable communities.	 Improved
9	Families and community members support learning in Promise Neighborhood schools.	 Declined
10	Students have access to 21st century learning tools.	In Progress

Academic GPRAS

The GPRAs presented in this report are organized into two main categories: academic and community support indicators. The academic measures are further divided into two groups, those focusing on children ages 0–5 and those addressing K–12 students, reflecting the continuum of educational development from early childhood through secondary education.

Result 1: Children enter kindergarten ready to succeed in school.

Measure: Percent of kindergartners ready for school



Source: First 5 Del Norte

According to the *Kindergarten Readiness Reports for Del Norte County* prepared by Applied Survey Research and First 5 Del Norte, the percentage of kindergarteners entering school ready to learn has shown substantial improvement over the past three years. In 2021, only 45 percent of children demonstrated readiness for kindergarten, compared to 66 percent in 2024. This notable increase reflects the positive impact of early learning initiatives and community efforts to support children’s development during the crucial early years.

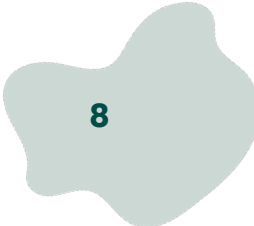
Result 2: Students are proficient in core academic subjects.

Measure: Percent of students who do NOT meet state standards in Math

State Mathematics Assessment				
	2021	2022	2023	2024
Del Norte	65%	57%	56%	54%
Statewide	41%	42%	41%	41%

Source: California Assessment of Student Performance and Progress

In mathematics, Del Norte County has shown gradual improvement in student performance since 2021, though proficiency levels remain below the statewide average. According to the *California Assessment of Student Performance and Progress (CAASPP)*, the percentage of Del Norte students not meeting state standards in math declined from 65 percent in 2021 to 54 percent in 2024. While this nine-point improvement indicates meaningful progress, Del Norte’s rates still exceed the statewide percentage, which has remained steady at approximately 41 percent.





Result 2: Students are proficient in core academic subjects.

Measure: Percent of students who do NOT meet state standard in English Language

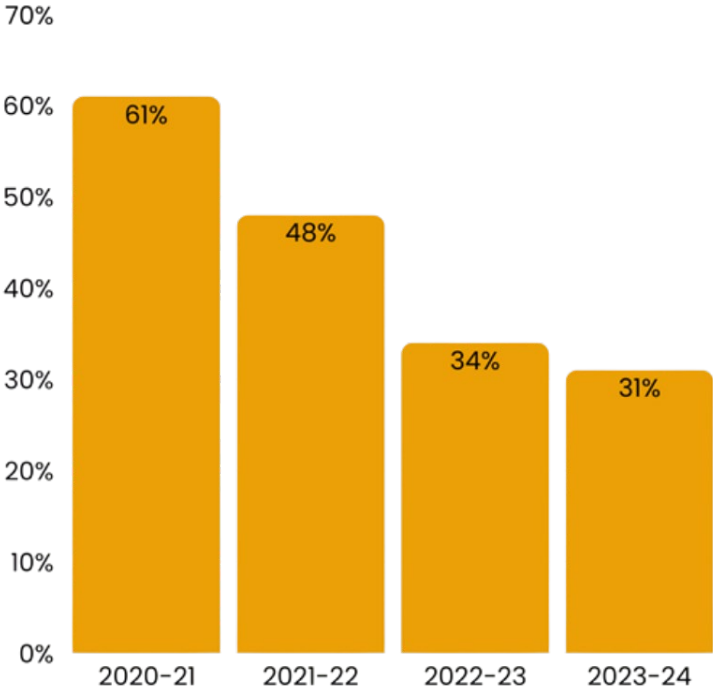
State English Language Assessment				
	2021	2022	2023	2024
Del Norte	36%	47%	45%	45%
Statewide	28%	30%	31%	31%

Source: California Assessment of Student Performance and Progress

In English Language Arts, outcomes have been more stable over time. The share of Del Norte students not meeting state standards increased from 36 percent in 2021 to 45 percent in 2022 and has since remained at that level through 2024. Statewide averages have hovered around 30 percent during the same period, suggesting that while local performance has plateaued, continued efforts are needed to close the achievement gap between Del Norte County and the state overall.

Result 3: Students successfully transition from middle grades to high school.

Measure: Chronic Absenteeism



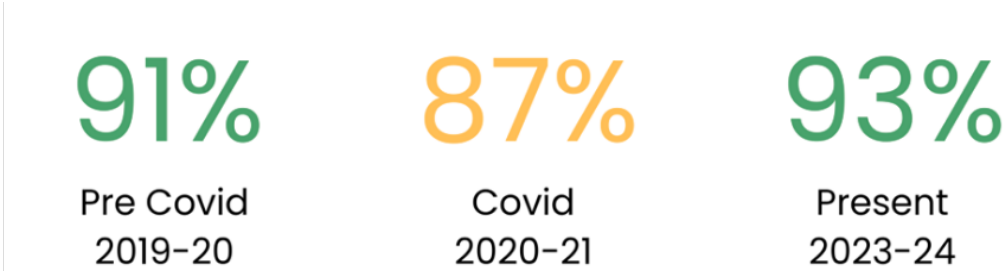
Source: California Department of Education - Data Quest

Chronic Absenteeism refers to the share of students who miss 10 percent or more of the school year—whether the absences are excused or unexcused. High rates of chronic absenteeism often reflect underlying challenges such as health issues, transportation barriers, or family instability, and they can significantly hinder academic achievement and long-term success.

According to the *California Department of Education (DataQuest)*, chronic absenteeism in Del Norte County has improved substantially over the past four years, declining from 61 percent in 2020–21 to 31 percent in 2023–24. This steady reduction reflects ongoing collaborative efforts among schools, families, and community partners, including initiatives supported by the Klamath River Promise Neighborhood (KPN), to remove attendance barriers and promote consistent student engagement.

Result 4: Youth graduate from high school.

Measure: Youth Graduating from High School



Source: California Department of Education - Data Quest

According to the California Department of Education (DataQuest), Del Norte County's high school graduation rates have remained strong over the past several years, despite temporary declines during the COVID-19 pandemic. Before the pandemic, in 2019-20, 91 percent of students graduated on time. This rate dropped slightly to 87 percent in 2020-21, reflecting pandemic-related challenges, but rebounded to 93 percent by 2023-24.



Source: California Department of Education - Data Quest

When compared to the statewide average of 90 percent in 2023-24, Del Norte's graduation rate stands above the California average. This upward trend suggests that local schools and community partners, including the Klamath River Promise Neighborhood (KPN), have made meaningful progress in supporting students' academic persistence and completion through targeted interventions and increased family and school engagement.

Result 5: High school graduates obtain a postsecondary degree, certification, or credential.

Measure: Students who enroll in a two-year or four-year college or university after graduation

Student Enrollment After Graduation				
	2018-19	2019-20	2020-21	2021-22
Del Norte	51%	38%	39%	41%
California	66%	64%	64%	64%

Source: California Department of Education - Data Quest

Data from the *California Department of Education (DataQuest)* show that the percentage of Del Norte County high school graduates enrolling in a two- or four-year college after graduation has fluctuated modestly over the past several years. College enrollment declined from 51 percent in 2018-19 to 38 percent in 2019-20 and 39 percent in 2020-21, before rising slightly to 41 percent in 2021-22. These trends reflect ongoing challenges in postsecondary transitions, particularly in rural areas where access, affordability, and local opportunities remain significant barriers.

By comparison, California’s statewide college enrollment rate has remained steady at around 64 percent during the same period. The gap between Del Norte and the state average highlights the continued need for targeted support to strengthen college and career pathways. Efforts led by local schools, community partners, and the Klamath River Promise Neighborhood (KPN) are essential to improving postsecondary access and helping students successfully transition from high school to higher education or credential programs.

Community GPRAS

The following section presents data on the community support GPRAs, which track the well-being of children, families, and neighborhoods beyond academic outcomes. These indicators reflect key areas such as health, safety, housing stability, and family engagement, offering a broader view of how community conditions influence educational success and overall quality of life.

Result 6: Students are healthy.

Measure: Percentage of children who consume one or more servings of fruits and vegetables daily

Children's Eating Habits			
	2023	2024	2025
Fruits	93%	88%	93%
Vegetables	88%	95%	78%

Source *Promise Neighborhood Survey*

According to the *Promise Neighborhood Survey*, most students in the Klamath River region report consuming at least one serving of fruits or vegetables each day, reflecting overall positive health behaviors among children. Between 2023 and 2025, the percentage of students eating fruits daily remained relatively stable, increasing from 93 percent in 2023 to 93 percent again in 2025 after a slight dip in 2024. Vegetable consumption showed more fluctuation, rising from 88 percent in 2023 to 95 percent in 2024, then decreasing to 78 percent in 2025. While the data suggests strong dietary habits overall, the recent decline in vegetable intake may warrant further attention to ensure consistent access to and awareness of healthy food options across the community.

Result 7: Students feel safe at school.

Measure: Percentage of students who feel “safe” or “very safe” at school

Perceived Safety at School		
	2019	2023
Del Norte	35%	38%
California	57%	60%

Source: Cal Schools – School Safety

According to data from the *California School Climate, Health, and Learning Survey (CaSCHLS)*, students’ perceptions of safety at school have improved modestly between 2019 and 2023. In Del Norte County, the percentage of students in grades 7, 9, and 11 who reported feeling “safe” or “very safe” at school increased from 35 percent to 38 percent during this period. Statewide, perceptions of safety were higher overall, rising from 57 percent to 60 percent. While the upward trend is encouraging, the data indicates that students in Del Norte continue to feel less safe at school compared to their peers across California, highlighting an ongoing need for efforts that promote positive school climate and student well-being.



Result 8: Student who live in stable communities.

Measure: Student stability rate

Stable Student Enrollment				
	2020-21	2021-22	2022-23	2023-24
Del Norte	84%	83%	85%	86%
California	92%	90%	91%	91%

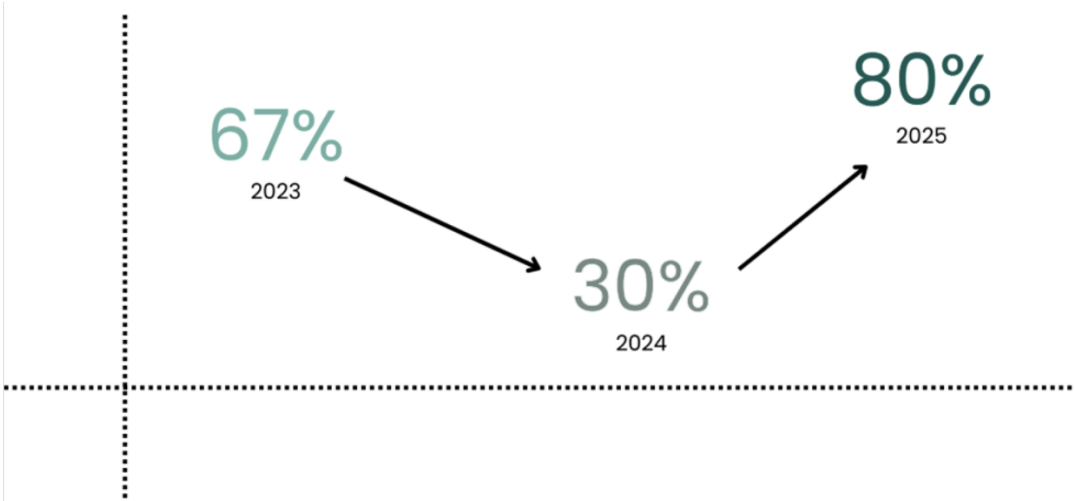
Source: California Department of Education - Stability Rate

Student Stability Rate refers to the percentage of students who remain enrolled in the same school or district for an entire academic year. High stability rates are associated with stronger academic performance, better attendance, and improved social and emotional outcomes, while lower rates may reflect challenges such as family mobility, housing insecurity, or economic hardship.

According to the *California Department of Education (Stability Rate Data)*, Del Norte County's student stability rate has shown a gradual upward trend over the past four years, increasing from 84 percent in 2020-21 to 86 percent in 2023-24. Although this improvement indicates growing community stability, the rate remains slightly below the statewide average, which has stayed consistent around 91 percent. Continued efforts to enhance housing stability and reduce student mobility could further strengthen educational continuity and student success in the region.

Result 9: Families and community members support learning in Promise Neighborhood schools.

Measure: A parent who reads to children at least three times a week



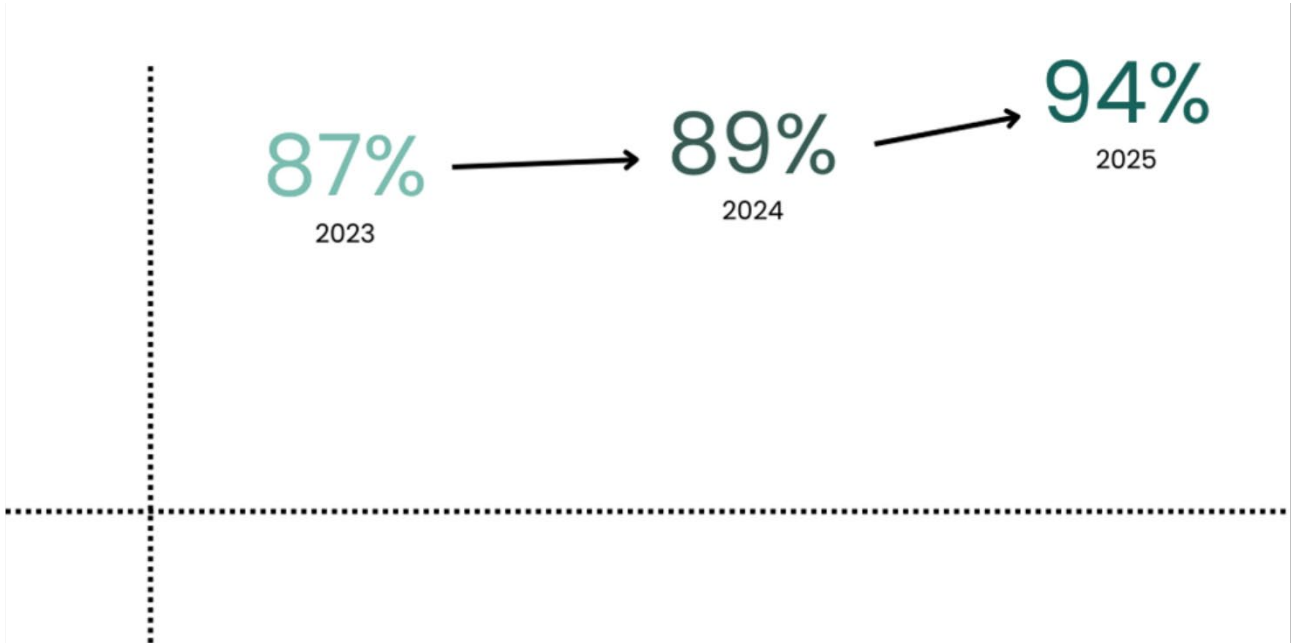
Source Promise Neighborhood Survey

According to the *Promise Neighborhood Survey*, family engagement in early learning activities has fluctuated notably over the past three years. The percentage of parents who reported reading to their children at least three times a week dropped from 67 percent in 2023 to 30 percent in 2024, before rising sharply to 80 percent in 2025. These shifts¹ may reflect varying family circumstances and program outreach efforts over time. The recent increase suggests renewed success in promoting early literacy and encouraging parents to take an active role in their children’s learning at home.

¹ These year-to-year fluctuations are likely attributable, at least in part, to differences in data collection methods across survey administrations and should be interpreted with appropriate caution. Notwithstanding these methodological considerations, the marked increase observed in 2025 suggests renewed progress in promoting early literacy practices and strengthening parental engagement in children’s learning at home.

Result 9: Families and community members support learning in Promise Neighborhood schools

Measure: Parents who report talking with their children about the importance of college



Source Promise Neighborhood Survey

Similarly, the proportion of parents who reported talking with their children about the importance of college has consistently increased, from 87 percent in 2023 to 94 percent in 2025. This steady growth highlights a strong and expanding culture of educational aspiration within Promise Neighborhood communities, where families are increasingly supporting their children’s long-term academic and career goals.

Result 10: Students have access to 21st century learning tools.

This section of the report is currently being revised.



PART 2 – Stories Behind the Curve

The data presented below are collected using a Results-Based Accountability (RBA) approach². These program-level data are then aggregated across all partners at the end of the year to provide a comprehensive picture of collective reach and impact. This shared measurement approach allows partners to align their efforts, track progress consistently, and use data to inform continuous improvement.

Scope of Organizations/Programs Serving the Community			
Category	Organizations	Programs	Population Served
Children 0–5	4	14	8,266
K–12	8	24	6,392
Community Support	7	22	6,564

The table summarizes the scope of organizations and programs serving different population groups in the community. Early childhood services (ages 0–5) are delivered by four organizations operating a total of 14 programs, reaching 8,266 children. Services for K–12 youth are provided by eight organizations through 24 programs, serving 6,392 students. Community support services include seven organizations offering 22 programs, collectively serving 6,564 community members. A comprehensive list of participating organizations and their respective programs is provided in **Appendix 1**.

In addition to quantitative data, partners also share specific examples that illustrate how their programs make a difference in the lives of the populations they serve. These stories, narrated by partner organizations, provide important context to the numbers by highlighting real experiences, meaningful relationships, and tangible outcomes that cannot always be fully captured through data alone.

² **Results-Based Accountability (RBA)** is a data-driven framework for planning and evaluating outcomes that emphasizes clearly defined results, measurable indicators, and the use of performance data to guide decision-making at both the population and program levels.

Success Stories

from

**Klamath Promise
Neighborhood**

Partner Organizations



From Overwhelmed to Empowered

In partnership with Northern California Indian Development Council (NCIDC)

Jacob, a proud Yurok 4th-grader, has shown incredible growth since joining our afterschool program. When he first arrived, he carried the weight of several Adverse Childhood Experiences, and big feelings often overwhelmed him. His frustration came out in tantrums, yelling, and conflicts that led to suspensions and put his place in the program at risk.

But everything changed once he was surrounded by steady support.

With patient guidance, close communication with his guardians, and a safe space to practice new coping skills, Jacob began learning how to calm his body and manage tough moments. Little by little, the outbursts became fewer, and he started choosing healthier ways to express himself. As he gained confidence, his academics improved too, especially his reading. He now participates more positively with peers, and approaches challenges with greater control and courage.

Jacob's story is one of resilience and hope. His progress shows what can happen when a child feels believed in, supported, and safe. We are incredibly proud of how far he has come.



Finding His Voice

In partnership with Northern California Indian Development Council (NCIDC)

Joshua, a proud Yurok 2nd-grader, has shown extraordinary courage and growth during his time in our afterschool program. His early years were filled with significant trauma and several ACE (Adverse Childhood Experiences) factors.

After his parents lost custody, he moved in with his grandparents, a transition that added more emotional weight to an already difficult childhood. By the time he joined our program, Josh had become completely non-verbal. He didn't speak at all and found it nearly impossible to interact with other children, making learning and connection feel out of reach.



Northern California Indian Development Council (NCIDC) is a nonprofit organization that works to support Indigenous and Native American communities across Northern California. Its mission is to deliver culturally appropriate services that promote economic self-sufficiency, education, employment, wellness, cultural heritage, and community involvement for American Indian people. It provides programs such as job training and placement, educational support via the Del Norte Indian Education Center, emergency assistance, youth services, housing and energy aid, and culturally grounded wellness and community-development initiatives.

From the moment he walked through our doors, our priority was to give him a safe, calm, and nurturing space where he could begin to heal.

Within a few weeks, we started hearing the very first whispers, single words here and there. With patience, encouragement, and consistent support, those words blossomed into full sentences. Today, Joshua communicates daily with staff and peers, makes eye contact, and even initiates conversations. Socially, he has opened up too laughing, playing, and engaging with other children in ways that once felt impossible.

Joshua's growth reaches far beyond our program. His mother has now regained custody, and together they are building a safer, healthier life. Joshua's story is a powerful reminder of the healing that becomes possible when a child feels safe, supported, and truly seen. We are incredibly proud of his bravery and excited to watch his bright future unfold.

Growing Curiosity

In partnership with Del Norte and Tribal Lands Community Food Council (DNATL CFC)

This summer, our team expanded the School Garden program into a joyful, hands-on Garden Explorers Summer Camp at Bess Maxwell Elementary School. Many of the children who joined had never been part of our classes before, but their curiosity blossomed the moment they stepped into the garden. Over the course of the program, we reached nearly 170 students from 2nd through 5th grade.

Our days were filled with discovery. We introduced fresh vegetables, rice paper, and simple tools like plastic knives so students could safely practice chopping and preparing food. They watched in amazement as rice paper softened and disappeared into the water, and then they proudly rolled their very own fresh spring rolls, each of us becoming chefs together. The next day, the same vegetables became the base for a group stir-fry. Students harvested lettuce straight from the garden and used the leaves as wraps for their meal. Nearly every child tried what they made.

Their reactions were unforgettable. One student, grinning proudly after his first spring roll, told us, *"I've never eaten vegetables before, and now I love them!"* Another ran up to us with bright eyes, saying, *"I'm going to ask my mom to make vegetables for me!"* We weren't lecturing them or telling them what they "should" eat. We created fun, hands-on activities they can easily repeat at home. By inviting students to chop, cook, taste, and create, we are giving them something deeper: confidence, independence, and the excitement of discovering new possibilities. In that garden, they weren't just students, they were explorers, chefs, and creators. And they left with something they can carry with them for life.



Where Nature Nurtures

In partnership with Del Norte and Tribal Lands Community Food Council (DNATL CFC)

Our Food & Farm Camp has helped countless young people discover strengths, build confidence, and learn about the world around them. One camper in particular is a powerful reminder of what supportive adults and strong relationships can make possible.

When he first joined, he arrived with what many would call “an attitude”—high energy, frustration, and behaviors that often caused challenges in a traditional classroom. But our camp is fully outdoors, which gives young people space to move, explore, and express themselves. Instead of being disciplined or labeled, this camper was met with patience, redirection, and opportunities to channel his energy into meaningful, hands-on activities.

Over time, everything began to shift. With room to breathe, caring role models, and plenty of choices, he gradually grew into one of our most engaged and joyful participants. He felt accepted rather than “othered,” and that sense of belonging helped him thrive. He began diving into activities with genuine interest, eager to share what he learned and excited to challenge himself. His confidence grew, and so did his leadership.

Today, he’s not just a participant, he’s a role model. This past season, he proudly shared that he wants to become a camp counselor with us when he’s old enough. His transformation is a beautiful example of how outdoor learning, emotional support, and community can change the direction of a young person’s life.

While our camp teaches youth about food, farming, and the natural world, its impact goes far beyond that. It nurtures social and emotional growth, belonging, and resilience, helping build a stronger and more connected community for all.

The Del Norte and Tribal Lands Community Food Council (DNATL CFC) is a community-driven organization dedicated to building a resilient, equitable, and culturally grounded local food system. The Council works in partnership with tribal nations, local farmers, schools, and community organizations to expand access to healthy and culturally appropriate foods while strengthening regional food infrastructure.

Breaking the Stigma

In partnership with Rx Safe Del Norte

Through the Youth Opioid Prevention Training, one participant discovered the true power of youth voices. They came in knowing opioids were dangerous, but they had never seen the human impact of addiction so clearly until the Taco Cat project revealed the stories, the hurt, and the hope behind the issue.

What stayed with them most was understanding stigma. They learned how shame keeps people silent, and how compassion and accurate information can open the door to support. Creating youth-led media messages with their peers showed them that awareness isn't just important. It can save lives.

The training didn't just teach facts; it changed how they move through the world. They now speak confidently about substance use, recovery, and the importance of using respectful, non-stigmatizing language. They see how media shapes attitudes, and they want to be part of the shift toward healing.



When asked what adults should know, their message was simple and powerful: *Be real. Be empathetic. Don't be ashamed or scared.* Teens listen when they feel respected and when youth are trusted to lead the message themselves.

Their journey is a reminder that when young people are given space, creativity, and belief, they become catalysts for change. Youth voices don't just raise awareness, they build stronger, healthier communities.

Rx Safe Del Norte is a community-based coalition dedicated to reducing opioid misuse and strengthening local prevention, treatment, and recovery efforts. Through partnerships with health agencies, law enforcement, schools, and community organizations, the coalition promotes safe prescribing practices, increases public education about opioid risks, and provides secure medication-disposal sites to prevent misuse and environmental harm. By

A Place to Belong

In partnership with True North Organizing Network

Katie joined the Changemakers Leadership Program looking for a place where she could grow, contribute, and feel connected. What she found was a community that helped her discover not only her strengths, but also her purpose.

Through hands-on projects, leadership activities, and community-focused meetings, Katie realized that her voice and actions truly matter. With each event and service project, she saw the impact she could make in Del Norte County, whether it was helping classmates, supporting local families, or bringing youth together around shared goals.

As Katie puts it, *"Changemakers has impacted me in the way that it's made me feel I have a purpose. I know that when I do activities and meetings with Changemakers, what I do helps others in my community. It also brings a sense of community because we are all there to help others and bring people together."*

Today, Katie is confident, motivated, and proud of the leader she is becoming. Her journey shows the power of youth leadership programs to inspire belonging, build confidence, and spark meaningful change, one young leader at a time.



A Journey of Leadership and Connection

In partnership with True North Organizing Network

At the only alternative high school in the county, one student stepped into a peer leadership role through the Sources of Strength program, hoping to make a difference among classmates who often felt overlooked. What they didn't expect was how deeply this experience would shape their own path.

During the second year of the Klamath Promise Neighborhood (KPN) initiative, the student connected with the school's community navigator, a relationship that became a turning point. Through check-ins, encouragement, and opportunities to lead, they began to see themselves not just as a participant, but as someone whose presence, voice, and care mattered.

With each activity, outreach effort, and moment spent supporting peers, their confidence grew. The relational model of support offered by KPN helped them recognize their strengths, understand their capacity to lead, and stay grounded in a network that believed in their potential.

Now, as a first-year graduate, they are an active member of leadership spaces across the community. Whether attending local meetings, contributing to youth-focused initiatives, or uplifting their peers, they continue to grow guided by connection, purpose, and the relationships that helped them get here.

Their journey reflects the heart of KPN's work: when young people are supported through meaningful relationships, they discover their strengths, step into leadership, and help shape a healthier, more connected community.

True North Organizing Network is a grassroots nonprofit that brings together people from diverse faiths, cultures, incomes and backgrounds to build community power and fight for social, economic, and environmental justice. Their work includes advocating for affordable housing, environmental protection and water rights, immigrant and Indigenous justice, better public education, and civic engagement. Using a community-organizing model they



Where Belonging Begins

In partnership with Gateway Education of the Wild Rivers Coast

For years, Jakob heard about camp from his high school peers. They encouraged him to go, but he always brushed it off. As a self-proclaimed “band camp geek,” he wasn’t sure this space was for him. At home, his family had the financial means to support his participation, but encouragement was limited, at best, they were indifferent.

Everything shifted after Jakob attended a presentation by the camp director the year before. Something about the vision stuck with him. Curiosity, paired with gentle peer pressure, finally led him to say yes.

Jakob didn’t arrive as a confident leader. In fact, he had never held a leadership role before. During his first week, he trained as a camp counselor, serving as a third support counselor for a group of younger campers. The experience was transformative.

“The mentor experience was extremely unique,” Jakob shared. “I’d never been in a leadership role before. By the end of the camp, I had confidence and talking skills like never before.”

As part of his agreement, Jakob returned the following week – this time as a camper with the older youth. What he found surprised him even more than the week before.

"As a camper, it felt like I could actually be myself, without judgment of others and without judging others," he said. "I was able to be immersed in myself for the first time ever."

Today, Jakob's story reflects the quiet power of belonging and mentorship. Through supportive relationships and opportunities to step into new roles, he discovered confidence, self-expression, and a sense of acceptance he hadn't experienced before. His journey reminds us that sometimes all it takes is one welcoming space – and one chance to say yes – for young people to begin seeing themselves differently.



Seeing the Strengths Within

In partnership with Gateway Education of the Wild Rivers Coast

One day at camp, three banana slugs slowly made their way onto the mouth of the camp photographer's Gatorade bottle. She hesitated to remove them herself, her hands needed to stay clean for her camera. Without being asked, Emmett, a quiet and unassuming 10-year-old camper, stepped in to help.

Carefully, Emmett removed each banana slug and returned them safely to nature. When the photographer joked that kissing a banana slug was good luck, Emmett played along, pretending to give one a kiss while she captured the moment on camera. It was a small act, but one filled with kindness, confidence, and care for both people and the environment.

Later, during youth interviews about their camp experience, the photographer noticed something surprising. Emmett had rated himself as "neutral" when asked how likely he was to make another camper feel welcome. Yet earlier that day, he had gone out of his way to help someone feel comfortable and included offering assistance, humor, and reassurance without hesitation. When the photographer later called to ask permission to use his image in promotional materials, she introduced herself by saying, "I'm the woman you rescued from the banana slugs. Do you remember me?" Emmett immediately replied, "Of course. I will never forget the banana slug incident."

Emmett's story is a reminder that young people don't always recognize their own strengths, but the right environment can help those strengths shine. At Youth Survival Camp, surrounded by nature and caring adults, Emmett's kindness, empathy, and quiet leadership emerged naturally. His experience shows how outdoor, relationship-centered programs can help young people see themselves and each other in a new and more confident light.

Gateway Education of the Wild Rivers Coast is an educational non-profit dedicated to fostering curiosity, lifelong learning, self-awareness, and healthy relationships through immersive educational, recreational, and artistic programs in nature. Rooted in a passion-based learning approach, they expose youth to a diversity of experiences both locally and through travel encouraging self-discovery and igniting a natural desire for academic

PART 3 – What’s Next

Early Childhood Education 0 - 5

Looking ahead, strengthening early childhood systems will require focused investment in both people and practices. While the expansion of Transitional Kindergarten (TK) has increased access, many educators report feeling underprepared to meet the developmental needs of young learners. Newer teachers, in particular, would benefit from targeted early childhood education training and ongoing professional development. At the same time, social-emotional learning, once a strong emphasis before the COVID-19 pandemic, has been deprioritized, raising concerns that children are entering school without critical self-regulation and coping skills. Re-centering SEL in early learning environments will be essential for supporting children’s readiness to learn and for equipping teachers with effective classroom strategies.

Building and sustaining strong family connections also remains a promising area for growth. Programs that focus on relationship-building have been effective in connecting families to health care, developmental resources, and early learning support. However, these relational impacts are not consistently tracked, limiting opportunities to understand and strengthen what works. Workforce challenges continue to pose a significant barrier, particularly in Head Start and early care settings, where low wages make it difficult to recruit and retain qualified staff—even as individuals complete training in related fields. There is also growing interest in intergenerational and mixed-age learning opportunities that engage elders alongside young people. While a few programs have successfully implemented this approach, expanding these models could further enrich early childhood experiences.

K–12 Education and Community Support

Across K–12 education and community support services, educators and partners describe systems under strain. Overcrowded classrooms, limited behavioral and psychological support, and insufficient resources for students with special needs place significant

pressure on teachers and staff, contributing to burnout and turnover. At the academic level, a disconnect persists between classroom performance and standardized testing outcomes. Many students demonstrate understanding through coursework but struggle with tests, often due to anxiety, disengagement, or a perception that testing lacks relevance. This gap reinforces broader concerns that students are being pushed through the system without adequate preparation for college, careers, or life beyond high school.

Social-emotional needs remain a consistent theme across discussions. Students report feeling disconnected and lacking emotional support, while families, particularly those of children with special needs, often struggle to navigate fragmented or unclear support systems. Counseling services exist but are frequently limited in scope or difficult to access in practice. At the same time, partners see opportunities to strengthen parental and community involvement, whether through classroom engagement, advocacy, or participation in school governance. Addressing negative narratives about education within communities and school environments will be critical to raising expectations and reinforcing student potential.

Health, Nutrition, and Safety Supports

Access to healthy food emerged as both a challenge and an opportunity. Students respond positively to fresh vegetables through summer camps and school garden programs, yet the high cost of fruit and limited capacity for gleaning surplus produce restrict broader access. Staffing shortages and low wages further limit the ability to expand or sustain nutrition programs, even as demand remains high. More broadly, insufficient support systems for managing student behavior and ensuring safety continue to affect both learning environments and staff wellbeing. High levels of trauma and adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) among students and families underscore the need for more coordinated, trauma-informed supports.

Career & Technical Education (CTE)

In the area of Career and Technical Education, students and families face structural and informational barriers. Many students feel forced to choose between CTE pathways and

college-preparatory tracks, due to scheduling constraints and system-level limitations. At the same time, confusion persists about what CTE offers and how it connects to long-term career opportunities. Strengthening counseling, communication, and flexible pathway design will be key to ensuring students can pursue multiple postsecondary options.

Cross-Cutting Themes and Opportunities

Several cross-cutting themes point to both ongoing challenges and meaningful progress. The long-term impacts of COVID-19 continue to affect academic learning, social-emotional development, and workforce readiness. At the same time, strong momentum is building around collaboration, particularly among Tribes, school districts, and community-based organizations, which partners identify as a major success. There has also been a notable cultural shift in how data is viewed, with partners increasingly recognizing its value for accountability, return on investment, and program improvement. Participatory budgeting stands out as another bright spot, fostering greater community engagement, transparency, and shared ownership in decision-making.



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All photographs included in this report are credited to Amy Kumler.

Appendix 1

Category: Children 0–5	
Organization	Programs
Del Norte Child Care Council	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The wonder Bus • Mary Peacock Afterschool • Little School of Redwoods
Family Resource Center	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pre-k University • Toddler Time • Ages and Stages of Developmental Screenings • Diaper Giveaways • Backpack Giveaway • Winter Break Meal • Youth and Family Fair
First 5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dolly Parton’s Imagination Library • Ready4K • Early Learning Support • Children’s Garden
Del Norte United School District	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Childhood Behavioral Coach (pre-k)

Category: K–12	
Organization	Programs
True North Organizing Network	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Leadership Development • Changemakers • Sources of Strength • Volunteers • Youth mentorship
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dance and Movement

Category: K-12

Organization	Programs
Dirt and Glitter	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Adventure • Arts • Youth Employment • Design
Northern California Development Council	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Del Norte Indian Education Center- Smith River (after school programs and on-site visitation) • Indigenous Education Advocate (Youth: learning disability, suspended more than one time) • Nutrition and Hygiene • Tobacco Cessation (Native youth school aged)
Del Norte Community Food Council	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Food Forest • Food Forest Camp • Highschool CTE: Agriculture Pathways • Community College CTE: Agriculture Pathways • School Gardens
Gateway Education	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Disc Golf Clinic • Summer Camp I (ages 9 – 12) • Summer Camp II (ages 13 – 18) • Coyote Disc Gold Camp • Survival Dirt Times
RX Safe Del Norte	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Youth Opioid Prevention Toolkit • Trainings • Outreach / Facebook Ad Reach
Yurok Tribe Education Department	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Girls and Boys Club

Category: Community Support

Organization	Programs
True North Organizing Network	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Participatory / Community Budget • Parent Teacher Association (PTO and Booster Club)
Northern California Development Council	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Indigenous Education Advocate (Parents)
Family Resource Center	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Community Baby Shower • Parental Café • Awaiting Arrivals • Breastfeeding Support • Maternal Mental Health Support
RX Safe Del Norte	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Opioid Coalition • Training • Outreach / Facebook Ad Reach
Yurok Tribe	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Community Van • Community Engagement Assembly • O me-nok Day
Resilient DNATL	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Coalition and Capacity Building • Education and Outreach • Community Education • Systems Change