

STRONGSTARTS4ALL

A comprehensive plan to support every child.



OMAR PASSONS
FOR SAN DIEGO COUNTY SUPERVISOR

My Story

I'm focused on prioritizing every child in San Diego County because my life is proof that it works.

I was born in San Diego, 10 weeks premature, at 2 pounds, 8 ounces — small enough to fit in an adult's hand. The County of San Diego-funded emergency health care for the poor saved my life in a neonatal intensive care unit. But my biological mother was disabled and suffered from mental illness and was never going to be able to take care of me, so at 10 months old I entered San Diego County's foster care system.



In foster care, I found loving parents, a speech pathologist for a stutter I developed, a child psychologist to help me through early rough spots, nutritious food, and educational support and encouragement. All of these strong, early supports built a foundation for my life. They equipped me with the tools I needed not only to graduate from high school, something half of all foster children don't do, but to attend and graduate from college, earn a Master's Degree in Public Health and then go on after completing law school to achieve a successful career as a land use and construction attorney. My ability to thrive in this community and to become a good citizen and leader in this community has been grounded in both my own hard work and perseverance and in early and ongoing support in childhood. This County — and the San Diego community — wrapped its arms around me.

I am grateful and fortunate to be in the position now to return the favor to hundreds of thousands of children in our region — from wealthy to working class — to transform our region's future for those children, their families, and the health of our regional economy.

Our plan is a framework influenced by my personal experience growing up with over 100 foster brothers and sisters in San Diego and it is a plan based on breakthrough research in brain science and child development.

Thank you for taking the time to read this plan; we have shaped it by listening to experts, voters, parents, and children in San Diego.

With passion and commitment,

A large, stylized handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'Omar'.

STRONGSTARTS⁴ALL:

Investing Early, Investing Wisely

StrongStarts4All is a plan founded on one unequivocal value: every child in San Diego County has a right to a strong start in life. Every. Single. Child. This right applies regardless of race, economics, neighborhood or citizenship. Children have no control over the circumstances of their birth, but as a community we can make a major difference in their lifetime opportunities and help them unlock their full potential. This creates a better life for kids, is essential for our regional economic competitiveness, and is at the core of improving equity and opportunity for our region for the long-term.

These solutions are not about expanding the government bureaucracy. Many trusted non-profit and community based organizations already exist and provide critical support, but they need our help. This plan is a path to provide that help and re-prioritize at the county level.

Our Region's Future Requires Us to Support Our Children

When we prioritize our region's children – from the time they are infants and toddlers until they transition into adulthood – we will generate profound long-term benefits for the San Diego region in addition to the immense benefits to the children themselves:

- **Reduced use of public benefits:** Children from strong families who receive quality early care and a boost into good careers will use fewer public supports, like welfare, food stamps, emergency room treatment and drug treatment, when they are adults.
- **Crime and risky behavior reduction:** Children who receive quality early child care are dramatically less likely to commit a violent crime in their lifetime. Middle and high school students who are busy with enriching after school and summer opportunities, including jobs for older youth, are less likely to commit crimes, take drugs and get pregnant.
- **Labor force participation:** Parents, especially mothers, benefit from child care by being able to work and earn 13% more each year over their lives. And teens who stay on track to graduate from high school and then attain a post-secondary degree or professional certificate will stay out of the category of “opportunity youth” – the ~10% of San Diego county 16-24 year-olds who are disconnected from both school and work.

The County of San Diego Must Drive This Change

Alongside school districts and community-based organizations, the County of San Diego is the most powerful and best-positioned entity in our region for supporting kids and families.¹ Most state programs and services for children and families run through the county, and the county manages our region's First 5 San Diego, which focuses on children aged five and under, and distributes (rapidly declining) tobacco tax funds designated for early childhood programs. There are over 250,000 children under age five in the region and First 5 San Diego reaches only a tiny fraction of them. To reduce this gap, the County can and should invest more than what it is legally mandated to do.

¹ This plan focuses on supports for all children and their families. Because homeless young people face increased and unique burdens, our campaign will release a plan that focuses on youth homelessness.

Our county government must be a beacon that lights a better path forward for every child to reach his or her full potential. We will have a stronger, more just, more equitable community that ensures meaningful opportunities to earn a living, raise a family if you choose, and be a contributing member of our community. Every child has a right to this future and together we can make it a reality.

This plan is a blueprint to ensure every child has access to reaching the American Dream. It is framed around three core principles:

1. **Prevention.** The smartest choice and the most prudent investment is to prevent negative outcomes before they even start.
2. **Growth.** Every phase of life offers the chance to build skills and knowledge, but the growth process is most intense during childhood, and it must be nurtured, with academic support, mental health resources and good nutrition.
3. **Opportunity.** Government and community cannot make outcomes equal for every child, but we can commit to ensuring that every child, regardless of community or family of origin, has the same opportunity to thrive.

These three core principles — **prevention, growth, opportunity** — exist in every stage of this plan and connect our *StrongStarts4All* plan to our overarching vision for the San Diego region.

Leveraging Existing Resources – Fiscally Prudent Growth

Our *StrongStarts4All* plan takes into account that no government has an endless supply of resources. We know, however, that San Diego County has failed to leverage money already available from the state and federal government for exactly the type of support that is critical for our young people. For example, state preschool providers underspent their contracts by \$49 million in 2016 and our county does not have high enough rates of food stamp (i.e. CalFresh) utilization. These underspends are not the result of low need — they are the result of the County not placing high enough priority on supporting families to get the benefits for which they are qualified. Our plan calls for fully utilizing available funds and for combining that money with County resources to be fiscally smart about the growth in our County's budget. Strong support for every child requires careful planning — for those most in need as well as for families who are doing okay financially but still suffer under the crippling weight of expensive child care that is too often inflexible for the workforce demands of our society.

Essential Early Advocacy: Expanding Quality Childcare

There is a massive need for high quality, flexible, and affordable child care across the region and across nearly all income levels including many middle-class families. The national Chamber of Commerce Foundation released a report from the business community citing quality child care as both a tremendous investment and a business necessity. One Louisiana study estimated a \$2 billion cost in lost worker productivity and tax revenue from lack of quality childcare. Further, economists at the Federal Reserve Bank of Minneapolis demonstrated a remarkable **16% return per year** on public investment from high quality early child care.



Early Focus on Reading is Critical

Given these figures, the County of San Diego's role in advancing early care and child development must include a dramatic reprioritization of lobbying efforts in Sacramento. Business leaders in San Diego have asserted a willingness to increase availability — and to fully subsidize care and development — but key regulatory and liability hurdles stand in the way. We must elevate to the top of the County priority list:

- Legislation to restore state investments in early childhood to pre-recession levels and greater; and
- Legislation calling for reform to Community Care Licensing Division processes to ease creation of high-quality facilities; and
- Legislation calling for liability protection for business-subsidized care for employees and their families when the facilities meet certain standards of quality and supervision

These changes, along with County-level overhauls to zoning and building processes to incentivize child care facility development, will significantly improve access to affordable, high-quality child care.

Part I – Prevention: Promoting Possibilities

Major advances in brain science over the last two decades make clear that as a society we have vastly overlooked the importance of the first years of a child's life. When a child is born, her brain is only 25% of its adult brain weight. **However, by age two brain size has spiked to 75% and by five, it has reached 90%.** We know that brain development and income are linked and so investing in children early improves their lifetime outcomes.

Strong Nutrition is Essential to Strong Development

The County is responsible for administering federal government programs for nutrition, education, and food aid. These programs are vital for all San Diegans who experience food insecurity but are especially critical for children and youth. In San Diego County, 232,358 children are enrolled in the Free & Reduced Price Meal Program (FRPM). This federal program provides breakfast, lunch, dinner and summertime lunch options to young people. Despite the presence of this program, we know that **nearly 140,000 children** in San Diego County are not receiving food support essential for development, for which they are eligible.

To improve every child's development and ability to succeed with a nutritious start, the County must:

- Increase alignment of Nutrition Education & Obesity Prevention (NEOP) funding with existing CalFresh outreach and education
- Expand summer meals at county libraries in high-need portions of the county
- Expand summer academic programming and access to mental health for youth co-located with expanded summer meal efforts
- Further expand CalFresh outreach targeting eligible families

The County must elevate the start of every child's life to the top of our regional priority list. The results are unequivocal:

- 13% ROI — There is a double digit return on investment for every dollar spent from birth to age 5 versus vanishing returns over time as a child becomes an adult. Investing early makes a difference
- 70% — Decrease in arrest rates for children with high-quality care and pre-kindergarten
- Higher Income — Parents whose children receive high-quality care and pre-kindergarten experience higher lifetime earnings

The County of San Diego has the authority and the reach to prioritize infants and children in a way that no other body could. It also has the tools and ability to support nutrition and essential prevention steps across a child's journey to adulthood.

Key Action Steps for Prevention

- **Support strong parents:** The County must expand maternal and child health home visits and other forms of parenting education because parents are a child's first teacher. Helping them be stronger parents helps everyone.
- **Provide paid family leave:** The County can lead the way and join most of the industrialized world with four months of paid family leave to care for a new child — for its own employees. Over time it can also include this benefit for its contractual relationships with its funded partners and contractors. Many countries guarantee six to twelve months of paid family leave following the birth or adoption of a new child, so this is merely a start and a commitment of leadership.
- **Decent pay to teach our children early:** Child care providers earn ridiculously low wages, considering the essential role they play in nurturing our children in the most crucial brain-building years. To prevent high turnover and increase the supply of qualified providers, we must pay those who care for and teach our children at the earliest stages a wage that is livable with full benefits. The County can start by expanding its existing but very limited program for child care teacher stipends and by providing access to a benefit pool for teachers in licensed child care settings.
- **Places to Get on Track:** Expansion of County library system programming and partnership with municipal libraries focused on academic support, youth mental health and nutritional lunches for youth
- **Academic Recovery & Enrichment:** Working with the school & private learning systems with expanded county library resources, the county must support getting young people on track academically as they transition to enter high school. This will prevent the space where most youth slide into truancy, crime, incarceration, and homelessness.

The role of First 5 San Diego

San Diego County receives a relatively small amount of support from First 5 San Diego each year. In FY2018, the Commission's \$42 Million budget will enable it to contract for \$36 Million in services for young children — about \$144 per young child in the county. By contrast, our public schools receive about \$9,500 per child age 5 and older. Notably, since First 5 funding comes from a tobacco tax and Californians are fortunately smoking less and less each year, funding for First 5 is projected to decline precipitously over the next five years. In short, the Commission's resources are important, but they are a drop in the proverbial bucket and we need to act now to create a plan to sustain the successful programs that our First 5 San Diego currently funds.

These steps are specifically designed to embrace the mantra that “an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure.” Prevention is the key to promoting healthy choices and sets the stage for the growth our young people need.

Part II – Growth: Nurturing the tools for success

Preventing challenges for our children is necessary, but it is not enough and we must help them grow. Research is clear that student transitions from middle school to high school are a risky time when all-too-common dips in commitment to school have dramatic long-term consequences.² To support the growth of our region’s youth, the County must leverage its existing buildings and partnerships. The County can no longer be a passive observer in the lives of young people, many of whom end up in the juvenile and adult justice systems or on the streets of our communities without support, and adding to our homeless crisis.

Key Action Steps for Growth

- **Expand the supply of high quality affordable child care:** San Diego parents from every community and at nearly every income level are struggling to find quality reliable child care — there simply are not enough providers. Working parents are leaving the labor force because they can’t find affordable care they can trust. Staying home by choice is an appropriate choice for some parents, but staying home because our child care market is failing is a problem our government can tackle. The County can use zoning incentives identified in our *Housing4All* plan, excess property and social impact financing to reduce facilities costs for child care providers.
- **Help understand the transition to high school:** Provide essential transition and career information and support in child welfare and family nutrition programs to reach high-risk youth
- **Create Bridge opportunities:** Partnerships with learning camps for summer bridge opportunities to limit academic slide during transition to high school
- **Support Use of Interest Assessment:** One key to success is ensuring that youth understand their talents and interests. Local universities are doing groundbreaking work to help youth using the *Strong Interest Inventory*; this or similar tools must be made a larger part of our regional support of all youth.
- **Support Self-Directed Career Learning:** The County must partner with the existing workforce training system and the community college system to ensure every high school student has personalized access to career pathways. This will require a new partnership between our K-12 and community college/UC/CSU systems to push key technologies into reach for students and their families as well as a mechanism for tracking use.
- **Provide Transportation Access for Every Youth:** San Diego County is home to regional assets that include Balboa Park, Mission Trails Regional Park, Torrey Pines State Preserve and numerous locations for summer work and continued growth for young people. Our County must make these assets — as well as our Community College, apprenticeship, and certificate learning programs — more available to San Diego’s youth by fully sponsoring bus and trolley access from ages 14 to 21.

² Examining Long-Term Impact of Achievement Loss During the Transition to High School - Joshua S. Smith (2006); Achievement loss associated with the transition to high school – John W. Alspaugh (1998)

Part III – Opportunity: Opening doors for children to thrive

Our region faces two major crises that we must address: (1) an exploding homeless population driven in part by struggling youth and (2) underqualified and underprepared youth for the region's in-demand careers. Our *StrongStarts4All* plan tackles both of these key issues by fostering opportunity when it will make the most difference.

For our struggling youth who are in foster care, homeless, or who are living on the brink in or near poverty, County support is critical. Our plan calls for support to help these young people understand who they are and what their strengths and aptitudes are and then provides support to help them train and achieve. For all youth in our region, we know the statistics present serious challenges. Only 26% of San Diego County's residents have completed any post-secondary degree or certification by the age of 24. This is a major barrier for our regional economic competitiveness and it also locks many people out of the opportunity and upward mobility that has been our country's hallmark. We know that youth who lack knowledge of quality career prospects are more likely to drop out of high school than their peers and that a student who drops out of high school is as much as **8 times more likely** to become incarcerated than a graduate.

Strengthening the ladders to career pathways and providing roadmaps to those pathways will not only help young people achieve, it will strengthen the quality of our workforce and improve our overall economy. This third phase of our plan is about strengthening the entire pipeline of local talent, from software engineers and scientists to plumbers and pipefitters, teachers, entrepreneurs, police officers and many other quality, in-demand careers.

First, we must have County leadership to support growth so that more young people in schools, through our community college system and those temporarily or at risk of dropping out can see a path forward. Then, our County must lead in supporting the opportunity infrastructure needed for paid work experience and to enhance our STEM and apprenticeship pipelines.

To help every young person in San Diego County get the strong direction to take hold of their future, San Diego County must support parents, schools, and our community in strategic ways.

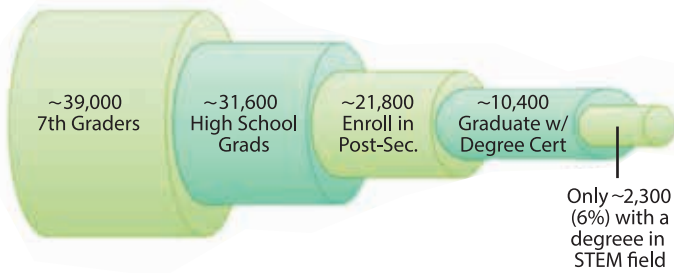
Key Action Steps for Youth Opportunity

- **Establish Youth Summer Enrichment:** Focused middle school foster/high-risk youth summer enrichment exposures through non-profit partnership and sponsored access to Balboa Park and Liberty Station Arts District museums and programming
- **Expand Paid Trade & Technical Summer Internships:** The County must partner with computer and health science companies and our union and non-union trade institutions to establish a full summer employment internship/pre-apprenticeship program throughout the County. Every student who is willing to work in a trade or technical internship must have the opportunity to realize the value of work for a livable wage in a critical shortage area for the San Diego market. This will improve career readiness, bolster economic stability, and strengthen the workforce system, especially for those youth not certain to choose a 4-year college path.



*Exposure to Career Alternatives
is Critical*

SAN DIEGO'S WORK FORCE PIPELINE GETS "TOO THIN"



Bookings documented ~15,000 STEM job openings per quarter in SD County in 2013



- **Establish Health Care & IT Career Ladder Connections:** Health care and Information Technology present unique opportunities for San Diego for two reasons. First, these fields are high-growth in our region. Second, they have built-in career ladders that require little post-secondary training at the first rung. The County must establish these connections by convening private industry and our education institutions and through its contractual relationships with service providers and hospitals.

- **Broaden Life Sciences Summer Institute:** A robust program for San Diego County's most cutting-edge industry — the life sciences sector — already exists and the County does not need to reinvent the wheel. The County does need to better support the LSSI program, to use its position as a regional leader to bring more companies in as partners, and to facilitate linking participants in the LSSI to quality opportunities in the post-secondary system.

San Diego has become a major international center for high-skill careers in STEM fields, but our collective failure to prepare local San Diego children for this work means that we are leaving behind our own children. This hurts regional competitiveness and the overall strength of our economy.

CONCLUSION - IMPORTANCE OF LASTING CHANGE

Our *StrongStarts4All* plan calls for sweeping, dramatic change that will require a shift in mindset by our policymakers, our parents, our public schools and our philanthropists. This plan is significantly more cost effective for our region than the cost of our prolonged inaction. We know that meaningful educational support — and support for parents where needed — pays off in the long run. We know that the changes called for in this plan will decrease crime and homelessness in the long term. We know strong, sustained support for our young people will enable the San Diego region to make its regard for children and their future match the beauty of our natural environment.

My own life is a testimony to the power of the components of this plan. The parents and grandparents and educators and job creators in our community are demanding the components of this plan and we are listening. In a country with increasing uncertainty and with diminishing support from the state and national level, our County must step forward with bold action. It made the difference in my life and can be the key to greater equity, economic growth and social prosperity for generations to come.

We must find paradise not merely in temperate climates, palm trees, and beaches, but in a community where every parent knows their child has the support and opportunity to thrive and achieve her full potential.

*" I am living proof that if
we support every child early,
we will foster a community
that is safer, more equitable
and more economically
prosperous for everyone."*



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FOR SAN DIEGO COUNTY SUPERVISOR

Stay in touch! Text Omar4SD to 50500