

I. Health & Safety

“Improve wellbeing of children and adolescents through collaborative and cooperative advocacy and service”

Health: There are thousands of children and youth in East Baton Rouge Parish; all of them need access to high quality, preventive health care. The authors of these goals represent experts in the fields of physical, medical, dental, and mental health as well as health education from Baton Rouge whose cumulative service to the children of this community represents hundreds of years of experience in Baton Rouge.

This plan for health and well-being is a call to action for every citizen of East Baton Rouge Parish, no matter their individual circumstances (money, race, religion, etc.); the challenges set forth in the plan emphasize human dignity for all of the children. The community of Baton Rouge will advance the physical, medical, mental, and dental health of children and teens 18 years of age and younger through utilizing community conversations and collaborations to attain the following goals.

Safety: For the children of the Greater Baton Rouge area to achieve their fullest potential, we must endeavor to assure that each child lives in a safe home and a safe community. Our children deserve safe places and structured activities in which to learn and grow. We must aim to protect our children from child abuse, online predators, crime, teen-on-teen violence, and preventable injuries – the number one killer of children ages 1-18; and, we must provide our children with safe venues where they can go before and after school for stimulating, adult-supervised activities that are physically safe, caring, developmentally challenging, accessible and affordable. Additionally, our community must improve our ability to respond to emergencies and disasters for the security of our children. Given the paramount importance of safety to the overall well-being and success of our children we propose the following goals to improve safety in our community.

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II. Education & Early Childhood

Education- ***“Improve literacy skills of children so that all children are reading and writing on grade level by the end of 3rd grade.”***

Early childhood – ***“Support high quality early childhood care and education for children through aggressively advocating for the LA Quality Rating System for Childcare.”***

Early Childhood: During early childhood, from birth until 5 years of age, a child undergoes tremendous growth and development. Research tells us what we know instinctively: caring, responsive relationships and encouraging environments that are safe and healthy set the stage for early learning experiences. These positive experiences provide a foundation for future success in both academics and life. Regardless of setting, quality early childhood care and education nurtures children by using developmentally appropriate practices such as imaginative play and hands-on learning. Early language and literacy, math, science, and social skills are all developed through everyday routines and positive interactions with adults.

Relationships with parents and families are of primary importance and parents are valued as their child's first and life-long teacher. Quality early learning experiences improve health and safety outcomes and provide support for children whose families are struggling with social and economic stressors. Investing in high quality early childhood care and education is critical for our community because it truly is an investment in our future.

Education: Our community is at a critical juncture in public education. The final settlement consent decree in our desegregation case expires at the end of the 2006-2007 school year. We as a community must step up to our responsibility to educate all our community's children. As a community concerned about economic development and the quality of life for all, vibrant education is the foundation for Baton Rouge to achieve the vision of becoming a learning community.

Our public school system has its first ever Strategic Plan with the goal "To become an exemplary pre-kindergarten through 12th grade school system with rigorous teaching learning where ALL students and adults meet high expectations." These education goals, crafted by stakeholders throughout the Greater Baton Rouge, are ones that the community can work on together to improve the education of our children. Universal prekindergarten would increase our ability to achieve these goals.

In the 2000 census in East Baton Rouge Parish 26.2% of our population was under 18 — 101,109 children. Post- Katrina that number of children has increased. The better we educate our children, the brighter the future of our community will be.

These teams can work together. There is steam building for these programs around the state and we should be a part of the fight for quality child-care and early childhood initiatives.

1. Literacy program collaboration
 - a. EBR library
2. Early Childhood Education
 - a. LA Partnership Road Map
 - b. Keeping informed on most up-to-date information

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III. Basic Needs & Family Support

"Increase awareness of the community on the importance of quality parenting that includes comprehensive life skills training."

"Increase community awareness of services available to families and facilitate coordination of these services."

"Increase public knowledge of food banks and emergency food availability."

Basic Needs: Louisiana ranks 49 among all states in a recent state-by-state report on the well being of our citizens. Nine percent of Louisiana's children live in low-income households where no adult worked in the past year, the highest of any state nationwide. In 2003 fourteen percent of all teens in Louisiana were not working or in school. Louisiana ranked 44th among all states in out-of-wedlock pregnancies.

The Basic Needs of children ranked number one in priority ranking by the Institutional Community leaders and those who responded to the Adult Survey. The committee addressed the areas of food/ clothing, housing, transportation and child care as the areas needing focused, priority attention if we are to expect advancement by our indigent, vulnerable citizens. We feel passionately that the goals and strategies outlined for you are only starting points for community leaders. It is incumbent for all sectors of this community to come together and share the responsibility of working towards a better life for all citizens of Baton Rouge. This is the time to "seize the day."

Family Support: Children are our future and families are their foundations. Families come in all shapes, sizes and colors. Because of this complexity, our approach to support families must be as diversified. One of the major goals for Family Support is to nurture efforts at raising informed, healthy and happy children so that they may become productive adults. In addition, we must “pop” the family bubble that keeps us from taking responsibility for all children—no matter where they come from or to whom they belong. We all have a role to play in assuring children and their families have what they need. Understanding the impact we have on each other will bring great improvements to the status of our community.

1. LAPEN – we should be in the loop.
2. Neighborhood Place – Is it right. What could our role be?
3. Awareness is the key – what would be a good way to increase this?
4. Poverty – does it fit into this category?

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IV. Art/Recreation & Youth Leadership

“Advance Arts & Education by establishing youth leadership programs through community collaborations.”

Arts & Recreation: Recreation, Arts and Culture are areas that are critical to the well being of all children. Often considered the “fluff” in the education arena, these areas support better learning and increase value in every day living. These areas are needed for the quality of life. Recreation is a tool in dealing with obesity. Play time for the very young is the first education a child receives. Art is one of the first learning tools for little ones , learning colors and shapes. Art as expression is therapeutic, as a non threatening way for children to express themselves. Art, performance or visual, is communication and brings great pleasure to children. Cultural Activities offer our children the appreciation of heritage and our different cultures. Recreation and childhood play are a foundation for lifelong health. Arts, Culture, and Recreation enhance and support all the other areas of the Community Plan for Children - Health, Education, Early Childhood and Child Care, Youth Leadership and Service, Family Support and Safety.

Youth Leadership & Service: The Children’s Coalition of Greater Baton Rouge recognizes the importance of youth leadership in our community. This community plan embraces the value of the youth voice, their solutions and contributions. Through forums and surveys, we want to actively consider their thoughts and ideas about building a brighter future for all youth and children in the Greater Baton Rouge area. This is only one example of how we should support our youth and help them to become engaged, productive citizens of Baton Rouge. “Service is the rent we pay for being. It is the very purpose of life.” This famous quote of Marian Wright Edelman directs our community to a very, precious value we must instill in our youth--“giving back”. Making a difference in life begins with service and ultimately produces well-rounded, caring leaders. Service and leadership development combined teaches our young people about civic participation, democracy and public voice...the true attributes of citizenship.

1. Explore community collaborations
 - a. Arts Council
 - b. Local Museums and Galleries
 - c. Search for possible collaborations
2. BREC – how can we utilize this relationship?

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