

# WE COUNT AND WE VOTE!

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



# 2021

Increasing census and electoral participation among underrepresented children and families in Contra Costa County.

## PROJECT OVERVIEW

The recent U.S. census and national elections offered unprecedented opportunities for more equitable political representation, distribution of resources, and civic engagement. In 2020, volunteer parent advocates in the Central, East, and West County Regional Groups (RGs) led a community mobilizing effort to understand the concerns and priorities of underrepresented families with young children and to increase their participation in the U.S. census and general election. Despite the devastating impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, RG members succeeded in engaging low-income residents of color to bring more resources and electoral representation to Bay Point, Concord, Richmond, and San Pablo communities.

Regional Group members spoke with thousands of residents to understand their priorities, identify solutions, and facilitate participation in the 2020 census and general election.

## METHODOLOGY

Parent advocates in the three RGs made 17,347 in-person and telephone attempts to connect with Contra Costa residents, resulting in 6,529 completed contacts which included a survey of community priorities, conversations about the census and voter participation, and/or sharing of informational materials.

## COMMUNITY ASSESSMENT

RG members collected over 1,500 surveys assessing the pressing needs and concerns of residents in the selected areas. **Across all regions the top concerns identified were quality parks and safe streets, and affordable, stable housing.**

## TOP COMMUNITY CONCERNS BY REGION AND COUNTYWIDE

Source: Community Survey

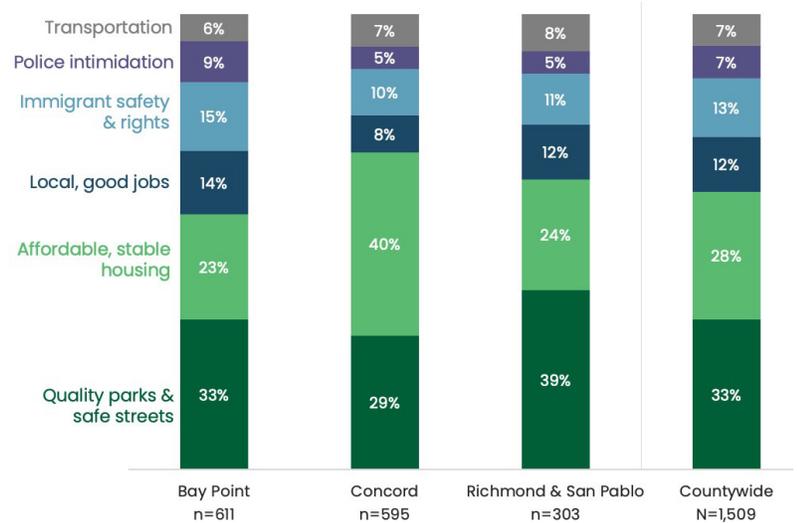


Figure 1 summarizes survey responses for top priority concerns by region and countywide.

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### CENSUS

Families with young children, low-income communities, and Black, Indigenous and people of color have historically been undercounted due to inadequate outreach, disinformation, exclusionary policies, and mistrust of government. The RGs developed linguistically and culturally relevant census information to increase participation. Of 4,500 residents reached with census messaging, 83% said they intended to complete the census or had already done so. Self-response rates increased 5.3% overall, from 72.1% in 2010 to 77.4% in 2020, with increases in Concord District 2 (+7.6%) and Richmond (+3.5%) and a slight decrease in Bay Point (-0.6%). **Overall, Contra Costa's self-response rate increased from 72.1% in 2010 to 77.4% in 2020, the third-highest self-response rate in the state.**

### VOTER EDUCATION AND REGISTRATION

The November 2020 general election included electoral races and ballot measures important to the RG priorities of equity, health, and safety. RGs spoke to 2,086 residents, registering voters and providing vital information about voting during the pandemic. **In the districts where the RGs focused their efforts, voter turnout increased from 2016, with 88% of residents reporting they had voted or would vote.**

### MOVING FORWARD

This community-led, peer-to-peer mobilization demonstrates the effectiveness of supporting and investing in resident leadership for increased electoral representation, equity, and early childhood health. The project underscores the importance of community partnership and support, collaborative strategy and flexibility, investment in leadership development, and the transformative power of engagement.

#### Key recommendations gleaned from this effort include:

- Investments should support resident-led advocacy and base building to increase equitable health, safety and representation.
- Policymakers in the focus areas should prioritize investments in parks, streets, and housing security.
- Decision makers should strengthen partnerships with underrepresented residents and community-based organizations.
- Census promotion campaigns should partner with, learn from, and support trusted community leaders.
- Voter mobilization should be tied to community leadership, priorities, and long-term goals.
- Successful civic and census participation must include effective strategies for building trust and removing structural barriers.

**Authentic partnership between staff and Regional Group leaders was critical to ensuring that the project supported parents' short and long-term goals for themselves and their communities.**

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Please visit [first5coco.org/we-count-and-we-vote](https://first5coco.org/we-count-and-we-vote) to download the full report.