



Solano County's "100 Best Communities" Fast Facts and Q&A

Fast Facts:

- Solano County has, for the fourth time in a row, been named one of America's Promise Alliance's *100 Best Communities for Young People*, a competition presented by ING.
- We were honored for our commitment to helping our young people get a healthy start, enter school ready to learn and increase the chances they will graduate and be prepared for the workforce.
- We were selected as a winner because of how our community is working together and taking real action to address the challenges facing our young people head on.
- Earning the *100 Best* distinction signals that we are committed to helping to create a brighter future for Solano County's young people to achieve their potential.
- Residents and leaders of Solano County should be proud of receiving the *100 Best* honor. **Solano is the only community in California to be named a "100 Best Community" four times in a row.**
- Beyond demonstrating our dedication to local youth, the award can help bolster our economic development, and has further brought people together to better our community.
- Through winning *100 Best*, our local efforts can help inspire other communities across America to make a stronger commitment to children.

Q&A on What Winning Means for Solano County:

Q. What makes Solano County a *100 Best* community? Why is it important?

A: *100 Best* honors communities committed to helping every young person reach their potential by helping them graduate and end the nation's dropout crisis.

- Solano is a place determined to keep kids in school and prepare them for the future. With this distinction, we will work even harder to make sure our children and youth

are a priority, at all ages and across all sectors. Solano County is a *100 Best* community because we have dedicated leaders, organizations and residents committed to making Solano an even better place for kids to grow up.

- Faced with numerous challenges in society, our young people need us. That's why we've developed programs such as the Leaven's tutoring and afterschool programs, Solano County Library Foundation's "Reach Out and Read" program, First 5 Solano's School Readiness Programs (in Fairfield/Suisun, Dixon, Vacaville and Vallejo) and the recently-established Solano County Volunteer Center, just to name a few, to ensure the young people here have all the supports necessary to be healthy, achieve academically and succeed in life.

Q: What is Solano County doing that makes it one of the *100 Best* communities?

A: Applying for *100 Best* gave us the opportunity to reflect upon what we're doing locally to make Solano a great place for kids. Most importantly, winning showed us that we are headed in the right direction.

- We have community leaders, educators, faith leaders and neighbors working together to ensure our young people graduate and are ready for adulthood.
- We know that being named *100 Best* does not mean we're perfect, but it shows our collective commitment to Solano's kids, supporting them to stay in school and providing the resources they need to succeed.
- See our attached Solano County 2010 "100 Best" application for highlights of substantive and effective programs and services for young people in Solano. If it weren't for the strict word limits in the application, the list would be much longer!

Q: How did Solano County apply for the *100 Best* competition?

A: Each time Solano has applied for the "100 Best" designation, a different partner has taken the lead on compiling information from partners across the County. As in years past, just filling out the entry form brought committed members of the community together to recognize and solve problems.

- This year, under the leadership of the Solano County Library Foundation's Executive Director, Dilenna Harris, and Library Foundation Board Member Patty Jansen, new faith- and non-profit partners such as The Father's House, the Leaven Project and JROTC programs were featured in the 2010 Solano application.
- Also highlighted this year were the First 5 Solano and the Solano Child Abuse Prevention Council's partnership with California State Prison Solano to create a child-friendly family visiting area at the prison, as well as the newly-established Solano Volunteer Center.

- The 2010 Solano County “100 Best” application documented both the continued good work of ongoing partners and the fine work of new partners (see application for details).

Q. How will Solano County celebrate the *100 Best* award?

A: In addition to a presentation at the Solano County Board of Supervisors in October to honor the “100 Best” partners, each “100 Best” winning community will receive a \$1,000 honorarium to plan a community-wide event. Stay tuned for more information on this event, which will take place in late Fall or early Winter 2010/11.

Q. What other benefits has Solano County gained as a *100 Best* community?

A: Being *100 Best* honoree is a proud moment for every Solano resident. The challenges of the economic downturn are sometimes daunting; no one can deny that there is much to improve! That said, especially in these difficult economic times, it is more important than ever to hold our long-term and effective collaboratives together and keep track of the good works happening all over the county every day, so that we can build on our successes and expand our positive impact.

Against the odds, the perseverance, skills and practical optimism of our parents, providers and policymakers have helped us to ensure high rates of health insurance for our children, increasing improvement in our school test scores and increased numbers of at-risk children kept more safely in their homes and communities.

In addition, Solano is a community where families and businesses can flourish. Business, government and non-profit partners are working together in collaboratives such as the First 5 Solano/Solano Economic Development Corporation’s “Alliance of Business for Children,” Children’s Network/United Way’s “Earn It! Keep It! Save It!” campaign, Vallejo City Unified School District’s “Career Academies” project, and Solano County Office of Education’s “P-16 Council” (among many efforts) to help open doors for more young people to get a good job, own a home, invest in their future and stay on the right path to adulthood.

Solano County’s focus on children, attention to using data for accountability of our children’s programs, and collaborative successes make us an example that can serve as a guide for other communities. This is an opportunity for Solano share what we know works and to learn from other strong communities what they are doing to support their young people.

Q&A on the National *100 Best* Competition:

Q. What are the qualities of a *100 Best* community? Why is it important?

A: First held in 2005, *100 Best* honors communities committed to helping every young person reach their potential by helping them graduate high school and to end the nation’s dropout crisis.

- Being *100 Best* means you are working together to keep kids in school and prepare them for the future.

- *100 Best* communities make children and youth a priority, at all ages and across all sectors.
- Faced with numerous challenges in society, our young people need us. The winning communities recognize this and have made improvements to ensure their young people have all the wrap-around supports necessary to be healthy, achieve academically and succeed in life.

Q: How were the winners selected?

A: All applications were reviewed by a distinguished panel of civic, business and nonprofit leaders. These judges look for innovative or proven programs and initiatives that demonstrate applicant communities are actively working to increase graduation rates. Winning communities had to demonstrate how they are collaborating across sectors (schools, nonprofits, business and faith communities working together) to help the young people in cities and towns overcome challenges and achieve their potential.

Q: What do winning communities get for winning?

A: The theme for this year's competition is 'Get on the Map,' as the winners were recognized in September at a Washington, D.C. ceremony marking each winning community on the U.S. map. Winners also received two road signs designating their community as one of the *100 Best*, logistical and financial support for a local celebration, as well as national publicity. Also, winners received support from Alliance partners to help improve and energize their efforts and an opportunity to become a part of the larger *100 Best* winners' network where they can share and learn from other cities and towns and their successful programs.

Q: What does ING have to do with this initiative? What is their role in the competition?

- *100 Best* is supported by the ING Foundation which shares the Alliance's passion to invest in the development and future of America's young people.
- Each year on average, the ING Foundation contributes \$3.5 million towards education initiatives.
- ING is committed to supporting and improving education for youth in grades K-12, especially children in underserved areas or facing economic disadvantages.
- ING is helping spread the word of the *100 Best* competition through the ING Foundation's numerous community events such as its marathons, National Teacher /Superintendent of the Year awards, and its various conferences. In addition, the ING Foundation provides national publicity and recognition for the winning communities as well as financial support for local celebrations in the winning communities.
- Further, ING employees are participating in several of the local celebration events.

Q. What are the benefits for the nation?

A: *100 Best* communities are helping ensure this nation remains competitive in a global economy with a healthy, well-equipped workforce by developing confident, resilient young people ready to work.

- If the dropouts of the Class of 2008 had stayed in school and graduated, they would generate \$319 billion in wages over their working lives. The nation would have saved \$174 billion in healthcare costs.
- Ending the dropout crisis would be the best economic stimulus America could receive.
- We will be closer to achieving President Obama's goal of having the highest proportion of college graduates by 2020.
- If we could increase the graduation rate of male students by just 5%, our nation would gain \$7.7 billion in crime-related savings and added revenue.
- When a city or town comes together and provides the *Five Promises*, young people:
 - lead more productive, happier and healthier lives
 - do better in school and are more likely to pursue higher education
 - less likely to fall victim to the negative influences around them
 - are five to 10 times MORE likely to become productive citizens in their communities.

Background: 10 Quick Facts on the Nation's Drop Out Issue

- Every 26 seconds, another student drops out of school.
- One in three of America's students fail to graduate from high school.
- More than 7,000 students drop out every day.
- Among minority students, the problem is even more severe with less than 50 percent of Native American and a little more than half of African American and Hispanic students completing high school on time.
- The graduation rate is just 53% in the principal public school districts of our 50 largest cities.
- Dropouts are three times as likely as graduates to live in poverty and eight more times likely to go to prison.
- Dropouts are twice as likely to become the parent of a dropout, perpetuating the cycle.
- Dropouts are twice as likely as graduates to be unemployed.
- Dropouts have a four in 10 chance of depending on public assistance.
- Dropouts are more likely to have health problems, go without health insurance and have a shorter life expectancy.

Background: America's Promise Alliance

- Founded in 1997 America's Promise Alliance is the nation's largest partnership organization dedicated to improving the lives of children and youth.
- With nearly 400 partners representing all sectors of American society, the Alliance raises awareness, supports communities and engages in nonpartisan advocacy around key issues impacting the lives of young people to ensure that all receive more of the fundamental resources they need to graduate high school prepared for college, work and life.
- Building on the legacy of its Founding Chairman General Colin Powell, the Alliance believes the success of our young people is grounded in the Five Promises—caring adults; safe places; a healthy start; an effective education; and opportunities to help others.