

# Parent and Community Perspectives of a School-based Virtual Dental Home Program

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## Background

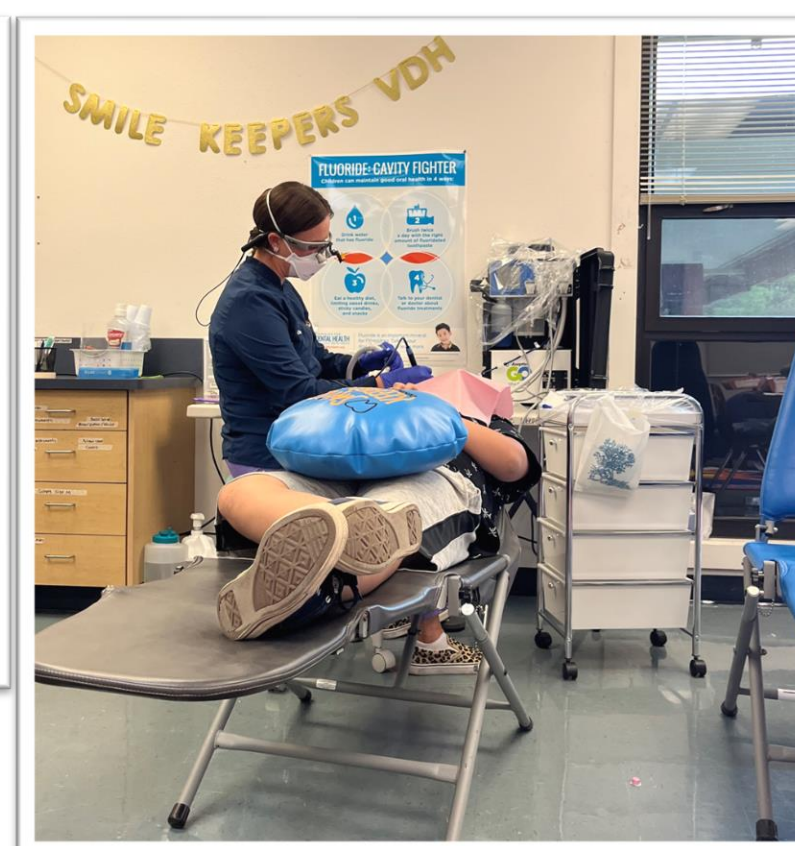
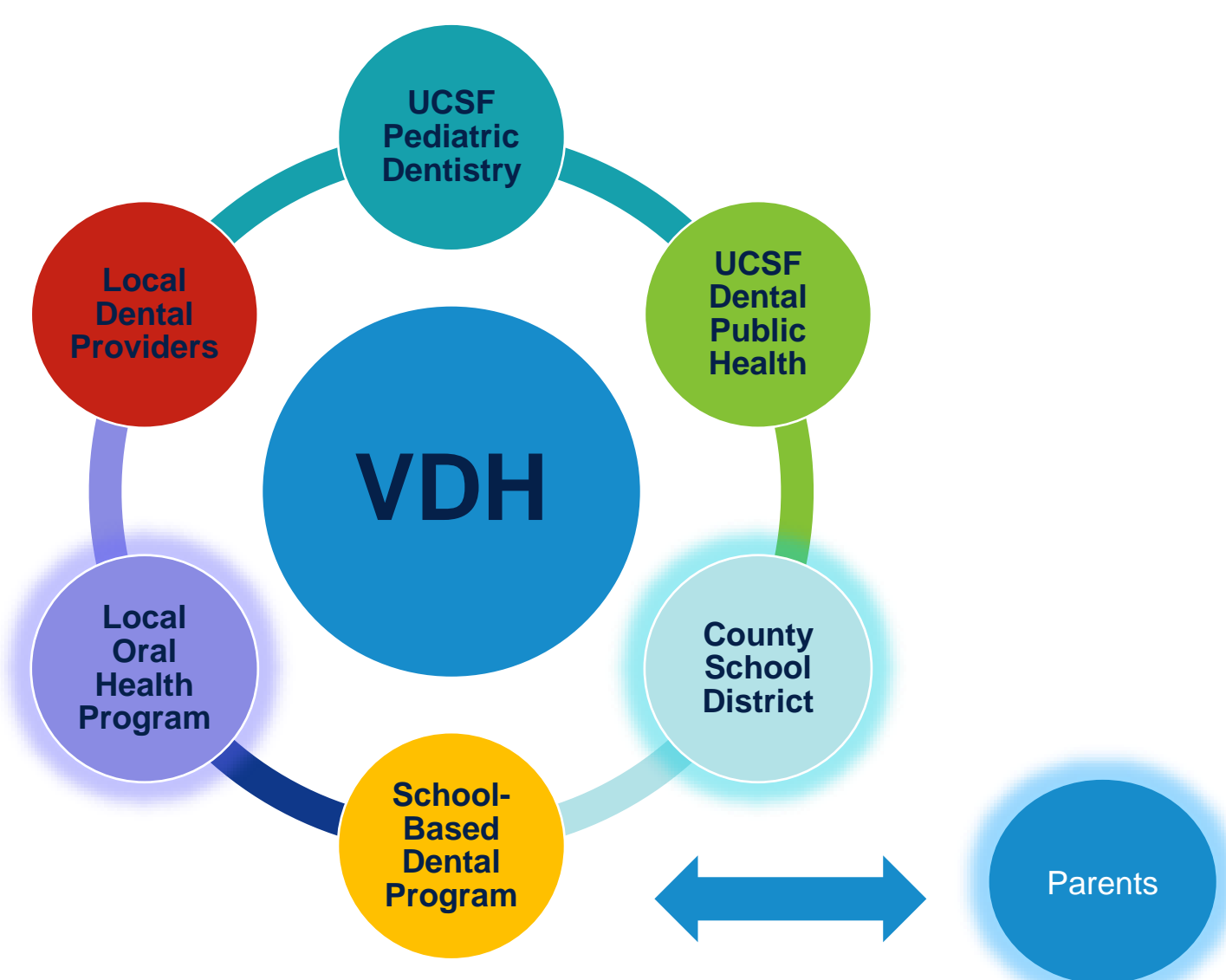
Children in rural California have limited access to dental services and a disproportionately high burden of oral disease. The provision of dental services through a school-based virtual dental program (VDH) can help to make dental care more accessible thereby reducing the delay with seeking appropriate treatment and the burden on families to ensure that their children have optimal oral health

Utilizing innovative models to increase access to dental care will help reduce unnecessary suffering in children due to unmet dental needs. By incorporating dental care into the school environment, we will help create awareness in the community about the importance of oral health and promote an atmosphere of trust between dental care providers and the community.

The aim of this study was to understand the perspectives of parents and community stakeholders about the VDH program and its impact.

## Methods

In Fall 2021, a school-based VDH program was implemented in Tuolumne County in partnership with two community-based dental clinics, and the pediatric dental and dental public health (DPH) residency programs at the University of California San Francisco. A five-item survey was distributed to parents (N=6) and semi-structured interviews were conducted with community stakeholders, three school personnel and two local health department personnel (N=5).



Open Smiles Team at the School

Left: Smile Keepers, DPH Resident, and UCSF Staff enrolling children in the VDH.

Right: Smile Keepers Clinical Director and RDHAP treating a child in the VDH.

## Results

Overall, there was a positive impression of the VDH program by parents and stakeholders. The most common response from families about the school-based VDH program is the convenience of accessing dental care at school, thereby reducing missed school days and travel time to the dental office. Parents also appreciated the personalized attention they were receiving in learning about oral diseases and helping their families with their overall health, which helped to build community trust. In addition, the school leadership found the program beneficial to increasing access to care in their rural community and appreciated the partnership with an academic institution. The availability of grant funding and financial support for the program made it easier to mobilize community resources. The close working relationship of the VDH team with the local health department and local oral health program has allowed for family assistance of other non-dental services such as food, travel, dental insurance, and other preventive services.

### County School District Perspective

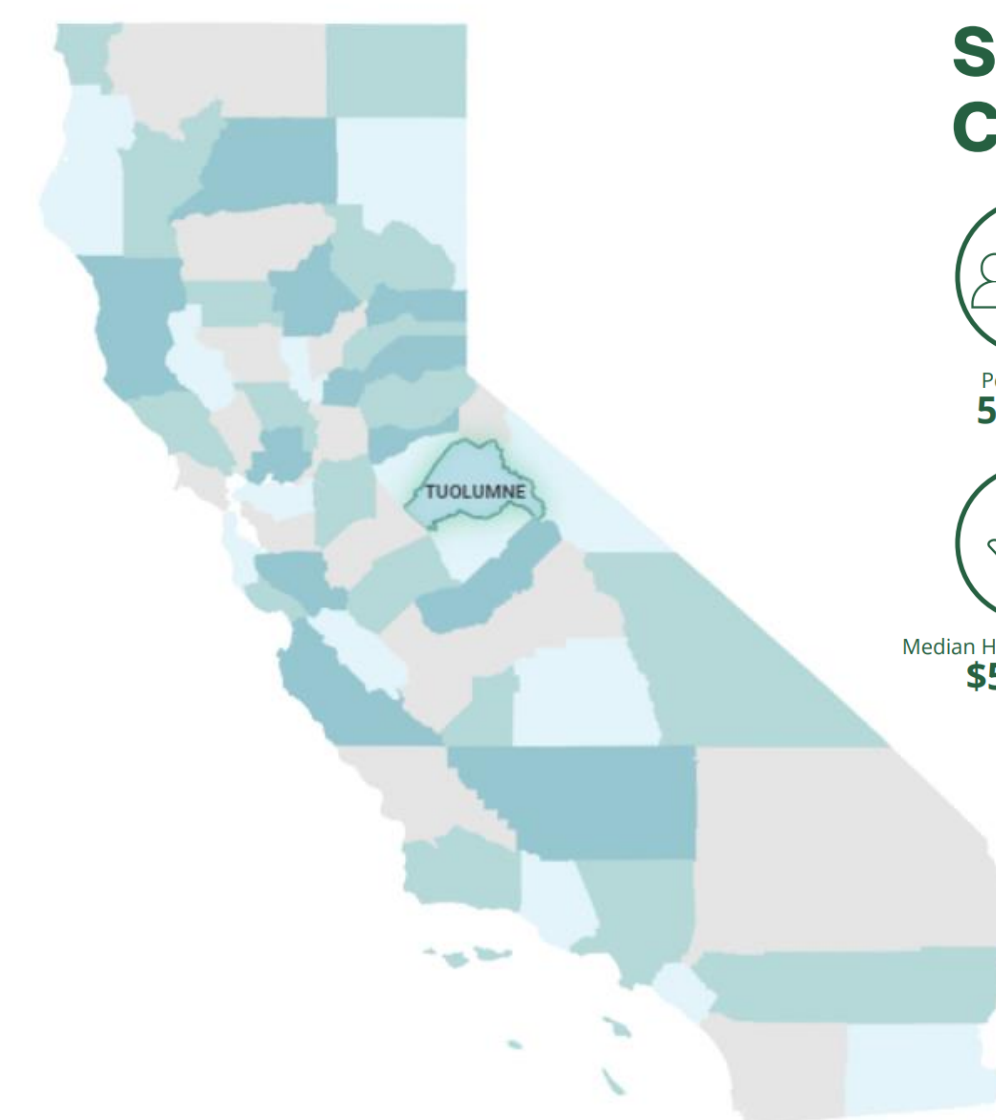
- “It’s a great partnership, it’s doing great things for the kids.. Having done the Smile Keepers program for many years has really already benefited our children and their dental health... that helps... it’s bringing the dental straight to the community.. That is only good for our kids.”

### Parents Perspective

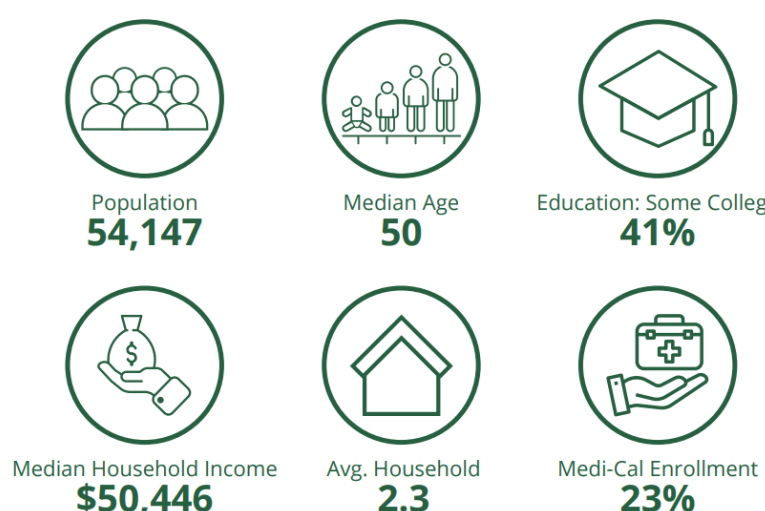
- “They are in school which means they are in good hands”
- “Because of your program, my children are confident and even enjoy going to the dentist which still amazes me”
- “My girls since they were little had a fear of the dentist. Since they have been seen at Smile Keepers at Tenaya that fear is gone. They are in a more comfortable and familiar environment”
- “They don’t have to miss school to drive to the next town with a dentist 45 minutes away”
- “ Smile Keepers is fantastic with communication... Both paper and phone communication. They were also gracious with giving me gas cards to get to the dentist”

### Local Oral Health Program Perspective

- “I think just having the backing of the health department has really helped to kind of get that support from the community and then also a lot have the internal stakeholders”
- Trying to work together to create a structure that we can apply all over... that will work for all programs and how we assess and refer and then provide education... starting to form a baseline so that we have that consistency, you no matter what school we’re at



### Snapshot of Tuolumne County



Data from: Tuolumne County Needs Assessment 2019

## Themes from Parent Surveys & Interviews

Communication

Community Trust

Convenience in Accessing Dental Care

Adaptability

Geographic Location

Community- Academic Partnership

Financial Incentives



Open Smiles Team

Above: Dental Public Health Resident, Smile Keepers and UCSF Pediatric Faculty at the elementary school

## Conclusion

Utilizing innovative models to increase access to dental care will help reduce unnecessary suffering in children due to unmet dental needs. By incorporating dental care into the school environment, we will help create awareness in the community about the importance of oral health and promote an atmosphere of trust between dental care providers and the community

### ACKNOWLEDGMENT

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