

## News Update

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### Study: Ottawa County Ranks Best In Child Well-being, Lake County Worst

The latest Kids Count in Michigan report ranks counties for the first time since its beginning in 1992, and the overall study shows an increase in child poverty and a decrease in children in foster care and teen birth rates.

Kids Count in Michigan is a collaboration between Michigan's Children and the Michigan League for Public Policy.

Ottawa, Livingston and Clinton Counties were ranked best for child well-being overall and Clare, Roscommon and Lake Counties were ranked worst.

By 2010 almost one of every four children, or 23 percent, lived in a family with an income below the poverty line (\$18,000 for a single-parent family of three and \$23,000 for a two-parent family of four), the study showed.

"We clearly see a connection between higher-income communities and better outcomes for kids," said Jane Zehnder-Merrell, Kids Count in Michigan project director at the Michigan League for Public Policy, in a statement. "But even in more affluent counties, child poverty and the need food assistance jumped dramatically."

Almost two in every five children live in a household where shelter cost uses more than 30 percent of the monthly income. The study also said the amount of children eligible for free or reduced price lunches in a county is the best measure for economic insecurity. More than half of the children in the state qualify for the program.

The amount of children eligible in Livingston County, ranked best in this category, is 23.2 percent compared to 92.7 percent in Lake County, ranked worst.

Almost two in every five young children, or 37 percent, were eligible for food assistance.

Almost 1 million children are covered by Medicaid and another 36,000 by MICHild.

Although the study said Michigan has one of the lowest rates of insured children in the country, some provider rates still limit access, especially for specialty care.

Almost one-third of children are threatened by being overweight or obese, which can cause many long-term health problems. Asthma is the most common chronic disease among children, affecting one in 10.

African-American children insured by Medicaid have the highest rates of asthma and of asthma-related emergency department visits compared with other children enrolled in Medicaid. African American infants are twice more likely to be born at a low-birth weight than white infants, (14 percent vs. 7 percent) this disparity leads to disproportionate risk of developmental delay, chronic disease and death.

The study also showed accidents, usually with a motor vehicle, are the primary cause of death for youth aged 15-19 in all ethnic groups except African Americans, whose major cause of death is homicide with a rate 24 times higher than white youth.

More than 33,000 children in the state were confirmed as victims of maltreatment in 2011, compared to 28,000 in 2005. Most of the increases were in the low risk category, where families are referred to community services.

More than 80 percent of the cases were forms of neglect – the study said it is often a byproduct of poverty.

Children in foster care declined from 17,000 in 2005 to 11,000 in 2010.

The study did show fewer infants, children and youth died. The infant mortality rate dropped 8 percent between 2005 and 2010. The rate of death in children between 1-19 years old dropped 11 percent.

The teen birth rate also continued to decline. Although 11,000 teens still give birth each year, the amount declined from 34 per 1,000 female teens in 2003-05 to 32 in 2008-10.

About 30 percent of infants were born to mothers who did not receive adequate prenatal care and the percentage of infants born weighing less than 5.5 pounds stabilized at 8.3 percent between 2005 and 2010.

The study showed mixed results on the education front. Fewer fourth-graders were unable to demonstrate proficiency on the Michigan Educational Assessment Program reading test: dropping from 40 percent to 32 percent. The amount of eighth-graders failing to show math proficiency increased from 68 percent to 71 percent, in line with national standards.

On the Michigan Merit Exam, 47 percent of 11<sup>th</sup>-graders were unable to meet the proficiency for reading. And about a quarter of high school students did not graduate within four years.

“In 2013, we need to better match public policy decisions to what works cradle to career. For example ... strengthen connections between early childhood and the early elementary school years; reform K-12 education in a way that holistically address challenges that students face beyond the school walls – an approach that doesn’t rely solely on the K-12 education community,” said Michele Corey, interim president and CEO of Michigan’s Children. “And expand access to alternative education opportunities that utilize a fifth or sixth year of high school and connect a high school credential to community college credits or real-world work experience.”