

MAR 22 2000

Allen's P. C. B. Est. 1888

State gets poor mark

PORTLAND — Oregonians received a grade of C- for the well-being of the state's children in 1999, according to Children First for Oregon, a statewide advocacy group for children and families.

The group gave the status of Oregon's children a C- for the third year in a row. Its grades are based on the change since 1990 and the progress toward the 2000 Oregon benchmark goals compared to 1995 data.

"During a period of strong economic growth for Oregon," said the group's report, "This below-average grade for the well-being of our children reflects a lack of investment in our most important resource."

It said, "Child abuse and neglect is at its highest level this decade, more youth are dropping out of high school, and the proportion of children in poverty has increased during the last eight years."

On the upside, the report said, "Teen pregnancy decreased for the third year in a row, fewer youth are being arrested, and substance abuse among eighth-graders declined for the first time during the 1990s."

By subject area, the grade in investment in families dropped from C+ in 1998 to C- in 1999.

Among the reasons listed in

the report was that the proportion of children in poverty increased from 14 percent in 1990 to 16 percent in 1999.

It also said, "The rate of children without health insurance is on the rise for the first time since prior to 1990."

It said only 68 percent of court-ordered child support payments are actually paid. That figure has remained level for several years.

The report said, "An increasing percentage of poor families must spend a disproportionate amount of their income on housing, leaving little left over for other essentials."

The early childhood grade also dropped, from B to B-. The report said, "Early prenatal care has shown little improvement during the 1990s and much progress is needed to reach the 2000 benchmark."

The report praised Oregon, however, for reducing infant mortality during the 1990s. It said the percentage of 2-year-olds with current immunizations continues to make slow but steady improvement in Oregon.

The report said Oregon has met the 2000 benchmark for having child care available for 21 percent of children under 13. It added that finding infant and toddler care is still a challenge

for many parents.

The grade for safety rose from a C- in 1998 to a B- in 1999. Child abuse and neglect, however, is at its highest level since before 1990.

The report said, "Currently, nearly one out of 80 children in Oregon is a known victim of abuse or neglect."

The child death rate has dropped 19 percent since 1990. The leading causes of death for children in Oregon are unintentional injury, cancer and homicide.

Violent crime in Oregon is 15 percent lower than in 1990.

The grade for teen years also rose, from an F in 1998 to a D- in 1999.

The rate of juvenile arrests increased rapidly through the 1990s, but has fallen the last two years to 53.9 arrests per 1,000 children under age 18.

Self-reported substance abuse among eighth-graders has also dropped during the past two years, but is still higher than the 1990 rate.

The report said 26 percent of eighth-graders reported drinking alcohol during the last month, 19 percent reported using illicit drugs and 20 percent reported smoking cigarettes.

The report said, "The rate of teen pregnancy has declined for three consecutive years and is 13 percent lower than the 1990 rate."

Out of every 1,000 girls ages 10-17 in Oregon, 17.2 got pregnant in 1999.

The report said, "The teen suicide attempt rate is at its lowest since 1990. Suicide continues to be the second leading cause of death among teens ages 10-17."

The report said, "There were 201 documented suicide attempts among youth in Oregon ages 10-17 for every 100,000 youth."

Finally, the grade for education dropped from a B in 1998 to a C in 1999.

A bright spot is reading proficiency. The report said, "Reading proficiency among eighth-graders has improved 17 percent since 1995."

It said that 56 percent of eighth-grade students met or exceeded state reading standards.

Math proficiency among eighth-graders also increased slightly during recent years and is now 6 percent higher than in 1995. The report said 52 percent of eighth-graders met or exceeded state math standards.