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Report on children's problems: Linn County is near average

Albany Democrat-Herald

Linn County middle-schoolers are close to the state average when it comes to statistics on drug and alcohol use, carrying weapons and suicide attempts.

The statistics are reported in "Status of Oregon's Children," a county data book made public today by a statewide advocacy group called Children First for Oregon.

This year's report focuses on the needs of children ages 8 to 13. It states that many of the challenges thought to be problems for older youths actually are faced by this age group as well, which should be kept in mind when the state seeks to make its policy decisions.

Statewide, for example, 26 percent of eighth-graders report-

ed they drink alcohol every month and 13 percent had used drugs. Fifteen percent of middle-schoolers carry weapons and 13 percent seriously considered suicide in the past year.

In Linn County, 28 percent of eighth-graders reported drinking alcohol in the past month and 15 percent had used drugs. Eighteen percent of middle-schoolers had carried weapons and 13 percent reported seriously considering suicide.

Benton County statistics were similar, with 23 percent of eighth-graders reporting they had drunk alcohol and 14 percent saying they had used drugs, 18 percent of middle-schoolers saying they had carried a weapon and 13 percent seriously consid-

ering suicide. The state counted 279,352 children between the ages of 8 and 13 in 1999. In Linn County, there were 8,992 children in that age range, and in Benton County, there were 5,750.

Among its sources, the book cites regional data from the Center for Health Statistics, the 1999 Youth Risk Behavior Survey and the Office of Alcohol and Drug Abuse Programs Student Use Survey.

Not all students in Linn County take the surveys, nor do the same schools administer them each year. Groups of Albany students, for instance, were surveyed in 1997, 1998 and 2000 but not in 1999.

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Children's problems report: Linn falls near average

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- On state test scores, 80 percent of Linn third-graders and 66 percent of eighth-graders met or exceeded state standards in reading, compared with 82 and 64 percent statewide. For math, 74 percent of third-graders and 53 percent of eighth-graders met or exceeded the standards. The state's figures were 75 and 56 percent.

- Both reading and math scores have improved for Linn eighth-graders in the past years. Reading scores are 32 percent better than last year and math scores are 13 percent better. No percentage change was reported for the third-grade level.

- The Linn high school dropout rate has improved 20 percent from the last time the report was issued. The current rate is 7.2 percent. The statewide rate is 6.6 percent.

- Linn has lowered its infant mortality rate (43 percent better

than the previous report), its rate of low-birthweight infants (6 percent better) and its death rate of children age 1 to 14 (44 percent better).

- The rate of child abuse and neglect victims rose 9 percent, to 10.6 per 1,000 children. The statewide rate is 13.5.

- Child care supply, defined as spaces per 100 children ages 0 to 13, is at a rate of 16.6, or 4 percent worse now than it was when the last report was issued. The state's rate is 21 spaces per 100 children under 13.

The report recommends the Legislature support mental health and drug prevention efforts for children and families.

It also recommends community support for after-school and recreation programs, mentoring opportunities between adults and middle-schoolers and more "family-friendly" policies in the workplace.

Full results are available online at www.childrenfirst-foregon.org or by calling the organization at (503) 236-9754.