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Middle school students face challenges

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According to information released through the statewide child advocacy group, Children First for Oregon, local middle school-age children are concerned with more than peer pressure, puberty, pimples and parents who pry.

A 1999 profile on middle school students in Lane, Benton, Linn and Lincoln counties showed:

- 20 percent reported feeling sad or hopeless continuously for two weeks or more.
- 6 percent reported attempting

suicide in the last year.

- 13 percent reported seriously considering attempting suicide in the past year.
- 11 percent reported they do not have a caring adult to talk to when worried or scared.

• 7 percent reported missing at least one day of school in the last month because they didn't feel safe.

- 18 percent reported carrying a weapon such as a gun, knife or club in the last month.

Violence, substance abuse, mental health and education were also studied in the data book, which will be delivered to Gov. John Kitzhaber

and other decision makers across the state.

"This is a bit of a new focus for us," said Marie Hoeven, executive director of Children First. "We have worked very hard to raise the level of commitment on early childhood issues and are gratified to see that priority reflected in budgetary decisions over the last few years — especially in Gov. Kitzhaber's proposed budget."

The evidence to support early childhood intervention is "profound," Hoeven said, "but the Data Book findings demonstrate the real challenges that our 8- to 13-

year-olds are facing and where smart and focused investments can really make a difference."

The message, Hoeven said, is "Don't forget the kids in the middle."

Across the state, 26 percent of eighth-graders are drinking alcohol on a monthly basis; 15 percent are carrying weapons; 39 percent feel harassed at school; 13 percent seriously considered suicide in the last year; and 879 seventh- and eighth-graders dropped out of school.

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