

## Oregon average in child well-being

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After a decade of measurement and analysis, Children First for Oregon has awarded the state a "C" grade in child well-being, as released in its annual Report Card 2000: The Status of Oregon's Children, a mark that continues to fall short of the state's own goals.

When the Oregon State Benchmarks for child well-being were set in 1993, Oregon intended to meet the Benchmarks by the year 2000. Despite the fact that the Benchmarks have since been lowered to a more realistic set of goals, we continue to earn a "C" grade. "The lack of significant improvement on these key indicators argues for better investments to ensure the well-being of our most valuable asset, our children," said Children first Executive Director Marie Hoeven.

Research shows that Oregon has steadily decreased or shown no improvement since 1990 in the areas of childhood poverty, hunger, teen dropouts and juvenile arrests. "We need to invest smarter for Oregon's children to make this the last Report Card in which Oregon receives merely an average grade for child well being," Hoeven said. "Our ability to achieve above average results depends upon evaluation of the spending of precious public and private dollars, and on expansion of cost-effective efforts that raise the grade."

For example, mentoring can be an effective method to prevent, mediate and/or reverse negative outcomes for kids. One successful approach is Committed Partners for Youth, a mentorship program sponsored by Portland General Electric. Committed Partners serves at-risk youth in both pre-teen and teen years, children who increasing need

more community support.

Committed Partners has succeeded in developing activities and retreats for participating youth to build self-esteem and create new opportunities for personal growth. And, in coordinating training and on-going counseling for its volunteer mentors. With these investments, Committed Partners has developed a program that works for their community needs.

Positive trends in the 2000 Report Card:

- The number of children without health insurance has decreased by more than half in the last decade, a dramatic improvement.
- Continued improvements in math and reading proficiency have nearly met or surpassed the 2000 Benchmark.
- Since 1990, infant mortality rates have steadily declined and have now passed the 2000 Benchmark.

Negative trends in the 2000 Report Card:

- Housing costs for low-income renters remain a largely disproportionate share of household income with no improvement in the last decade.
- Only 18 percent of high school students have completed a school related work experience program, a number which falls dramatically short of the 65 percent Benchmark.
- Documented suicide attempts among teens remains higher than the 1990 rate.

In some child well-being categories, Benchmarks have yet to be set, including the child death rate, suicide attempts among youth and crimes committed against persons.

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