

How Polk County fares in state report



DANIEL HURST/Itemizer Observer

Polk County middle school students like Shannin MacCarthy at Talmadge Middle School in Independence have the opportunity to participate in numerous programs that build confidence and fight against a wide array of problems.

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CAROL SEBENS

to our kids after infancy," Propes said.

CARING FOR KIDS

Whatever is happening to kids, the report concludes that loving parents and caring communities can increase

the chances of getting through childhood."

Researchers have found that preteens whose parents do not monitor their activities and friends are more likely to engage in problem behaviors," the report states.

Baumgartner agrees. She said one of the most important things parents can do is know where their children are and who they're with.

Middle schoolers need their parents as much as ever, but researchers believe that's when parents begin to weaken.

Baumgartner said the health and well-being of preteens is not just a parental or school responsibility.

"This needs to be a community effort," Baumgartner said.

She said Nite Court, Sanction Court and the city parks

and recreation department dance team as well as the new Dallas Aquatic Center all play an important role, as do many other local programs such as Kids, Inc. and Future Champs.

"We have the same issues as everyone else and we need to keep working at them," Sebens said.

"When we have been able to make a difference, like in lowering the juvenile crime rate, it has to do with working together — the different entities coming to the table and saying, 'We're committed to this.'"