

# State's children fare poorly in report

Although results from individual counties won't be reported until later in the year, Children First paints a dark picture of status of children

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Children First, a statewide voice for children, recently released its report card on the status of children in Oregon, and the grade-point average is dropping.

Although the overall average was a 'C-', down a grade from last year's report card, family and financial stability received the lowest grade — an 'F.'

According to Tina Kotek, policy director at Children First, "140,000 Oregon children are living in poverty."

Numbers compiled for food insecurity and unemployment are based on federal averages, she said.

With the downturn in the economy, less money available for programs involving children and higher unemployment rates in Oregon, the ability of parents to meet their children's financial needs is getting more difficult.

But it's not just about the economy, Kotek said. A lot of families were struggling on the borderline financially before the economy became an issue. Add to that budget cuts on state programs that

were already strained by requests for help from people who are either underemployed or unemployed, and families below the poverty level are finding it difficult to make ends meet.

The grade for financial stability includes statistics on child poverty, affordable housing, food insecurity and unemployment and we have a long way to go.

*Tina Kotek, policy director at Children First*

independent advisory board to the state government that reports directly to the governor.

The board reports on issues such as crime, poverty and premature death and sets standards for issues that vary from education to unemployment. Although its overall report in March 2003 stated Oregon was making strides to improve the economy and education, the board did express concern over the welfare of low-income and rural families in the state.

Of the 90 benchmarks set by the OPB, Kotek said that Children First selected out the standards that affect children and families.

The state also received a 'D' for health care programs throughout the state. According to the study, more than 80,000 children under the age of 18 go without healthcare in the state of Oregon on any given day. And only 75 percent of 2-year-old children are up to date on their immunizations.

A bright spot on the report card in the health category was the dramatic decrease in teen pregnancies in the state.

"Programs for teens are paying off," Kotek said, adding that teen pregnancies in Oregon number 27.6 of every 1,000 girls, while the benchmark was set at 36 of every 1,000.

Healthcare also includes prenatal care and infant mortality, which at 5.7 of every 1,000 babies dying before their first birthday is one of the lowest in the nation. Healthcare also considers uninsured children, 10 percent of whom lack any health insurance.

Youth development and education received a 'C' for progress in eighth-grade reading and math, high school dropout rates, juvenile arrests, substance abuse and suicide attempts.

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Due to Oregon State Police budget cuts, the program was unable to compile numbers for juvenile arrests this year. But high school dropout rates have fallen 0.5 percent below the standard, and substance abuse numbers had modest drops in the number of children under 18 who use drugs, drink alcohol and smoke cigarettes.

No benchmarks were set for lowering suicide attempts, but numbers indicate that nearly 900 suicide attempts resulting in death or hospitalization of children aged 10 to 17 were reported in 2002. Early care and education of children received a

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