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EDITORIAL

What state's children need

Another annual report on the state of Oregon children is coming out Tuesday. It generally gives Oregon a poor grade for the way we care for kids. But the report is not definitive. The way it looks at children may not be the best.

For example, Children First for Oregon, which has published these assessments since 1992, rates Oregon children based on family financial stability, health, early care and education, youth development, and safety. These are not the only things that determine how well children are treated and how well they grow up.

The assessment recounts statistics on things like the percentage of child support paid, the rate of poverty among kids under 18, the risk of not having enough to eat, unemployment among adults, the prevalence of prenatal care, infant mortality, the rate of immunizations, teen pregnancies, the availability of affordable child care, school test results, reports of child abuse and neglect, and others.

And as before, the group concludes that the state isn't doing nearly enough to make sure our kids are all right.

But what really counts for actual children is not some average measure across the state, but how individual children grow up in their individual families.

It is customary to argue that the state must do more for children. But the truth is that children are the responsibility of their parents at least until they turn 18. Instead of looking to the state to do more, groups like Children First ought to remind families of their obligations.

Families are not obligated to shower their kids with goodies and material things. They do have an obligation to take care of their children, not to ignore them but to talk to them, to make sure they are safe and fed, and to make them understand what is expected of people as they grow older. They also have a duty to see to their education, either in school or otherwise, and to live as reasonable examples to their kids.

None of those things takes a lot of money, a fancy house or expensive toys or foreign vacations. All it takes is for mothers and fathers to accept their responsibilities and to act on them as best they can. Perhaps this is something that the next Children First report can address. (hh)