

Executive Summary

“All Contra Costa children will reach adulthood having experienced a safe, healthy, nurturing childhood which prepares them to be responsible, contributing members of the community.”

Vision Statement, Contra Costa
Children and Families Policy Forum, January 1997

The Contra Costa Children and Families Policy Forum began its research on the status of Contra Costa County children in 1997. This third Children’s Report Card consists of 24 indicators that measure the status of children and families, arranged in four generalized outcome areas: Children are Healthy and Ready for School, Youth are Healthy and Preparing for Adulthood, Families are Economically Self-Sufficient, and Families and Communities are Safe.

Children are Healthy and Ready for School

A child’s early years provide the foundation for a healthy youth and adulthood. The indicators studied within this outcome focus on health, pre-literacy and early success in school.

In general, children in Contra Costa County are healthier and better prepared for school than children statewide. Infant mortality has decreased in Contra Costa County and it is lower than in California overall. More Contra Costa women received prenatal care in the first trimester of their pregnancies in 2001 than have women in the previous four years. The percentage of Contra Costa County kindergartners who receive all of their required immunizations exceeds the state level, as does the percentage of third graders who read at grade level. The rate of births to teenagers has steadily decreased from 1997 through 2002, and is consistently below the state rate. However, the number of babies born at low weight has increased, with the county rate exceeding the statewide rate by a narrow margin. In addition, there is a substantial lack of licensed child care space available to working families.

- **The infant mortality rate has decreased.** The infant mortality rate in Contra Costa County has decreased from 5.1 per 1,000 babies ages 0 to 12 months in 1997 to 4.0 per 1,000 in 2001. The rate has been lower than the state rate since 1999.

- **More women are receiving prenatal care in the first trimester.** The percentage of Contra Costa County women receiving prenatal care in the first trimester increased from 86.0% in 1997 to 89.4% in 2001.
- **The percentage of kindergartners receiving all required immunizations is relatively stable.** The percentage rose slightly from 92.4% in 1998 to 94.1% in 2001. In 2001, 94.1% of Contra Costa County kindergartners entered school with all required immunizations, above the statewide percentage of 90.9%.
- **Reading scores have increased.** The percentage of third graders reading at or above the 50th National Percentile Rank on the SAT-9 test increased from 52% in 1998 to 60% in 2002. In Spring 2002, 60% of third graders in Contra Costa County scored at or above the 50th National Percentile Rank compared to 47% statewide.
- **The rate of births to teenagers has decreased.** The rate of births to Contra Costa County teenagers decreased from 36.7 per 1,000 young women ages 15 to 19 in 1997, to 28.4 in 2001, below the statewide rate of 45.1.
- **The percentage of infants born at low weight has remained fairly steady from 1997 to 2001.** While the percentage of babies born at low weight has increased slightly by 0.3% from 1997 to 2001, the percentage consistently exceeds the statewide percentage by a narrow margin ranging from 0.1% to 0.3%.

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- **Licensed child care slots are in short supply.** In 2000, an estimated 119,169 children ages 0 to 13 potentially needed child care, while 35,132 licensed child care spaces were available, leaving an estimated 84,037 children who either receive informal or unlicensed care, or who were unsupervised.

Youth are Healthy and Preparing for Adulthood

The adolescent years are a time of profound physical, social, emotional, and cognitive transformation for young people. The indicators reported for this outcome reflect measures of health, social behaviors, and performance in school.

Youth health indicator results are mixed. Hospitalizations due to asthma have increased, especially for children under age five, which mirrors the national trend. The physical fitness of school age children is at or better than statewide levels. Juvenile misdemeanor arrest rates and preliminary data about the use of alcohol, marijuana, and tobacco among 9th and 11th graders indicate fewer arrests and lower drug and alcohol use than statewide levels. Unfortunately, the county's high school dropout rate has increased while the statewide rate has decreased.

- **Preliminary data indicates that hospitalizations due to asthma have increased.** The rate of hospitalization of children age five and under per 10,000 for asthma increased from 2.93 in 1998 to 38.3 in 2000. Children age five and under were more than three times as likely to be hospitalized for asthma than the general population in 2000.
- **Results on insurance coverage for children are mixed.** Only 4.2% of children in Contra Costa County were uninsured in 2001, compared to 9.6% statewide. However, the percentage of those insured by the public insurance programs (Healthy Families and Medi-Cal) for low-income families is lower than the percentage statewide.

- **The percentage of Contra Costa children who are physically fit equals or exceeds statewide levels.** In 2001, the percent of Contra Costa County children in grade 5 who are physically fit is equal to the percentage statewide. Contra Costa students in grades 7 and 9 are slightly more fit than students statewide.
- **Preliminary self-report data about the use of alcohol, marijuana, and tobacco among 9th and 11th graders show that Contra Costa County use is lower than the state level.** Contra Costa County 9th and 11th graders are generally less likely to drink alcohol, use marijuana, or smoke cigarettes than their peers throughout the state within the last 30 days.
- **Results on sexually transmitted diseases among youth are mixed.** Data from 2001 indicates the rate of chlamydia among Contra Costa County youth ages 15 to 24 is slightly lower than the statewide rate, while the rate of gonorrhea is slightly higher. There were nearly ten times as many reported cases of chlamydia among youth ages 15 to 24 as compared to gonorrhea.
- **The juvenile arrest rate has decreased.** Both juvenile misdemeanor and felony arrests in Contra Costa County have steadily decreased since 1997, and have been consistently below the state level.
- **High school dropout rate decreased slightly.** The four year high school dropout rate decreased slightly from 6.4 per 100 in 2000-2001 to 6.1 in 2001-2002. The Contra Costa County rate fluctuated in the past six years from a high of 8.7 to a low of 5.7, while the statewide rate steadily decreased during this time.
- **The academic performance of college prep students has improved, but the number of students taking college prep courses has decreased.** While Contra Costa County youth consistently outperformed the state in college preparation exams (SAT-1), the percentage of college-ready students decreased, falling from 42.9% in 1996-97 to 41.6% in 2000-01.

Families are Economically Self-Sufficient

The indicators for economic self-sufficiency include household income, unemployment levels, free and reduced cost meals for school children, housing affordability, and homelessness.

While the Contra Costa County median income is approximately \$20,000 above the state level, the rising cost of new and existing homes has made home ownership less achievable. Since 1997, the unemployment rate has been consistently lower than the state rate. The percentage of children in Contra Costa County who receive free or reduced cost school meals was 27.1% in 2001-2002, compared to 47.1% statewide in the same year. More than 40% of Contra Costa families who rent their homes pay more than 30% (the HUD standard of affordability) of their monthly income for this expense. The number of families seeking emergency shelter almost doubled in the past four years; meanwhile the number of shelter beds decreased.

- **Median family income in Contra Costa County exceeds the statewide level.** In 2000, the median family income in Contra Costa County was \$73,039 compared to a median family income of \$53,025 statewide. However, at least 18.5% of Contra Costa County families had annual earnings that were below the self-sufficiency standard,¹ and at least 5.6% had annual earnings below the federal poverty level.

- **Unemployment in Contra Costa County remains below the statewide rate.** Unemployment in Contra Costa County has climbed from a rate of 2.7 per 100 in 2000 to 4.9 in 2002. Although unemployment is on the rise, Contra Costa County unemployment has been consistently below the statewide rate from 1997 through 2002.

- **The percentage of children receiving free or reduced cost school meals is fairly steady and consistently below statewide levels.** The percentage of students in Contra Costa County receiving free or reduced cost meals decreased slightly from 28.2% in 1997-98 to 27.1% in 2001-02. Unfortunately, many families struggle to meet their basic needs but still earn too much to qualify for meal programs, which are linked to the federal poverty level.

- **Housing affordability is decreasing.** In February 2003, only 15% of Contra Costa households could afford to purchase a median priced, single family existing home. Census data show that in 1999, 41% of renters spent thirty percent or more of their income on housing costs.

- **Requests for admittance to family emergency shelters has increased.** The number of families needing emergency shelter on any given night almost doubled from 444 in 1998 to 855 in 2002, while the number of shelter beds decreased by 18% during this time.

Families and Communities are Safe

The indicators chosen to measure family and community safety include child abuse, foster care, domestic violence, and unintentional and intentional injury rates.

The rate of substantiated child abuse and neglect has increased, however, it remains below the statewide rate. First entries into foster care remain steady and until recently, lower than the state level. The total number of domestic violence incidents where children were present decreased significantly. The unintentional injury hospitalization rates in Contra Costa are higher than the statewide rates for age groups 5 to 15 and 16 to 20. Intentional injury rates are higher than the statewide rates for children aged 1 year or less and those aged 5 to 15.

¹ The Self-Sufficiency Standard for California is a measure of income adequacy. It provides information on how much income is needed for families of various sizes to meet their basic needs without public or private assistance.

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- **Substantiated reports of child abuse have increased.** In 2001, the rate of substantiated reports of child abuse and neglect in Contra Costa County increased to a four-year high of 10.1 per 1,000 children, although it still remains below the statewide rate of 10.7.
 - **First entries into foster care remain steady.** The rate of first entries into foster care in Contra Costa County of 3.1 per 1,000 entries has remained lower than the state rate of 3.5, and relatively stable between 1997 and 2001, while the statewide rate decreased during that time.
 - **The total number of domestic violence incidents where children were present have decreased.** In 2001, children were present in 919 or 26% of these incidents, down from 1,015 incidents or 35% in 1997.
 - **Unintentional injury hospitalization rates in 2000 for youth ages 5 to 20 years are higher than the statewide rates.** The Contra Costa County unintentional injury rate is lower than the statewide rate for children less than one year old, and equal to the statewide rate for children ages 1 to 4 years.
 - **Intentional injury hospitalization rates in 2000 for children less than one year old and youth ages 5 to 15 years are higher than the statewide rates.** The Contra Costa County intentional injury rate is lower than the statewide rate for youth ages 16 to 20 years, and equal to the statewide rate for children ages 1 to 4 years.

Summation

Indicators show that positive results have been achieved in each outcome area. Most notable are a decrease in infant mortality, an increase in women receiving prenatal care in the first trimester, fewer births to teenagers, an increase in third grade reading scores, a decrease in juvenile misdemeanor arrests, a median family income that exceeds the state level coupled with an unemployment rate beneath the state level, and a decrease in domestic violence incidents where children were present.

Indicators show Contra Costa children and families would benefit from additional attention to these areas:

- The availability of licensed and subsidized child care.
- The rate of hospitalization due to asthma.
- The number of children with health insurance.
- The rate of high school dropouts.
- The availability of affordable housing.
- The access to emergency shelter beds for families.
- The incidence of child abuse and neglect.
- The injury hospitalization rates for children.
- The availability of education and employment opportunities to increase economic development.