

A LOOK AT THE STATUS

OF BUCKS COUNTY KIDS



AND THEIR OPPORTUNITIES

FOR A BETTER FUTURE.

A CHILDREN FIRST BRIEF ON **BUCKS COUNTY**

November 2025

A DECADE OF STALLED PROGRESS: OPPORTUNITY STUNTED FOR CHILDREN IN BUCKS COUNTY

How are children and teens doing? Every two years, Children First answers that question in our comprehensive analysis of the status of children and teens in southeastern PA counties. We're glad to share with you some of the key findings – go to childrenfirstpa.org to read the full report, *A Decade of Stalled Progress: Opportunities Stunted for Children in Bucks County*. Knowledge is power and Children First hopes you'll use this information about Bucks County youth to fuel your advocacy efforts for children and teens.

Bucks County: Quick Pic

Bucks County is home to approximately 127,000 children, many with families who are able to afford the basics that will launch them into happiness, success, and stability – the American Dream. But close to 26,500 children live in families that cannot afford their needs, and more than 9,000 live in poverty. Current resources are inadequate to meet the health care, early learning, education, and family supports needed for these children to reach their full potential.

ECONOMIC HARDSHIP PREVAILS

Three out of ten Bucks County parents cannot afford to provide for their kids beyond the bare minimum. A family needs to make **\$86,268** to cover rent, food, transportation, health insurance, and other essentials; that jumps to **\$105,096** if child care is added to the equation. **Nine percent** of families have trouble putting food on the table – SNAP enrollment is up **10%** over the past decade and Bucks County families receiving WIC is at a **five-year high**. The number of homeless children shot up in the last two years, and is estimated at **800**, but the real number is likely higher because many caregivers find temporary alternatives to shelters.

17,886

KIDS RECEIVE
SNAP

up 10%

3,538

KIDS ON
WIC

a five-year high

800

KIDS WITHOUT
HOMES

INFLATION UNDERCUTS WAGE GROWTH

Although wages rose over the past decade, inflation did too. Bucks County residents with the lowest incomes actually have **less purchasing power** than they did a decade ago, accounting for inflation. All other earners saw larger but just minor gains.

CHILD CARE CHALLENGES PERSIST

For the parents of nearly **34,000 Bucks County children under five**, there are few early childhood policies that support them and their children's critical early learning years.

LACK OF PAID FAMILY LEAVE

More than **3,680** newborn babies went home with parents who did not have paid time off to care for them. Sixty-six percent of PA businesses don't offer paid family and medical leave. New parents are forced into an awful dilemma: stay home and go into debt, or go back to work and sacrifice precious bonding time.

66%

OF BUSINESSES ACROSS PA

DON'T OFFER PAID FAMILY & MEDICAL LEAVE

CHILD CARE COSTS RISE WITH INFLATION

Child care costs for Bucks County families increased **27%** over the past decade. Young families who can afford to pay out-of-pocket spend **16%** of their income on child care. State programs like **Child Care Works**, which subsidizes care for low-income working families, can be a game changer; half of eligible children can't get care because of staffing shortages.

STAFFING SHORTAGES CUT SUPPLY

For only **\$15.15/hour**, early learning teachers work long hours caring for very young children who require constant attention. With such high demands, many qualified workers leave the field to be paid more in the schools or even in retail or fast food. As a result, child care centers are understaffed, and providers can't enroll additional children. Last year alone, **977** young Bucks County children were turned away – equivalent to two entire elementary schools – due to underfunding.

\$15.15/hour

AVERAGE PAY FOR

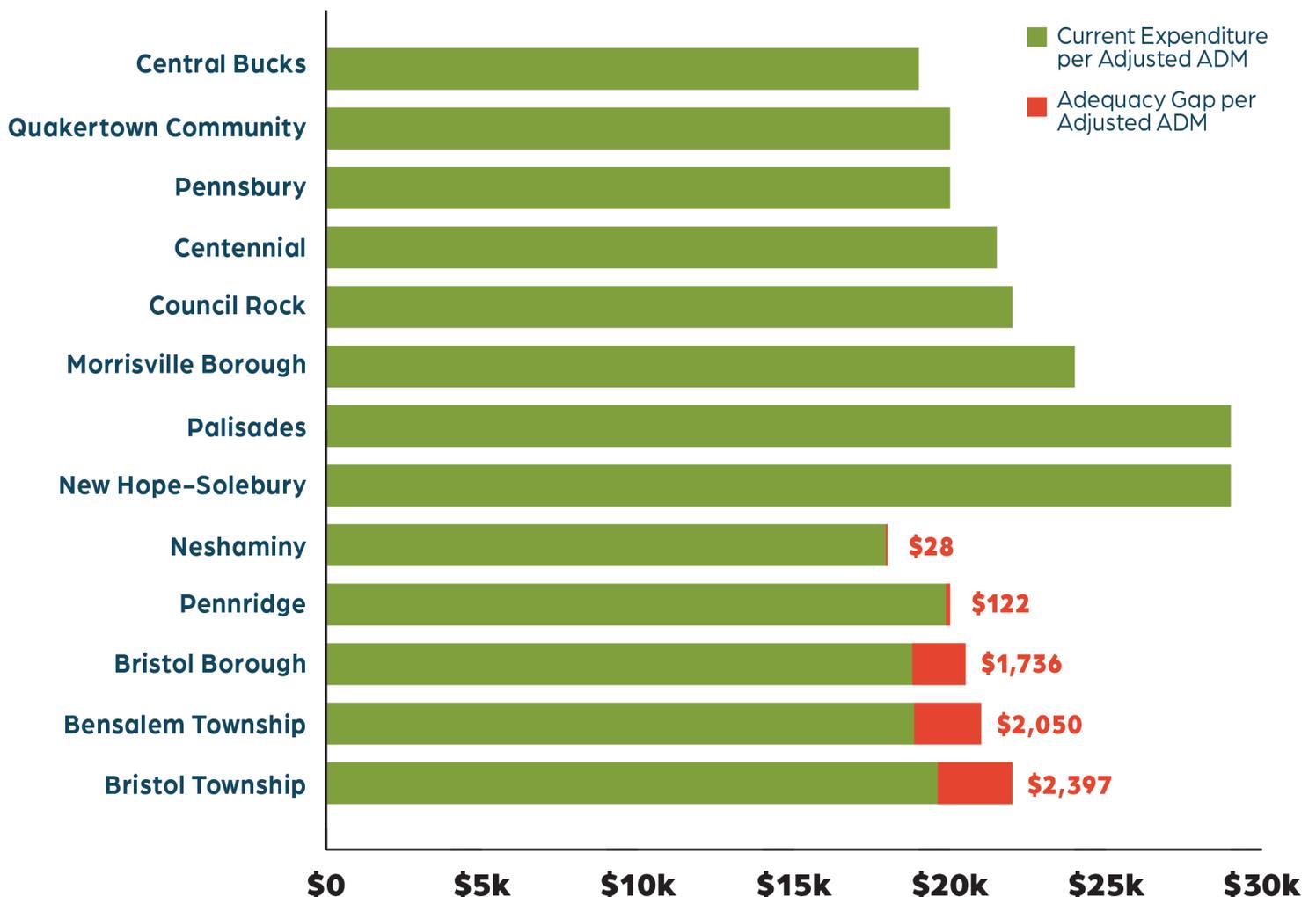
BUCKS COUNTY CHILD CARE STAFF

TROUBLING TRENDS IN EDUCATION

While **68%** of Bucks County third graders can read on grade level; only **one-third** of eighth graders are proficient in math. Students in the county's highest-poverty districts – Bristol Township, Bensalem Township, and Bristol Borough – have the lowest scores.

These are the same three school districts that are owed more than **\$36 million** by the state to be able to deliver the adequate education that higher wealth districts provide, with small class sizes, personalized instruction, specialists, counselors, extracurricular activities, updated textbooks and instructional equipment, etc.

Because property taxes are the main source of education funding, districts with a low-value housing market can't generate enough tax revenue. These districts teach the highest number of Black, brown, and low-income students.



EXPENDITURES PER ADJUSTMENT ADM

TROUBLING TRENDS IN EDUCATION

EDUCATION PATHWAYS TO GOOD JOBS STYMIED

Career and Technical Education (CTE) gives students an academic and career advantage. A low **8%** of Bucks County high school students are enrolled in CTE but that's higher than the state and the surrounding southeastern PA counties.

CHARTER SCHOOL COSTS SOAR

Cyber charter school payments soared **153%** over the past eight years, costing Bucks County school districts **\$30 million**, far more than what it actually costs to provide a virtual education. Payments to brick and mortar charter school increased by **\$29 million** in the same period.

CYBER CHARTER SCHOOL PAYMENTS IN BUCKS COUNTY ROSE BY

153%
in eight years reaching
\$30 MILLION

CHILD HEALTH AT RISK

THOUSANDS OF CHILDREN TO LOSE ACCESS TO HEALTH CARE

In 2023, **37%** of the county's children (46,708) were covered by Medicaid. By 2024, that number dropped to 39,091, even though many were still eligible. Post-COVID changes to federal enrollment rules caused thousands of kids to be dropped from coverage and it's unknown how many are still

FROM 2023 TO 2024,
7,600
BUCKS COUNTY CHILDREN LOST THEIR MEDICAID COVERAGE

CHILD HEALTH AT RISK

LEAD TOXINS CONTINUE TO CAUSE PERMANENT HARM

Toxic lead paint remains a threat in a significant number of Bucks County homes but **82%** of children are not tested for lead poisoning. Early detection is the best way to minimize the irreversible cognitive and behavioral damage that results in serious challenges in school and life.

82%

OF CHILDREN IN BUCKS COUNTY
NOT SCREENED FOR EXPOSURE TO TOXIC LEAD

RISKY BEHAVIORS DROP

One bright spot for Bucks County is that tweens and teens are making smarter choices when it comes to drugs and alcohol. Over a ten-year period, alcohol use **dropped 20** percentage points, smoking **dropped 10** percentage points, and vaping **dropped 8** percentage points. However, marijuana use **increased five** percentage points

SADLY, POOR MENTAL HEALTH AMONG TEENS PERSISTS

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Approximately **25,000** Bucks County children experience a mental, emotional, or behavioral health

MENTAL HEALTH OF BUCKS COUNTY CHILDREN OVER A DECADE



BETTER SECOND CHANCES

When young people break the law, most often the best way to boost community safety is to keep kids out of jail. Locking up children and teens makes it so much harder for them to make better choices as an adult. **Eighty percent** of young people who are imprisoned return to prison within three years. In 2023, **415** young people were locked up, the second highest in southeastern Pennsylvania counties.

A better alternative is community-based programs that keep children in their homes and schools, teaching them how to make better choices, and requiring that they make amends. **The Bucks County Youth Aid Panel**, which began in the 1970s, is the county's diversion program administered by the Juvenile Probation office. Through the Youth Aid Panel, trained volunteers work with young people and their families to determine the most appropriate response (for example, a letter of apology or drug and alcohol treatment) to an offense.

KEEPING KIDS SAFE AT HOME

The number of Bucks County children in foster care is dropping, but their length of stay is longer than the statewide average. Children who are abused, neglected, or placed in foster care have lower grades in school, and higher instances of mental health problems, drug use, and alcohol abuse. If fixable problems like poverty or family instability are the cause of family stress, it's best for children to safely stay at home.

589

KIDS IN FOSTER CARE
2014

349

KIDS IN FOSTER CARE
2022

Moving in the right direction, Bucks County delivers ongoing supports to parents, so children are safe, and families stay whole. In 2022, **6,917** Bucks County children and their families received these in-home support services, a drop from 2014. Through these community services, Bucks County families can access child welfare prevention services without having to have an open child welfare case.



THE ADVOCATE FOR KIDS

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LEARN MORE AND GET INVOLVED

Far too many kids and teens are not getting the support they need to be happy, healthy, and successful. This short report offers you important information about the status of Bucks County children.

Children First doesn't just point out the problems - we expose the harms that children face, point to tested solutions, and work with people like you to persuade lawmakers to enact change.

Learn more about kids in Bucks County and recommended actions leaders can take to improve children's lives:

www.childrenfirstpa.org/2025countyreports

Join us to push for the solutions children urgently need and support our work:
www.childrenfirstpa.org/joinus