

A LOOK AT THE STATUS

OF DELAWARE COUNTY KIDS



AND THEIR OPPORTUNITIES

FOR A BETTER FUTURE.

A CHILDREN FIRST BRIEF ON DELAWARE COUNTY

November 2025

A DECADE OF STALLED PROGRESS: OPPORTUNITY STUNTED FOR CHILDREN IN DELAWARE 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 Delaware County*. Knowledge is power and Children First hopes you'll use this information about Delaware County youth to fuel your advocacy efforts for children and teens.

Delaware County: Quick Pic

Delaware County is home to 126,000 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 50,000 children live in families that cannot afford their needs, and more than 17,000 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

Four out of ten Delaware County parents cannot afford to provide for their kids beyond the bare minimum. A family needs to make **\$74,916** to cover rent, food, transportation, health insurance, and other essentials; that jumps to **\$94,584** if child care is added to the equation. **Seventeen percent** of families have trouble putting food on the table – SNAP enrollment is up **10%** over the past decade and Delaware County families receiving WIC is at a **five-year high**. The number of homeless children is estimated at **1,730**, a massive 176% jump over the past decade but the real number is likely higher because many caregivers find temporary alternatives to shelters.

30,605

KIDS RECEIVE
SNAP

up 10%

6,215

KIDS ON
WIC

a five-year high

1,730

KIDS WITHOUT
HOMES

up 300%

INFLATION UNDERCUTS WAGE GROWTH

Although wages rose over the past decade, inflation did too. Delaware 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 the more than **32,000 Delaware 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 **4,200** 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 Delaware County families increased **24%** over the past decade. Young families who can afford to pay out-of-pocket spend **13%** 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 but six out of ten eligible children can't get care because of staffing shortages.

STAFFING SHORTAGES CUT SUPPLY

For only **\$16.04/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, **1,076** young Delaware County children were turned away – equivalent to more than two entire elementary schools – because of underfunding.

\$16.04/hour

AVERAGE PAY FOR

DELAWARE COUNTY CHILD CARE STAFF

TROUBLING TRENDS IN EDUCATION

Just **over half** of Delaware County third graders can read on grade level; only **one in three** eighth graders are proficient in math. Students in the county's highest-poverty districts – Chester-Upland, Chichester, Interboro, Southeast Delco, Upper Darby, and William Penn – have the lowest scores.

55%

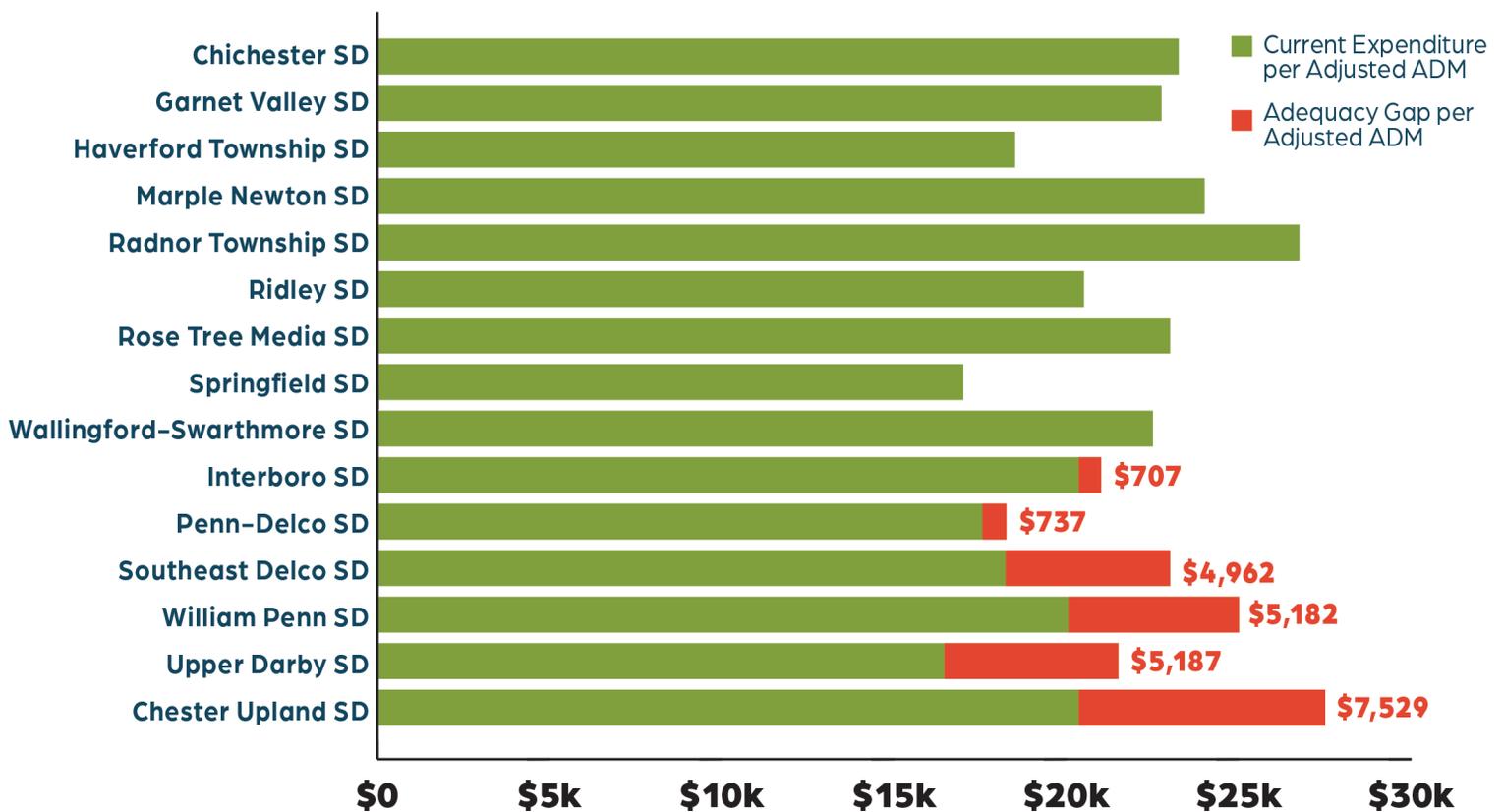
OF ALL THIRD GRADERS CAN
READ ON GRADE LEVEL

31%

OF ALL EIGHTH GRADERS
ARE PROFICIENT IN MATH

These are the same six school districts that are owed more than **\$175 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, but only **5%** of Delaware County high school students are enrolled in CTE, the second lowest share in southeastern PA (but double the enrollment in 2014).

CHARTER SCHOOL COSTS SOAR

Cyber charter school payments soared **71%** over the past eight years, costing Delaware County school districts **\$35 million**, far more than what it actually costs to provide a virtual education. By comparison, brick and mortar charter school payments increased 21% to **\$72 million**.

CYBER CHARTER SCHOOL PAYMENTS IN CHESTER COUNTY ROSE BY

71%
in eight years reaching
\$35 MILLION

CHILD HEALTH AT RISK

THOUSANDS OF CHILDREN TO LOSE ACCESS TO HEALTH CARE

In 2023, **more than half** the county's children (65,799) were covered by Medicaid. By 2024, that number dropped to 56,375, 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 uninsured.

While Delaware County has made great strides improving child health, like the opening of a new county health department in 2022, the 2025 closure of Crozer Chester Medical Center, Taylor Hospital and other medical facilities will seriously set back medical access to for pregnant women and children.

FROM 2023 TO 2024,

9,500

DELAWARE COUNTY CHILDREN LOST THEIR MEDICAID COVERAGE

CHILD HEALTH AT RISK

LEAD TOXINS CONTINUE TO CAUSE PERMANENT HARM

Toxic lead paint remains a threat in eight out of ten Delaware County homes yet most 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.

60%

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

RISKY BEHAVIORS DROP

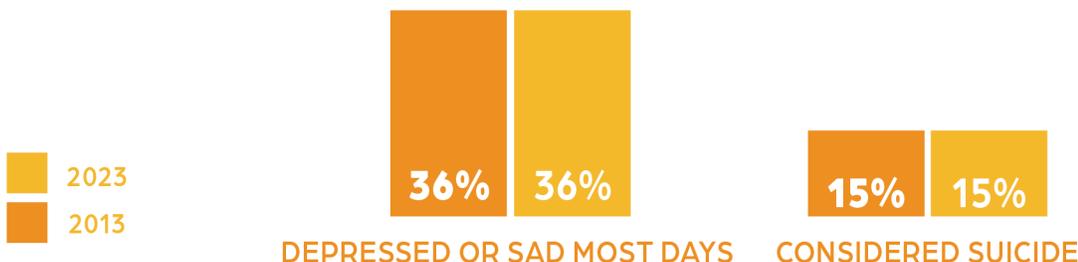
One remarkable bright spot for Delaware County is that tweens and teens are making smarter choices when it comes to drugs and alcohol. Over a ten-year period, alcohol use **dropped 16** percentage points and marijuana use **dropped seven** percentage points. Only **4%** of kids in 2023 were smoking, down from 15%, and only **6%** of kids were vaping, a decrease of 5 percentage points.

SADLY, POOR MENTAL HEALTH AMONG TEENS PERSISTS

At least **25,000** Delaware County children experience a mental, emotional, or behavioral health disorder; fewer than half of them will receive the treatment they need. The shortage of mental health providers is a significant barrier to care – there is only one licensed mental health provider for every **290** Delaware County residents.

Over the past decade, a consistent **36%** of children and teens feel depressed or sad most days; **15%** considered suicide. The addictive nature of social media is a prime contributor because it isolates children in an online world and robs them of real-life interaction that fosters social connection and meaning.

MENTAL HEALTH OF DELAWARE 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. Just **36** young people were locked up in Delaware County in 2023, the fewest in southeastern Pennsylvania.

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. Delaware County has rightly shifted its focus away from juvenile detention to community-based programs, where kids stay with their families, continue to learn in their local schools, and make amends to the people they've wronged. **Eight out of ten** young people in these diversion programs complete them; they are **17%** less likely to be rearrested within five years.

CHILD ABUSE AND NEGLECT

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. It's best for children to safely stay at home, especially if fixable problems like poverty or family instability are the cause of family stress.

733

KIDS IN FOSTER CARE
2014

361

KIDS IN FOSTER CARE
2022

Moving in the right direction, Delaware County is ramping the delivery of ongoing supports to parents, so children are safe and families stay whole. In 2022, **4,156** Delaware County children and their families received these in-home support services, a **13%** increase from 2014.



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 Delaware 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 Delaware 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