

A LOOK AT THE STATUS

OF MONTGOMERY COUNTY KIDS



AND THEIR OPPORTUNITIES

FOR A BETTER FUTURE.

A CHILDREN FIRST BRIEF ON
MONTGOMERY COUNTY

November 2025

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

Montgomery County: Quick Pic

Montgomery County is home to 183,000 children, many with families who are able to afford the basics that will launch them into happiness, success, and stability – the American Dream. But more than 35,000 children live in families that cannot afford their needs, and more than 15,000 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

More than a third of Montgomery County parents cannot afford to provide for their kids beyond the bare minimum. A family needs to make **\$88,104** to cover rent, food, transportation, health insurance, and other essentials; that jumps to **\$108,180** if child care is added to the equation. **Ten percent** of families have trouble putting food on the table – SNAP enrollment is up **13%** over the past decade and Montgomery County families receiving WIC is at a **five-year high**. The number of homeless children is estimated at **1,321** but the real number is likely higher because many caregivers find temporary alternatives to shelters.

24,712

KIDS RECEIVE
SNAP

up 13%

6,215

KIDS ON
WIC

a five-year high

1,321

KIDS WITHOUT
HOMES

up 100%

INFLATION UNDERCUTS WAGE GROWTH

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

CHILD CARE CHALLENGES PERSIST

For the parents of the nearly **45,000 Montgomery 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 **5,500** 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.

Fortunately, Montgomery County has expanded paid parental leave to 16 weeks for county employees, recognizing the importance of family support in improving health outcomes.

66%

OF BUSINESSES ACROSS PA

DON'T OFFER PAID FAMILY & MEDICAL LEAVE

CHILD CARE COSTS RISE WITH INFLATION

Child care costs for Montgomery County families increased **30%** over the past decade, as providers struggle to cover inflationary prices. Young families who can afford to pay out-of-pocket spend **14%** 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 **\$15.94/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, **900** young Montgomery County children were turned away – equivalent to two entire elementary schools – because of underfunding.

\$15.94/hour

AVERAGE PAY FOR

MONTGOMERY COUNTY CHILD CARE STAFF

TROUBLING TRENDS IN EDUCATION

More than a third of Montgomery County third graders cannot read on grade level; 60% of eighth graders are not proficient in math. Students in the county's highest-poverty districts – Norristown and Pottstown – have the lowest scores.

These are the same two school districts that are owed more than \$54 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.

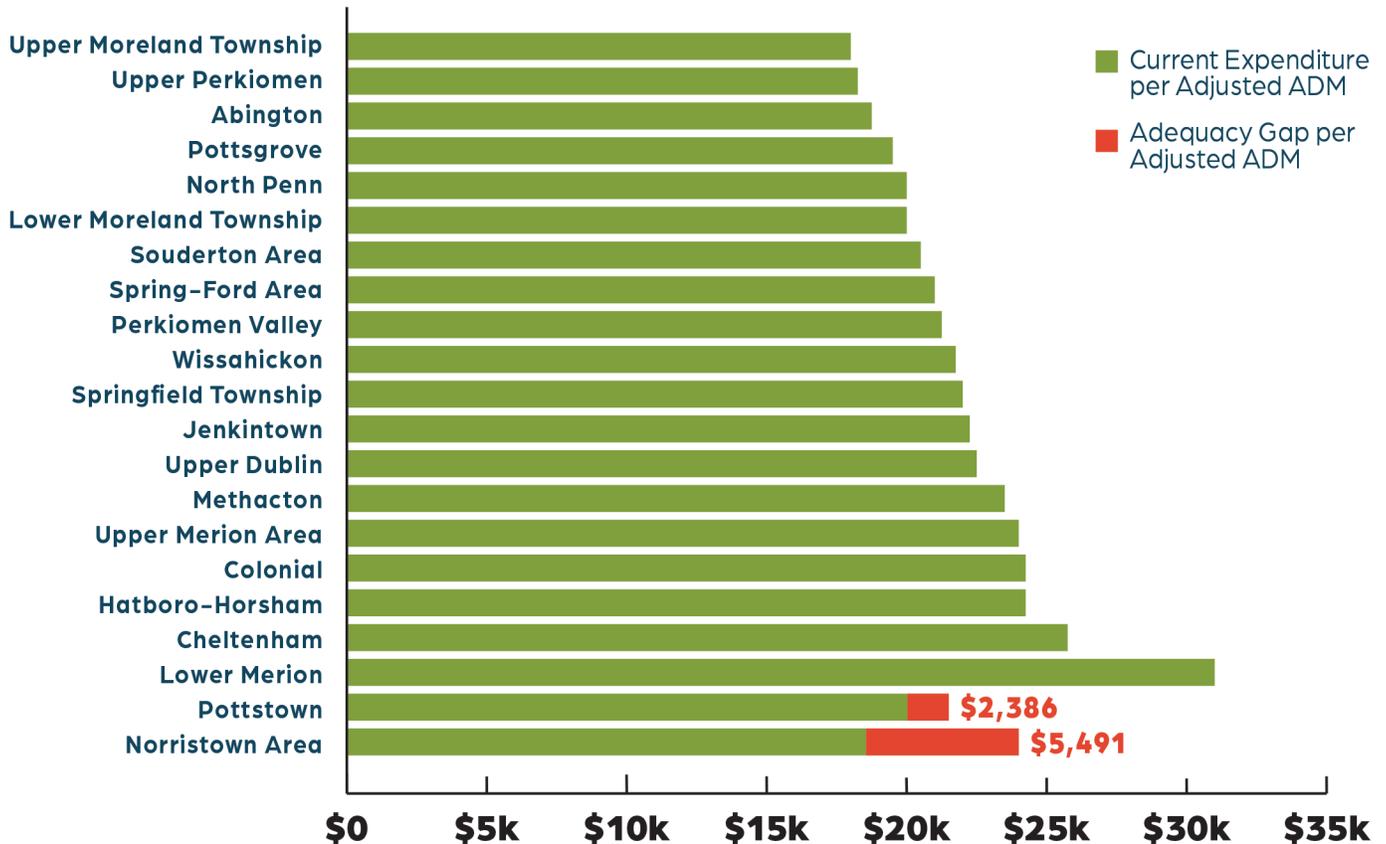
66%

OF ALL THIRD GRADERS CAN
READ ON GRADE LEVEL

40%

OF ALL EIGHTH GRADERS
ARE PROFICIENT IN MATH

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 **6%** of Montgomery County high school students are enrolled in CTE, the third lowest share in southeastern PA.

CHARTER SCHOOL COSTS SOAR

Cyber charter school payments soared **143%** over the past eight years, costing Montgomery County school districts **\$37 million**, far more than what it actually costs to provide a virtual education. By comparison, brick and mortar charter school payment increased 55% to **\$20 million**.

CYBER CHARTER SCHOOL PAYMENTS IN MONTGOMERY COUNTY ROSE BY

143%
in eight years reaching
\$37 MILLION

CHILD HEALTH AT RISK

THOUSANDS OF CHILDREN TO LOSE ACCESS TO HEALTH CARE

In 2023, **more than a third** of the county's children (62,810) were covered by Medicaid. By 2024, that number dropped to 54,526, 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.

FROM 2023 TO 2024,
8,284

MONTGOMERY COUNTY CHILDREN LOST THEIR MEDICAID COVERAGE

Montgomery County is investing in child wellbeing, including \$18 million for a Behavioral Health Crisis Center, \$3.5 million to support child care centers, \$500,000 for local food pantries, and \$1 million for Project CARE, which aids young families affected by domestic violence.

CHILD HEALTH AT RISK

LEAD TOXINS CONTINUE TO CAUSE PERMANENT HARM

Toxic lead paint is likely still in 80% of Montgomery County homes, yet an alarming **69%** 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.

71%

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

RISKY BEHAVIORS DROP

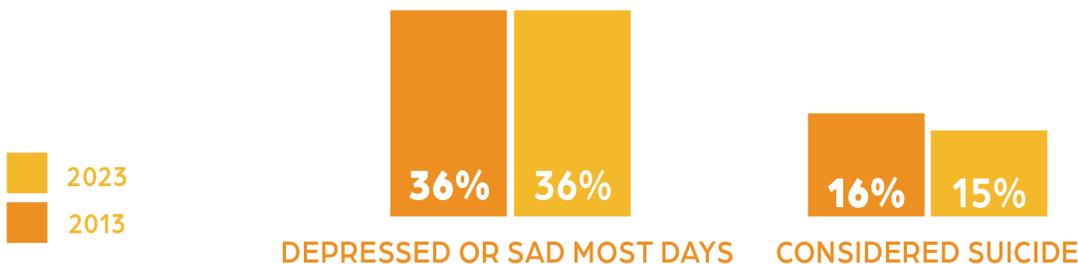
One remarkable bright spot for Montgomery County is that tweens and teens are making smarter choices when it comes to drugs and alcohol. Over a ten-year period, alcohol use **dropped 18** percentage points and marijuana use **dropped nine** percentage points. Only **4%** of kids in 2023 were smoking, down from 13%, and only **6%** of kids were vaping, a decrease of seven percentage points.

SADLY, POOR MENTAL HEALTH AMONG TEENS PERSISTS

Nearly **36,000** Montgomery County children experience a mental, emotional, or behavioral health disorder; fewer than half of them will receive the treatment they need. To make matters worse, there is only one licensed mental health provider for every **230** Montgomery 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 MONTGOMERY 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, **210** young people were locked up in Montgomery County, the third highest of the 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.

In Montgomery County, the District Attorney's Office Youth Aid Panel (YAP) trains community volunteers to meet with youth and assign education, restitution, or community service instead of prosecuting them in court. The program also includes supportive services to help young people and their families. YAP served 700 youth in 2023, and 87% of them completed the program successfully.

KEEPING KIDS SAFE AT HOME

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.

448

KIDS IN FOSTER CARE
2013

401

KIDS IN FOSTER CARE
2022

Moving in the right direction, Montgomery County is ramping up the delivery of ongoing supports to parents, so children are safe and families stay whole. In 2022, **2,994** Montgomery County children and their families received these in-home support services, a **25%** increase from 2014.



THE ADVOCATE FOR KIDS

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Join us to push for the solutions children urgently need and support our work:

www.childrenfirstpa.org/2025countyreports

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

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 Montgomery 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 AND GET INVOLVED