

**A LOOK AT THE STATUS**

**OF PHILADELPHIA KIDS**



**AND THEIR OPPORTUNITIES**

**FOR A BETTER FUTURE.**

A CHILDREN FIRST BRIEF ON **PHILADELPHIA**

*November 2025*

# A DECADE OF STALLED PROGRESS: OPPORTUNITY STUNTED FOR CHILDREN IN PHILADELPHIA

**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](http://childrenfirstpa.org) to read the full report, *A Decade of Stalled Progress: Opportunity Stunted for Children in Philadelphia*. Knowledge is power and Children First hopes you'll use this information about Philadelphia youth to fuel your advocacy efforts for children and teens.

## Philadelphia: Quick Pic

Philadelphia is home to more than 324,000 children, many with families who are able to afford the basics that will launch them into happiness, success, and stability – the American Dream. But 152,000 children live in families that cannot afford their needs, and 80,000 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

Nearly half of Philadelphia parents cannot afford to provide for their kids beyond the bare minimum. A family needs to make **\$74,016** to cover rent, food, transportation, health insurance, and other essentials; that jumps to **\$92,208** if child care is added to the equation. **Thirty percent** of families have trouble putting food on the table – about 171,000 children rely on SNAP and Philadelphia families receiving WIC is at a **five-year high**. The number of reported homeless children has nearly doubled, reaching **5,799**, but the real number is likely higher because many caregivers find temporary alternatives to shelters.

**170,688**

KIDS RECEIVE  
**SNAP**

**31,619**

KIDS ON  
**WIC**  
a five-year high

**5,799**

KIDS WITHOUT  
**HOMES**  
up nearly 100%

## INFLATION UNDERCUTS WAGE GROWTH

Although wages rose over the past decade, so did inflation. The 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 more than **93,000 Philadelphia 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 **12,600** 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 Philadelphia families have increased **21%** over the past decade. Young families who can afford to pay out-of-pocket spend **24%** 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 **\$16.46/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, **3,855** young Philadelphia children were turned away – equivalent to eight public elementary schools – due to underfunding.

**\$16.46/hour**

AVERAGE PAY FOR

**PHILADELPHIA CHILD CARE STAFF**

# TROUBLING TRENDS IN EDUCATION

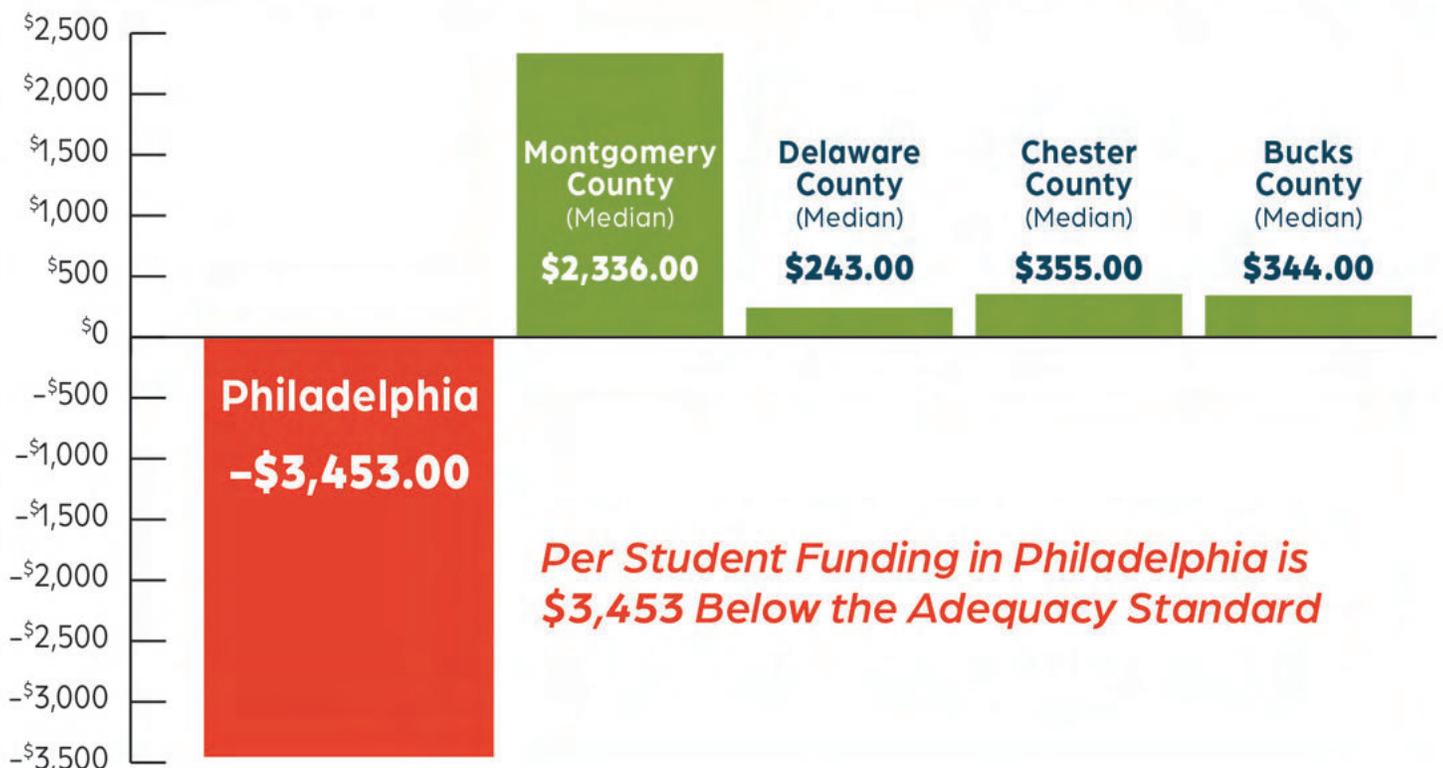
Only **35%** of Philadelphia third graders can read on grade level; only **16%** of eighth graders are proficient in math.

Schools in the city's highest-poverty communities have the lowest test scores. In 120 of the 121 elementary schools where 80% or more of students live in poverty, less than half of third graders are reading on grade level. But in the two traditional public elementary schools with the highest incomes, Greenfield and Meredith, almost all can pass the third grade reading test.

Only one Philadelphia school – Masterman – has high math proficiency. In 87 traditional public schools and 44 charter schools, less than 16% of eighth graders can pass the math proficiency test; three quarters of them serve student populations in high-poverty communities.

Unlike other districts, the School District of Philadelphia (SDP) can't impose local taxes to generate revenue for the school district; only the Philadelphia City Council can. At \$10,667 per student, SDP spends the second lowest amount per student out of all the southeastern PA school districts. This is largely due to state underfunding, resulting in a total funding shortfall of over \$1.25 billion.

## PHILADELPHIA STUDENTS ARE DENIED FAIR EDUCATION FUNDING



# 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 Philadelphia high school students are enrolled in CTE, the third lowest share in southeastern PA.

## CHARTER SCHOOL COSTS SOAR

Cyber charter school payments soared **219%** over the past eight years, costing Philadelphia school districts **\$214 million**, far more than what it actually costs to provide a virtual education. The district paid **\$903 million** to brick and mortar charter schools in the same period.

CYBER CHARTER SCHOOL PAYMENTS IN PHILADELPHIA ROSE BY

**219%**  
in eight years reaching  
**\$214 MILLION**

# CHILD HEALTH AT RISK

## THOUSANDS OF CHILDREN TO LOSE ACCESS TO HEALTH CARE

In 2023, **nine out of ten** Philadelphia children were covered by Medicaid; by 2024, that dropped to **eight out of ten** even though many were still eligible. Post-COVID changes to federal enrollment rules caused thousands of kids to be dropped from coverage. An estimated **18,408** Philadelphia children are currently uninsured.

FROM 2023 TO 2024,

**25,496**

PHILADELPHIA 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 Philadelphia homes but **56%** 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.

# 56%

OF CHILDREN IN PHILADELPHIA  
**NOT SCREENED FOR EXPOSURE TO TOXIC LEAD**

## RISKY BEHAVIORS DROP

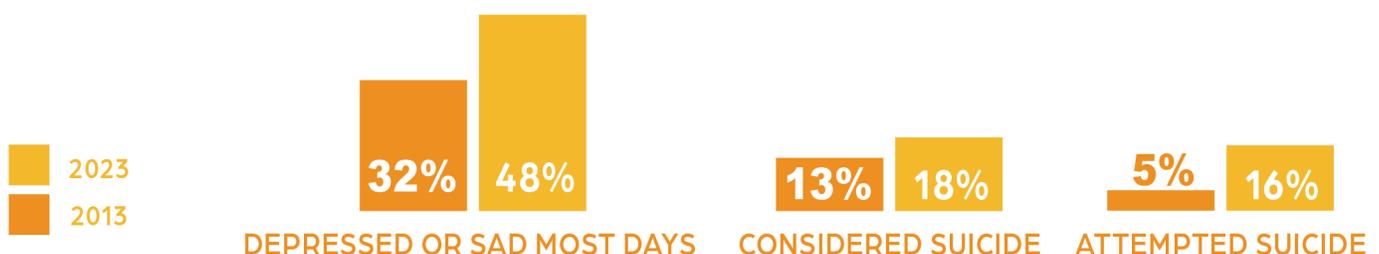
One remarkable bright spot for Philadelphia is that tweens and teens are generally making smarter choices when it comes to drugs and alcohol. Over a ten-year period, alcohol use **dropped 16** percentage points and marijuana use **dropped nine** percentage points. Only **16%** of kids in 2023 were smoking cigarettes. E-cigarette use, however, rose to 39% despite a significant drop in 2017.

## SADLY, POOR MENTAL HEALTH AMONG TEENS PERSISTS

At least **67,000** Philadelphia 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 **290** Philadelphia residents.

**Nearly half** (48%) of children and teens feel depressed or sad most days, up from 32%. Even more alarming was the jump in children attempting suicide, up from 5% in 2013 to **16%** in 2023. 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 PHILADELPHIA 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.

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 city launched two new opportunities for to divert youth from the system: police-led community diversion and the Juvenile Assessment Center (JAC). In 2023, **75%** of new delinquency charges were diverted, meaning youth were given the option to avoid a conviction going on their juvenile record while still being accountable.

**VIOLENT CRIME**  
**CAUSED BY CHILDREN IN PHILADELPHIA DROPPED BY**  
**51%**  
FROM 2014 TO 2023

## KEEPING KIDS SAFE AT HOME

The number of Philadelphia children in foster care is dropping, but their two-year average length of stay **substantially exceeds** the state 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.

**6,510**  
KIDS IN FOSTER CARE  
**2014**

**4,893**  
KIDS IN FOSTER CARE  
**2022**

Philadelphia is ramping up ongoing in-home support services to parents so children are safe and families stay whole. As of 2022, there was a 59% decrease in families getting services through the city's child welfare system, meaning that the Department of Human Services is shifting its focus to connecting families to services that address their needs outside of the formal system.



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 Philadelphia 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 Philadelphia and recommended actions leaders can take to improve children's lives:

[www.childrenfirstpa.org/2025countyreports](http://www.childrenfirstpa.org/2025countyreports)

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