



# A DECADE OF STALLED PROGRESS

*OPPORTUNITY STUNTED  
FOR CHILDREN IN DELAWARE COUNTY*



*A Children First  
Report on Delaware County*

*February 2025*

**children**  
**FIRST**  
THE ADVOCATE FOR KIDS



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## Introduction & Background

Delaware County is home to approximately 126,000 children.<sup>1</sup> Fortunately, most of these children are being raised in homes that offer them tremendous opportunities and they live in communities and schools that are boosting their prospects. Yet, nearly 48,000 or four out of ten children are much less fortunate, living in families that can't meet their children's needs without going into debt or going without essentials. These children mostly live in communities where the schools have insufficient funds to ensure the success of their students. Currently available resources are inadequate to meet the health care, early learning, and family supports needed to help roughly 48,000 children in Delaware County achieve their full potential.<sup>2</sup>

Unfortunately, the data shows that prospects for opportunity and economic mobility for children from low-wealth families stagnated in the last ten years.

## ECONOMIC FAST FACTS FOR DELAWARE COUNTY

48,000 children live in families earning too little to meet their needs

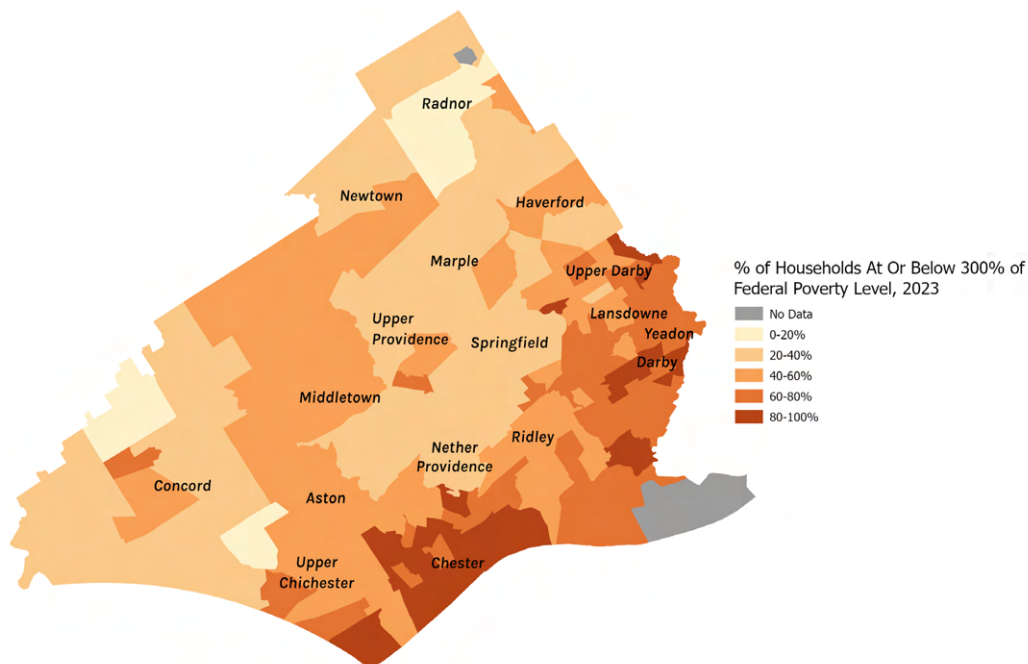
38% of all families with children are earning less than needed

Families with two children need to earn \$74,916 or much more if they have child care costs

17% of families report being food insecure

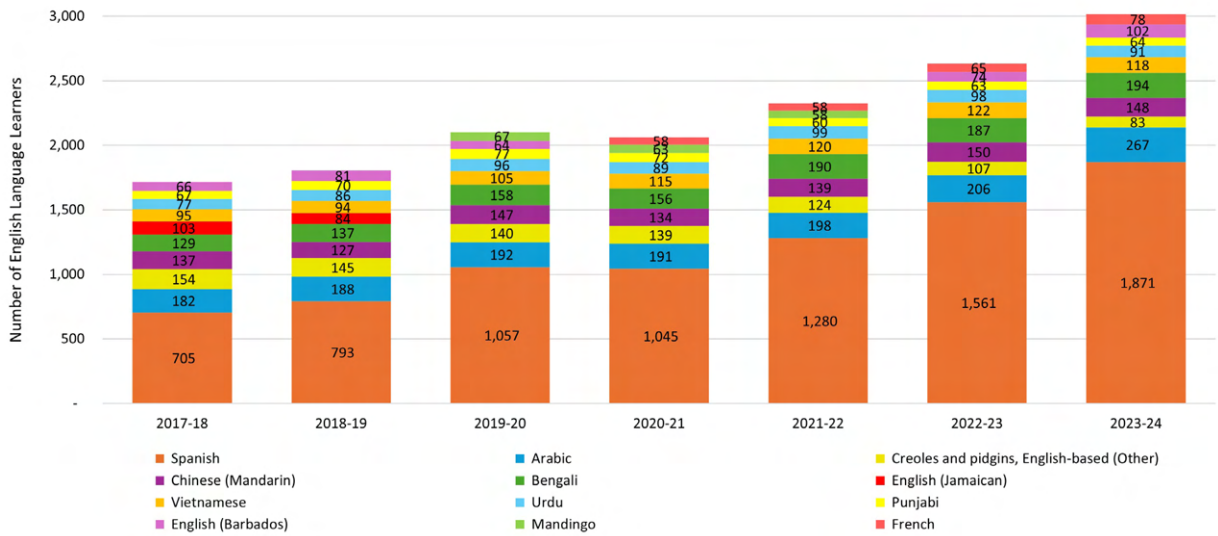
Families earning the least lost \$171 of purchasing power in the last decade

## Children from Low-Wealth Families are Concentrated in Communities Across Delaware County<sup>3</sup>



Delaware County’s children are more diverse today than they were ten years ago as the shares of Black and Asian children edged up by one percentage point and Hispanics by two percentage points in the decade, boosting the numbers of children of color by about 6,250 compared to 2014.<sup>4</sup>

### The Cultural Heritage of Children in Delaware County has Become More Diverse from 2017-2018 to 2023-2024<sup>5</sup>



While many cultural and ethnic communities are increasingly calling Delaware County home, Hispanic children account for the fastest growing newcomers.

There were slightly more than 1,800 children whose first language is Spanish enrolled in public schools in the 2024 school year, compared to about 700 in 2018.<sup>6</sup> Often large demographic categories obscure the diverse cultural heritages included in them. For example, Hispanic children come from a variety of heritages depending on their parents’ country of origin and ethnicity. The increasing diversity in the county requires greater cultural competence among child serving institutions for children to succeed.

### The Official Poverty Measure Masks Real Economic Hardship

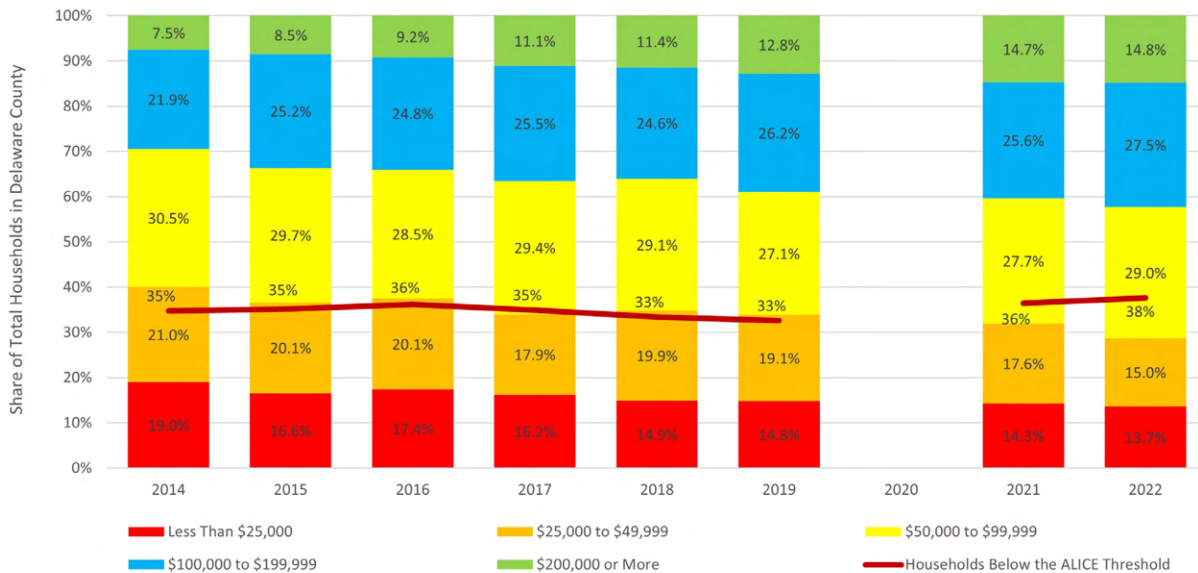
Too many families of all races and ethnicities are facing economic hardship in the county. The method used by the U.S. Census Bureau to measure poverty, while useful, is not robust enough to fully describe the relationship between the income earned by a household and the cost of living for that household. Therefore a collaboration among several United Way organizations across the country developed the **ALICE Household Survival Budget**, which calculates the minimum cost of household basics (housing, child care, food, transportation, health care, technology, and taxes) for every county in the country.

These budgets — tailored by the number and age of household members — are compared to household income from the Census Bureau’s American Community Survey to estimate the number and share of households living below the ALICE Threshold at the county level.<sup>7</sup>

■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■  
The average Delaware County family would need to make \$74,916 to afford the basics.  
■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■

This robust ALICE measure finds that the average family (two adults and two children) would need to make \$74,916, or more than two times the official federal poverty measure, to afford the basics of rent, food, transportation, health insurance, and other essentials.<sup>8</sup> If the family needs child care so the parents can work, their earnings would need to rise to \$94,584.

### Nearly 40% of Families with Children are Below the ALICE Threshold in Delaware County <sup>9</sup>



In the last decade, the share of households with children earning too little to meet their needs has fluctuated from a low of 33% to the latest data (2022) that finds 38% of households are short of what is needed to support their children based on the ALICE threshold.<sup>10</sup> As a result, it is not a surprise that about 17% of families report being food insecure in 2022, the highest rate since 2017 when data collection began.<sup>11</sup>

Families are increasingly turning to public benefits to meet their basic needs. Approximately 30,605 children relied on SNAP benefits to avoid hunger, up 10% compared to 2014.<sup>12</sup> Similarly, the number of children benefitting from WIC was at a five-year high of 6,215 in 2024.<sup>13</sup>

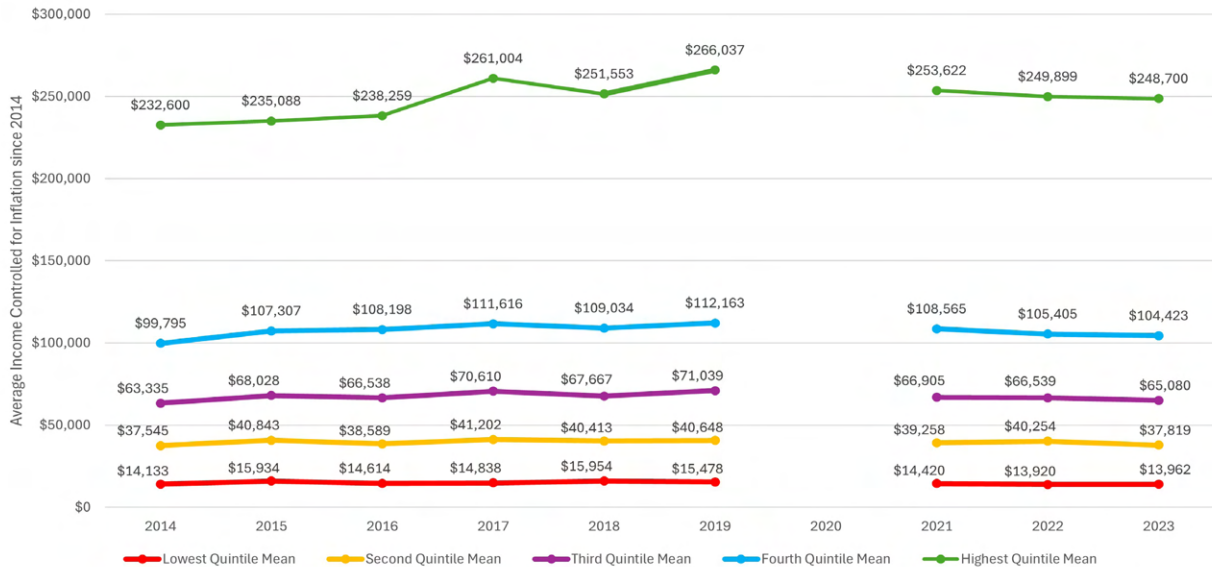
The number of homeless children nearly tripled, reaching a high of 1,370 in the 2024 school year in a period of ostensibly robust income growth in the county.<sup>14</sup> This number is likely a low estimate, given the many workarounds caregivers use to avoid shelters or living on the street, like couch surfing or short-term stays with family or friends.<sup>15</sup>

### Wage Growth Fails to Outpace Inflation

The shockingly high and stubborn number of children living in struggling families, and rising hunger and homelessness rates stand in stark contrast to the overall income distribution trends in the county. In the last decade, more people earn over \$50,000 (up from 60% to 70%) and the number of people earning over \$200,000 a year more than doubled.<sup>16</sup>

Although most Delaware County working adults earned more over the decade, generally any financial boost was wiped out by rapidly increased costs for basic goods and services. After accounting for inflation, the poorest 20% of county residents experienced negative net income growth in the last decade, losing \$171 of their annual purchasing power although their incomes rose by 29% in that period. The next lowest 20% income group saw a meager \$274 boost in annual purchasing power despite wage growth that was nearly \$12,000 over the decade. In contrast, the top 20% saw their purchasing power grow by \$16,100 in the same period.<sup>17</sup>

### Income Growth Fails to Keep Place with Inflation in Delaware County<sup>18</sup>



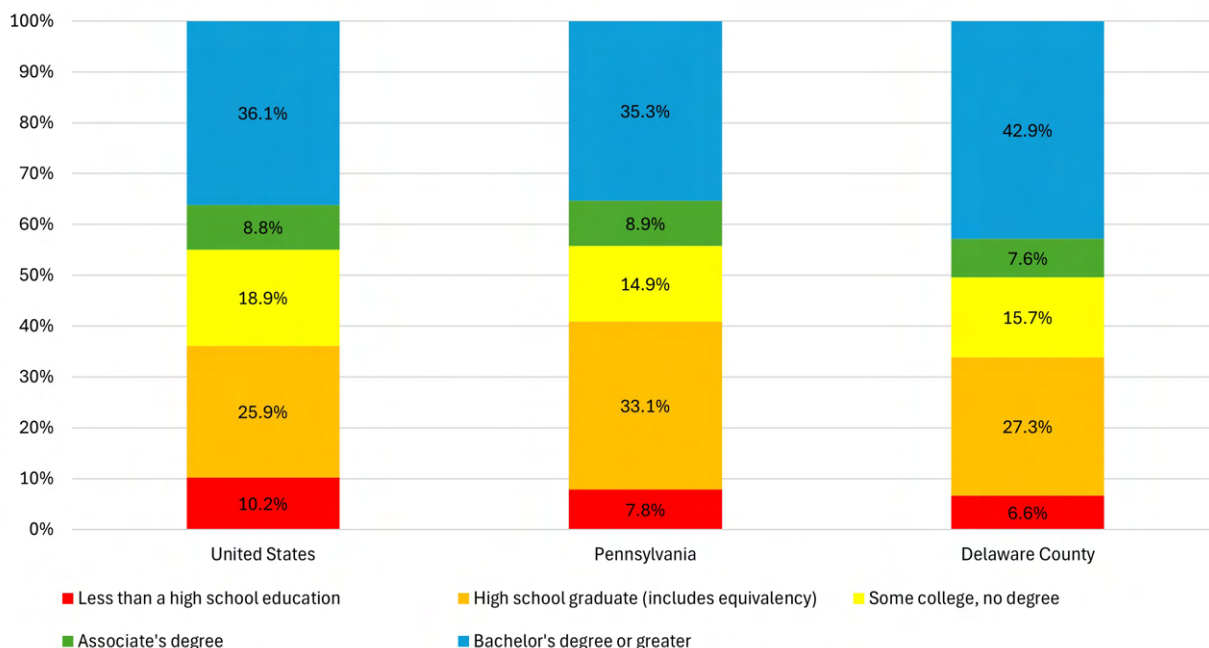
Unfortunately, the share of children living in economically stressed households has not dropped in the last decade even while the nation experienced a strong and sustained period of economic growth. The policy strategies in place are clearly insufficient to ensure that low-wealth caregivers increase their earning capacity, thereby making the lives of their children demonstrably better.

### *Educational Attainment Challenges Hold Back Economic Prospects*

National data demonstrates that adults can substantially boost their earnings capacity if they have some post-secondary training or education. In fact, for Delaware County families the impact of education is even stronger than the national trend. For families where at least one adult completed some college courses, their earnings were 23% higher than households where at least one adult had only a high school diploma.<sup>19</sup> Where a caregiver had a four-year degree their earning capacity rose by nearly 75% compared to households where at least one caregiver had only a high school diploma.

Fortunately, more Delaware County children are likely to be raised by a parent with at least some college or post-secondary education compared to ten years ago. Just over two-thirds (or 66%) of Delaware County adults now have some post high school education or training compared to 60% ten years ago.<sup>20</sup> Another promising trend is the number of adults with a high school degree which rose by six percentage points, or about 21,000 more adults with a diploma.<sup>21</sup>

**The Share of County Adults with Undergraduate or Post-Graduate Degrees is Much Higher than the National Share <sup>22</sup>**





Most promising is the increase of adults with four or more years of college, up nearly seven percentage points in the decade.

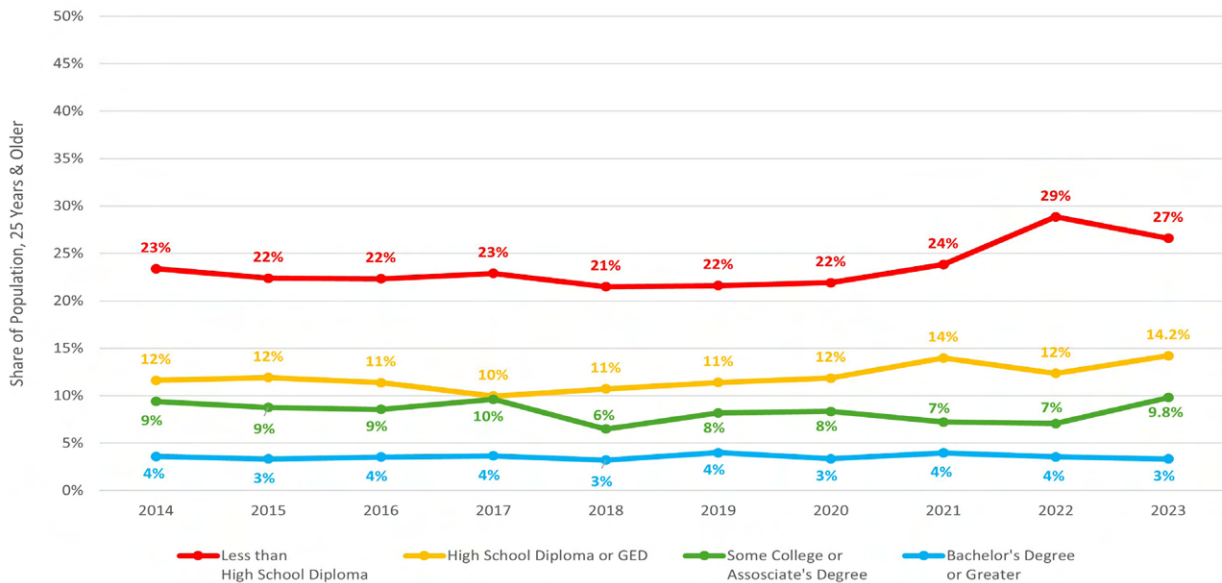
As of 2023, Delaware County adults were more likely to have a college education than all adults across the state and the nation.<sup>23</sup> This positive trend may explain the jump in the average median income from approximately \$63,000 to \$84,000 from 2014 to 2023.<sup>24</sup>

More children are likely to be raised by a parent with at least some college or post-secondary education compared to ten years ago.

Despite the rising demands of the labor market, which is increasingly rewarding job seekers with some college education, too many adults with just a high school diploma or less live in poverty. This data suggests that real barriers to secondary and post-secondary education pathways persist, limiting the capacity of approximately 21,500 adults in Delaware County to rise into the middle class based on the latest data from 2023.<sup>25</sup>

It also may explain why the county’s unemployment rate has trended higher than the state and national unemployment rates in eight of the last ten years and has consistently been worse than the state and federal unemployment rates since the pandemic.<sup>26</sup>

### Some College Attendance Cuts Chances of Living in Poverty in Delaware County by 31%<sup>27</sup>



The barriers to post-secondary training may also be at the root of the county’s child poverty rate which was 14% compared to the poverty rate for all county adults at 10% as of 2023.<sup>28</sup>

## *Volatility of Federal Tax Policy Hurts Families*

Research consistently shows that a significant portion of children’s well-being is directly linked to their family’s economic status. In addition to boosting education attainment government policies like paid family and medical leave, the Child Tax Credit, and the Child and Dependent Care Tax Credit provide families with much needed financial support to ameliorate the impact of poverty on their children.

The American Rescue Plan Act of 2021 temporarily expanded the Child Tax Credit for the 2021 tax year to \$3,600 per child younger than age 6 and \$3,000 per child up to age 17. This temporary expanded and refundable child tax credit, issued during the pandemic, significantly reduced child poverty by 43% nationwide.<sup>29</sup>

In Pennsylvania, the impact was even greater, with child poverty rates reduced by 46%.<sup>30</sup> In Delaware County, families across the board benefited from \$187 million through this temporary tax policy.<sup>31</sup> Delaware County families also benefited from \$26 million in savings through the refundable Child and Dependent Care Tax Credit policy. Survey research shows that families spent most funds on food, clothing, and school supplies.<sup>32</sup>

Unfortunately, both expanded tax policies expired, robbing tens of thousands of children the life-changing impacts of increased economic security. Recently, statewide efforts tried to offset these impacts by nearly tripling the state-level Child and Dependent Care Tax Credit, which will benefit 13,137 Delaware County families.<sup>33</sup>

This is demonstrated by the decade-long barriers to upward mobility for the lowest income families in the county, and the downward trends in educational attainment and health care access for children. Public policies are failing to produce the opportunity families need to help their children thrive and enter adulthood prepared for success.



The enhanced Child Tax Credit reduced child poverty by 46% in Pennsylvania in 2021.



## Early Childhood Education

High-quality and affordable child care is critical to boosting the economic conditions in low-wealth households by enabling caregivers to work.

Families languish on waitlists for child care, while early childhood providers struggle to find enough qualified staff to open up classrooms. In addition, Pennsylvania loses \$6.65 billion annually because of breakdowns in the sector.<sup>34</sup> This dysfunction in the child care sector has serious implications for Delaware County's economy.

### *Policies to Support New Parents are Absent*

As parents are welcoming a newborn baby, they shouldn't be forced to choose between bonding with their child or going back to work. Paid family leave allows parents to provide better care during a child's critical early developmental stages, which leads to improved health. Statewide, 66% of businesses in Pennsylvania do not offer their employees paid family and medical leave. In 2022, 4,281 Delaware County newborns went home to parents without paid leave, forcing thousands of families to give up their hard-earned savings and risk poverty.<sup>35</sup> A simple policy solution could provide parents with insurance so they can take care of their children and their bills.

### *Child Care: Affordability, Supply & Quality Challenges Persist*

With the pandemic in the rearview mirror, many experts, understandably, were concerned that the child care sector would struggle to rebound with the expiration of federal pandemic aid. Indeed, trends over the last ten years show that costs have continued to increase, capacity has been reduced, and access and enrollment in high-quality programs continues to be a challenge. Additionally, without high-quality care, children are unable to access the life-changing benefits of early childhood education.

This section looks at three aspects of the child care sector: cost, supply, and quality.

## CHILD CARE & PRE-K FAST FACTS FOR DELAWARE COUNTY

32,290 children under the age of five

7,710 children eligible for Child Care Works (child care subsidy)

Only 23.6% of child care providers are high-quality but they serve nearly half of eligible children (48.4%)

64% of children eligible for publicly funded pre-k (high-quality Pre-K Counts) are not enrolled

4,281 children born in 2022 went home with parents who did not have paid family and medical leave

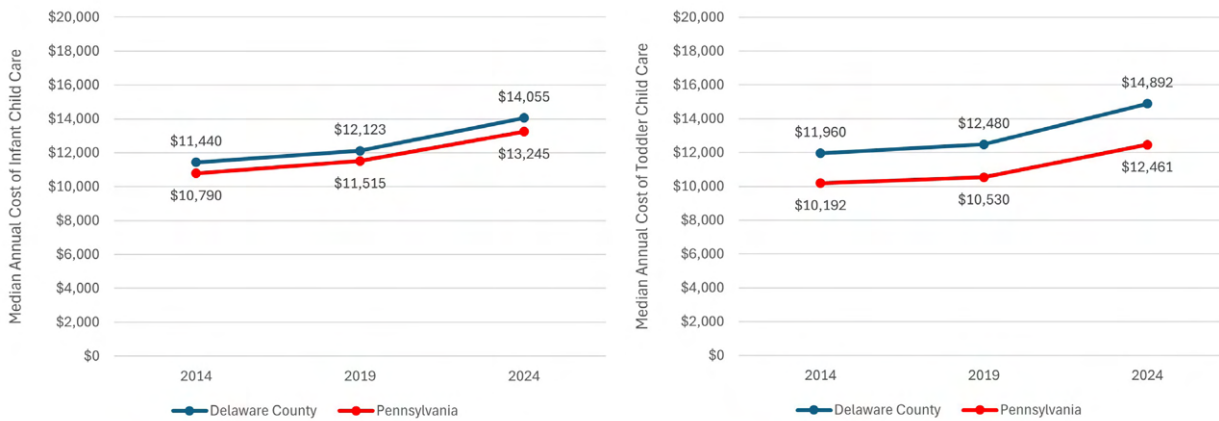
146 staff positions in child care programs are unfilled

1,076 children could be served if child care programs were fully staffed

### Without Help, Families Really Struggle to Cover Costs

Delaware County is home to 32,290 children under the age of five, and their parents face steep costs when it comes to early education and care.<sup>36</sup> County residents pay \$810 more for infant care than the rest of Pennsylvania; toddler care costs \$2,431 more.<sup>37</sup> Little progress has been made to bring those costs down. In fact, infant care costs in Delaware County increased by 23% and toddler care rose 25% from 2014 to 2024. In 2023, the average family spent 13% of their household budget on infant care, almost twice the federal recommendation of 7%.<sup>38</sup>

### The Median Annual Cost of Infant or Toddler Child Care is More Expensive in Delaware County than the Average Statewide Cost<sup>39</sup>



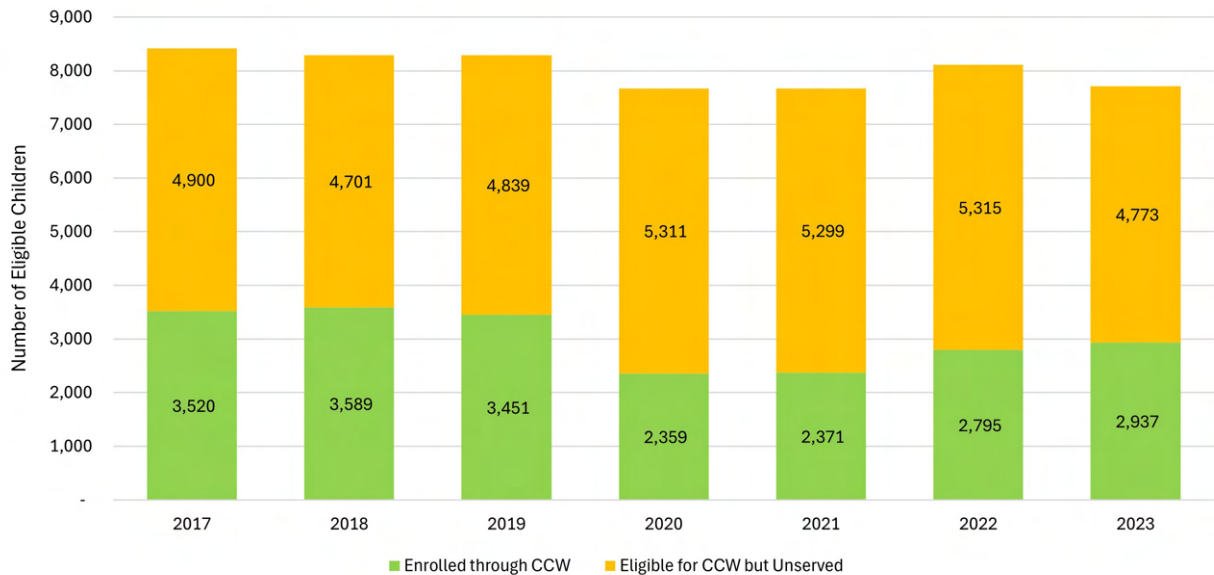
Given the high out-of-pocket cost of child care, state programs like Child Care Works, which provides subsidies to low-income working families, can be a game changer – offsetting the cost of care so parents can work while their children are cared for and educated. But six out of ten (62%) eligible children are not enrolled in Child Care Works. This is mainly because child care providers have a hard time recruiting and retaining staff and, as a result, must limit the number of children they can serve.<sup>40</sup>

### Staffing Shortages Cut Supply

Even though the number of providers in Delaware County has remained stable, chronic staffing shortages have forced providers to close classrooms and turn away 1,076 children in 2024, a number equivalent to two entire public elementary schools.<sup>41</sup> The reduced capacity of providers to serve more children continues to hold back any progress that was made to increase access to child care over the past ten years.

Low salaries are the primary driving factor for the staffing shortage. The average pay for child care staff in Delaware County was \$33,371 in 2023, so close to the federal poverty line that, if they reside in a family of four, they could qualify for a child care subsidy themselves.<sup>42</sup>

## 62% of Eligible Children in Delaware County Cannot Enroll in Subsidized Care Because of Persistent Staffing and Provider Shortages <sup>43</sup>



Their counterparts in the K-12 education system make more than double at \$68,591. Even retail workers make more money than child care staff, approximately \$3,370 more a year. It is no surprise then, that providers have struggled to compete with other sectors to hire and retain staff.

### Quality Matters

While access to affordable child care continues to be a concern, it is also important that programs be high-quality.

Research has shown that high-quality early childhood education supports the brain development of young children during a particularly sensitive period of growth. It also contributes to resiliency, which increases the likelihood of children being able to rebound from traumatic events.<sup>44</sup>

In essence, high-quality early learning programs are the foundation for success in school and career.

The Pennsylvania STARS program is a state rating system that uses multiple indicators to measure the quality of the early learning program, including factors such as the credentials of the teaching staff. Programs are rated from one to four, with four indicating the highest quality. High-quality programs are rated STAR 3 or STAR 4.

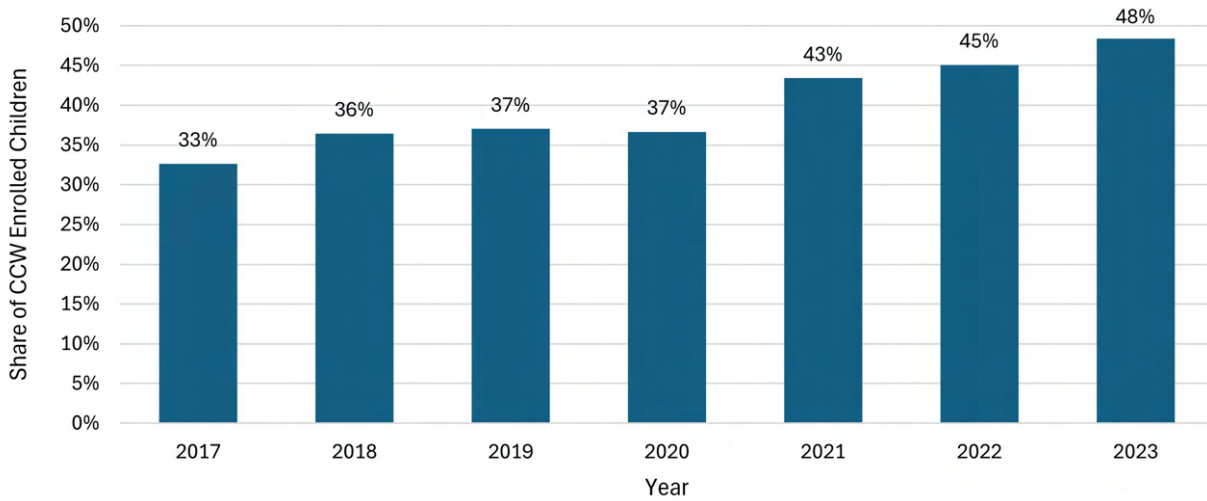
**13%**

Young families in Delaware County spend **13%** of their income on child care; almost twice the federal recommended standard.

While the number of Delaware County children attending high-quality programs has increased over time, unfortunately, more than half of children continue to attend STAR 1 or STAR 2 programs and may not be receiving the maximum benefit of high-quality early childhood education.<sup>45</sup>



### The Share of Low-Income Children Under 5 in High Quality Child Care Programs is Rising in Delaware County, 2017-2023<sup>46</sup>



## K-12 Education

Over the last ten years, gaps in school quality and funding have plagued some Delaware County communities, holding back thousands of students from reaching their full potential. While school districts and charter schools await a sustainable funding solution from state lawmakers, student learning has stalled. Schools should be an economic engine and a driver of upward mobility – but Delaware County students from low-income households are still just as likely as they were ten years ago to attend schools that do not have sufficient funds to provide the resources, teacher support, and environment they need to learn.

### *A Dearth of Full-Day Kindergarten Options*

One way to improve early reading and math skills is to provide full-day kindergarten. Nine out of 15 Delaware County school districts provide access to full-day kindergarten to at least some of their students – this is up from five districts in 2013.\* Nevertheless, Rose Tree Media, Springfield, Wallingford-Swarthmore, Upper Darby, Haverford, and Marple-Newtown do not offer full-day kindergarten. This leaves 2,122 kindergarteners without the extra support that could boost their learning.<sup>47</sup> Limited access to full-day kindergarten also sets families back by up to \$10,711 per year, because working parents typically need to pay for childcare or private kindergarten.<sup>48</sup>

### *COVID Drop in Student Achievement Persists*

When the pandemic forced schools to close in 2020, students across the county experienced major learning losses that are reflected in dropped test scores.

\* These school districts do not offer full-day kindergarten to all families. Some do provide full-day kindergarten to a small number of students with special needs.

## EDUCATION FAST FACTS FOR DELAWARE COUNTY

70,562 Delaware County students enrolled in traditional public schools across 15 school districts

4,693 students enrolled in 35 brick and mortar charter schools with tuition costs totaling \$72,279,405

1,954 students registered in 13 cyber charter schools with tuition costs totaling \$35,210,312

4.5% of students are English Language Learners

Six out of 15 school districts do not offer full-day kindergarten

11% of high school students are enrolled in career and technical education (CTE)

Six districts, teaching half of Delaware County students, have a remaining adequacy gap of \$156 million

Only 55% of third graders can pass English assessments

Only 31% of eighth graders can pass math assessments

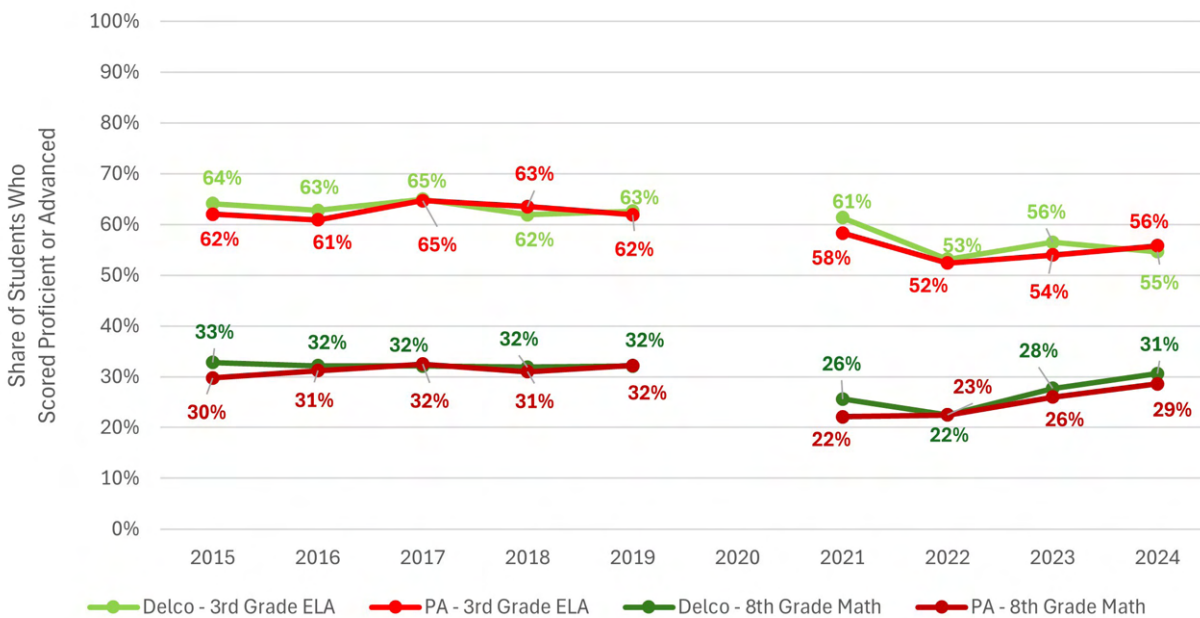
46% of students do not have access to full day kindergarten

The county’s students are gaining back some lost ground, but students are still not back to where they were before the pandemic or where they were nine years ago.<sup>49</sup> Just over half of Delaware County’s third graders can read on grade level and only one in four eighth graders is proficient in math – both major predictors of future success.



Of all the southeastern PA counties, Delaware County most closely mirrors the state in student achievement.<sup>50</sup> However, within the county there are stark differences by school district.

### Student Performance Suffered and is Still Recovering from COVID Learning Disruptions <sup>51</sup>



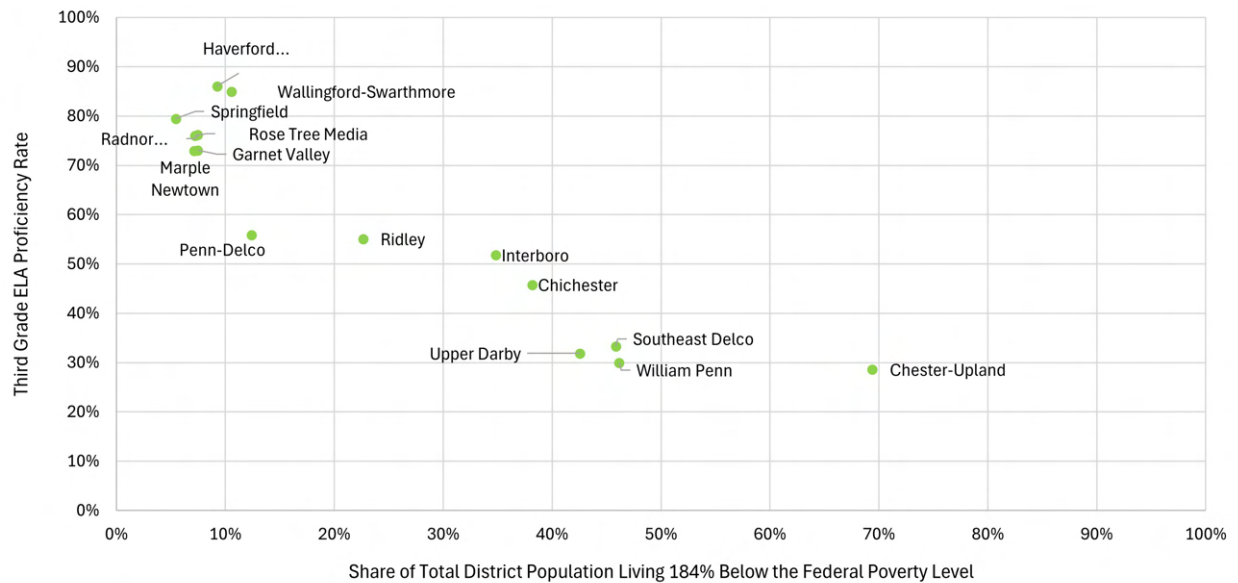
### Students in Low-Wealth Districts Lag in Reading and Math Skills

Children who can read proficiently by fourth grade are more likely to be successful in school and career and are more likely to grow into healthy adults and earn family-sustaining wages.<sup>52, 53, 54</sup> In Delaware County, 45% of all third graders (1,255) cannot read proficiently – enough to fill 17 school buses with three kids to a seat!<sup>55</sup> The school districts in the county’s highest-poverty communities have the fewest students who can pass the reading test.<sup>56</sup>



In Upper Darby, Southeast Delco, William Penn and Chester-Upland, only about one third of third graders are reading on grade level. Just a few miles north in Haverford Township and Wallingford-Swarthmore, almost all third graders can pass the reading test.

### Fewer Third Graders in Delaware County Can Read Proficiently in High-Poverty School Districts <sup>57, 58</sup>



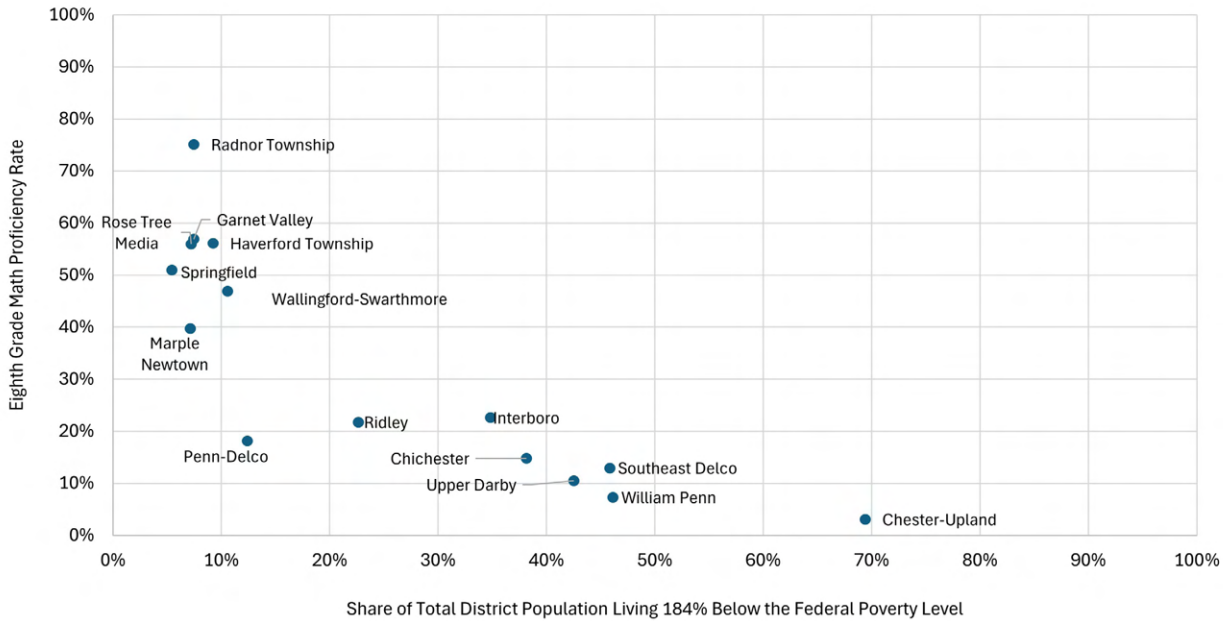
In some school districts, funding constraints leave students without much-needed literacy support, like reading specialists, targeted tutoring, and small-group instruction. Another barrier to early literacy success is that some school districts continue to use the recently debunked “whole language” approach to teach reading that has produced dismal reading outcomes for decades.<sup>59</sup> This “whole language” approach does not work for all students, especially students who have dyslexia or another learning challenge, are learning English, did not receive high-quality instruction in prior years, or whose parents don’t have strong literacy skills to support them.

An evidence-based “science of reading” approach offers instructional practices that teachers can use to support all learners. Training teachers and providing them updated curricula can transform learning outcomes, and it has worked in states like Mississippi.<sup>60</sup> However, curriculum change is not a quick fix. It is only successful when teachers participate in the process and school districts provide extensive coaching to help teachers implement it well.<sup>61</sup>

Eighth grade math proficiency is a predictor of students’ ability to take on more advanced coursework in high school and college and to apply math skills in their careers.<sup>62</sup>

Eighth grade math proficiency is at a crisis point in low-wealth school districts. There are five school districts where less than 15% of 8th graders can pass the math proficiency test and they are the districts experiencing the greatest poverty.<sup>63</sup> Even in the districts with the highest math proficiency levels, less than three quarters of 8th graders can pass the test.

### **Eight Graders in Delaware County are at a Crisis Point in Math Proficiency in Low-Wealth School Districts <sup>64</sup>**



These math skills deficits are aligned with a disturbing national trend – American 8th graders’ math skills are sharply declining compared to other countries, and math proficiency has dropped among both high-performing and low-performing 8th graders.<sup>65</sup>

Many parents don’t know how to help their children when they struggle with math because of changes in how math is taught in the classroom. The math achievement crisis is putting Delaware County students at a disadvantage in college and career.



**Eighth grade math proficiency is at a crisis point in the five low-wealth school districts.**



### **Many School Districts Have Disproportionately High Local Taxes, Yet Remain Underfunded**

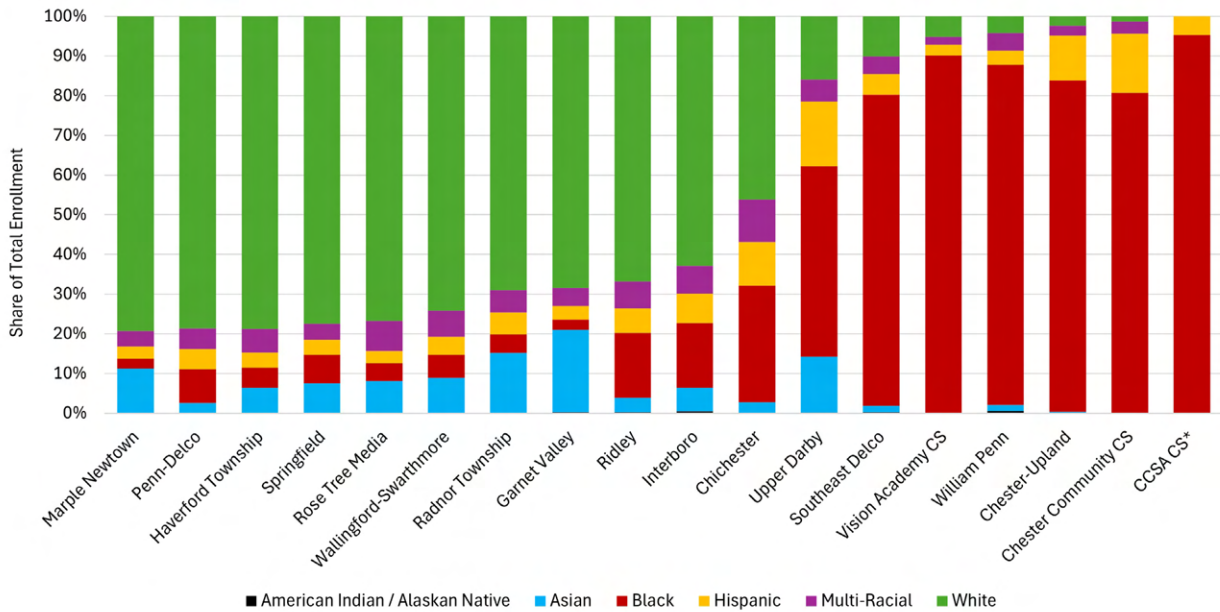
Students of color and those from low-income families are clustered in a handful of school districts and charter schools in Delaware County. These are the school districts with the lowest-value housing stock, which in turn generates the lowest revenue to fund their local schools.

For example, the William Penn school district property tax rate of 27.6 mills generates \$9,411 per student.<sup>66</sup> Meanwhile, the Radnor school district tax rate of 13.9 mills produces \$26,211 per student because their housing values are so much higher than those in William Penn. Radnor’s local taxes give the district twice as much per student at less than half the local property tax rate. In this broken education funding system, low-wealth communities tax themselves at very high rates and still cannot raise the revenue they need for their local schools.

Underfunding is a Pennsylvania problem, not just a Delaware County problem. Pennsylvania gets an “A” grade for its overall level of funding but an “F” for the funding distribution, according to a recent Education Law Center report.<sup>67</sup> That is because Pennsylvania’s school funding system relies heavily on local property taxes, resulting in massive funding differences between high-wealth and low-wealth school districts.

Because a Pennsylvania community’s wealth is often correlated with its racial makeup, the schools with the highest numbers of Black and Hispanic students have the lowest level of education funding to educate their students.

### Delaware County’s Black and Hispanic Students are Clustered in a Few School Districts and Charter Schools <sup>68</sup>

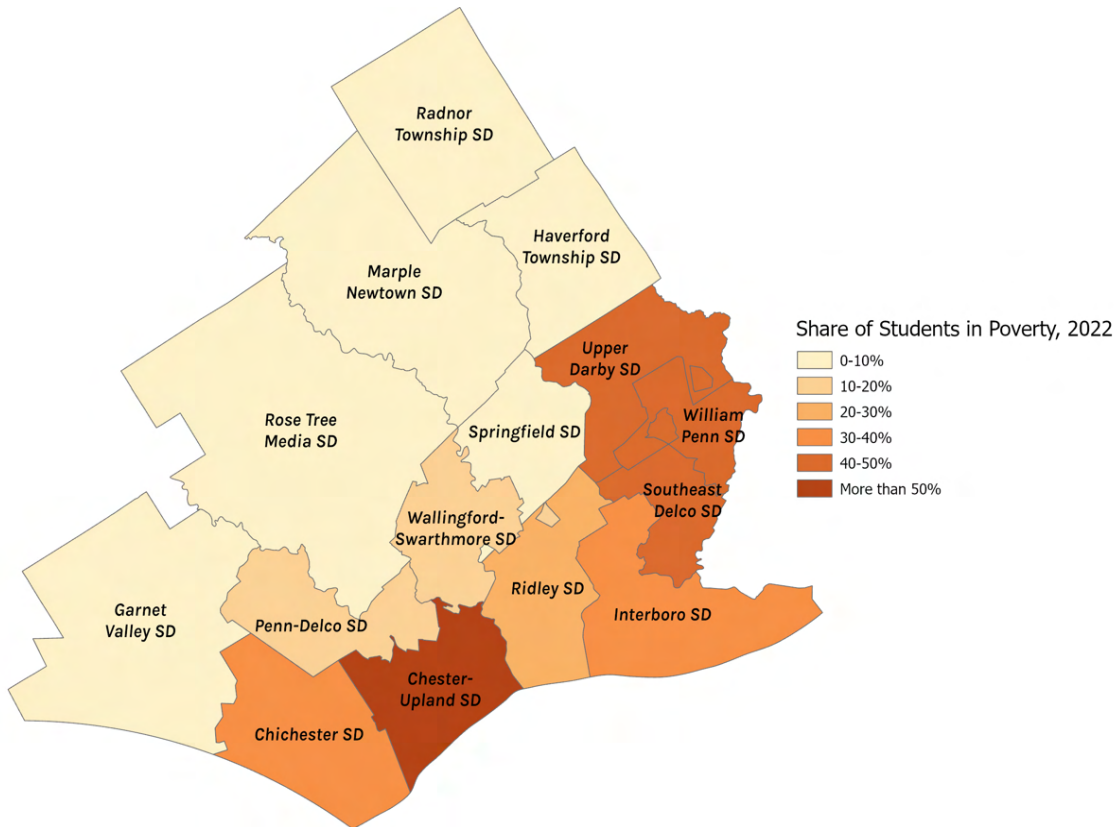


\* CCSA is the abbreviated name for Chester Scholars Charter Academy. “CS” is the abbreviation for Charter School. All others are school districts. Unfortunately, cyber charter students are not shown because racial enrollment data is not available for cyber charter students.

Some of Delaware County’s underfunded school districts also report high levels of student transience.<sup>69</sup> This may be a result of families moving their children from school to school as they struggle to find an option that works. This type of student churn harms student outcomes and disrupts classroom and school stability and is one of many consequences of inadequate public school funding.<sup>70</sup>

Approximately 22,684 public school students in Delaware County live in poverty.<sup>71</sup> Overall, the number of students living in poverty has decreased over the last nine years, but the number and share of students in poverty increased in five school districts: Haverford, Interboro, Rose Tree Media, Upper Darby, and Wallingford-Swarthmore.<sup>72</sup> Every school district in Delaware County serves at least 250 students who live in poverty, with many school districts educating thousands of students whose families cannot make ends meet. Numbers this large require a robust and dedicated plan to educate these students who are the county’s future.

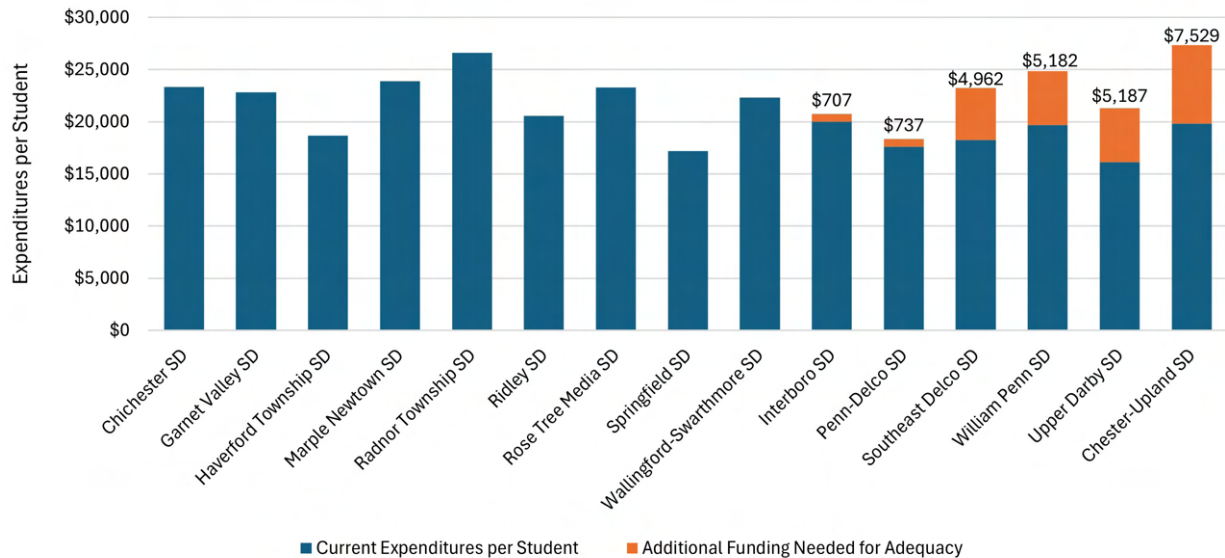
### Students from Low-Wealth Families Concentrated in Eight School Districts <sup>73</sup>



### The State School Funding Adequacy Gap Persists

To build an effective education system in Delaware County, the low-wealth school districts that serve students with the highest needs must be on an equal playing field with wealthier districts. In 2023, Pennsylvania’s Commonwealth Court ruled that the state legislature must fix the school funding system and guarantee every child a right to a thorough and efficient education – one that provides basic needs like reasonable class sizes, updated textbooks, and tutoring programs. The state measured the total school funding shortfall to be \$4.5 billion; Delaware County’s total shortfall was measured at over \$175 million.<sup>74</sup>

#### Six Delaware County School Districts Need More Funding to Adequately Educate Each Student <sup>75</sup>



Under the leadership of Governor Josh Shapiro, the 2024 state budget introduced \$1.1 billion in new state funds, the largest increase in Pennsylvania history. Half of the new state dollars in 2024 will fund adequacy efforts, filling the first 11% of that \$4.5 billion gap. The new adequacy funds must be used to improve student learning and must be approved by the Pennsylvania Department of Education. There is currently no timeline for when the state will release the remainder of the adequacy funds.

Six school districts in Delaware County qualify for adequacy funds, which will reach 36,675 students or 48% of students in the county. The first \$19 million in adequacy funds was released in 2024 leaving a \$156 adequacy gap to fill.<sup>76</sup> The other nine school districts also received funding increases in 2024 to keep up with inflation and other rising costs. Charter schools also receive a share of the adequacy funding for each student who lives in the catchment of an adequacy-receiving school district.

### *A Shortage of High School Career Oriented Courses*

Students enrolled in career and technical education (CTE) programs in high school can earn industry-recognized credentials and college credits before graduating high school, equipping them to quickly enter a skilled career or higher education. Although the FY2024 state budget added \$30 million more for CTE, an overall lack of state investment and outdated policies obstruct more students from accessing these effective programs.<sup>77</sup> As a result, only 5% of Delaware County high school students (1,271) are enrolled as CTE concentrators, the second lowest share of the five southeastern Pennsylvania counties.<sup>78</sup> (A CTE concentrator is a student who successfully completes at least half of their CTE coursework.)

**Only 5% of high school students** in Delaware County are enrolled in Career/Technical Education programs.



Enrolled in Career/Technical Education

The good news is that the number of students in these promising programs more than doubled in Delaware County since 2014. Further, more than half (54%) of Delaware County CTE concentrators come from low-income families, demonstrating student demand for the programs and the desire of parents to do what they can to help their children graduate high school and enter the middle class.<sup>79</sup>

Another indicator of the promise of CTE for students is the fact that these Delaware County students are outperforming their peers across the state. Half of county's CTE students pursued a postsecondary education, compared to a third of CTE students statewide.<sup>80</sup>

Still CTE enrollment rates are severely depressed due to resource limitations. State funds currently cover only 9% of CTE costs, requiring school districts to foot 88% of the costs (3% is covered by the federal Perkins V Grant).<sup>81</sup> As a result, programs that serve students in many low-wealth school districts cannot afford the materials and equipment needed to prepare students for their careers. Statewide programs also suffer from teacher shortages and large enrollment waitlists. Over 200 of the state's teacher vacancies are for CTE positions, and an estimated 27,000 students are on CTE waitlists.<sup>82</sup>



### Teachers are the Lynchpin to Learning

For math, English, and every other subject at school, the most important factor in student learning is their teacher. Students need qualified educators who can support their diverse needs. The teacher’s level of instructional skill, years of experience, and culturally competent skillset matter but the major statewide teacher shortage has made it hard for the most underfunded school districts to recruit and retain qualified educators.<sup>83</sup>

Across Delaware County in 2023, 111 teacher and school worker positions were unfilled and an additional 90 positions were being temporarily filled by substitutes.<sup>84</sup> The school districts with the most vacancies were those with the lowest funds: William Penn, Upper Darby, and Chester-Upland.

Teachers’ experience levels vary greatly across school districts and charter schools. Classroom teachers at Rose-Tree Media, Radnor, and Garnet Valley had over 17 years of experience on average, while teachers at Vision Academy Charter School and Chester Community Charter School averaged less than nine years.<sup>85</sup>

To attract new teachers, school districts need to offer competitive starting salaries but there are wide gaps in starting pay ranging from \$50,119 in William Penn to \$64,350 in Rose Tree Media.<sup>86</sup> Differences in salaries make it much more attractive for teachers to choose wealthier school districts, exacerbating educational inequities.

### Charter School Costs Rise Faster Than Other Costs

When it comes to funding, charter school tuition continues to divert funds away from the traditional public school system and it has done so for more than ten years.

Delaware County’s school districts pay more than \$35 million to cyber charter schools where student achievement is far worse than students at traditional public schools.<sup>87</sup>

Delaware County school districts paid an additional \$72 million to brick and mortar charter schools, an increase of 21% in the same period.<sup>88</sup>

Cyber charter school payments  
in Delaware County rose by

**71%**  
in eight years,

reaching

**\$35**  
**million**



## Child Health

Delaware County has made significant progress in improving child health, but systemic inequities continue to undermine the overall health outcomes for many children, particularly in marginalized communities. Addressing these issues requires a holistic approach that not only improves healthcare access but also tackles the root causes of health inequities.

The opening of a new county health department in 2022 was a big step toward keeping children and families healthy, but some of that progress was offset by the closure of two of Crozer Health System's hospitals, which reduced access to care for pregnant women and children.

Delaware County Memorial Hospital, which recorded 1,373 births in 2013, saw that number plummet to just 52 births by 2022 before its closure.<sup>90,91</sup> Similarly, Healthy Start, a program serving parents and children, reported a 7% decline in pediatric well visits.<sup>92</sup> The county's hospital bed rate now stands at 1.1 per 1,000 residents, well below Pennsylvania's average of 2.3.<sup>93</sup> The ratio of primary care physicians to residents has also continued to decrease with the 2024 County Health Rankings showing just one physician per 990 residents.<sup>93</sup>

### **Medicaid Processes Cause Thousands of Children to Lose Access to Health Care**

As the county increases its focus on improving the health of its children, state and federal Medicaid policies are making it harder to ensure that children are doing better. Healthcare access for children in Delaware County is closely tied to Medicaid, a critical support for families with limited income who cannot afford private insurance.

## CHILD HEALTH FAST FACTS FOR DELAWARE COUNTY

In 2023, 65,799 children in Delaware County were on Medicaid and 2,794 children were on CHIP

In 2023, 9,424 children were affected by Medicaid unwinding, primarily due to procedural disenrollments

6,770 children in Delaware County are uninsured

60% of Delaware County children are still not screened for lead

Non compliance with vaccines for kindergarten students tripled from 2016 to 2024

16% of Delaware County twelfth graders considered suicide; 5% reported attempting suicide

30% of students report feeling sad or depressed most days

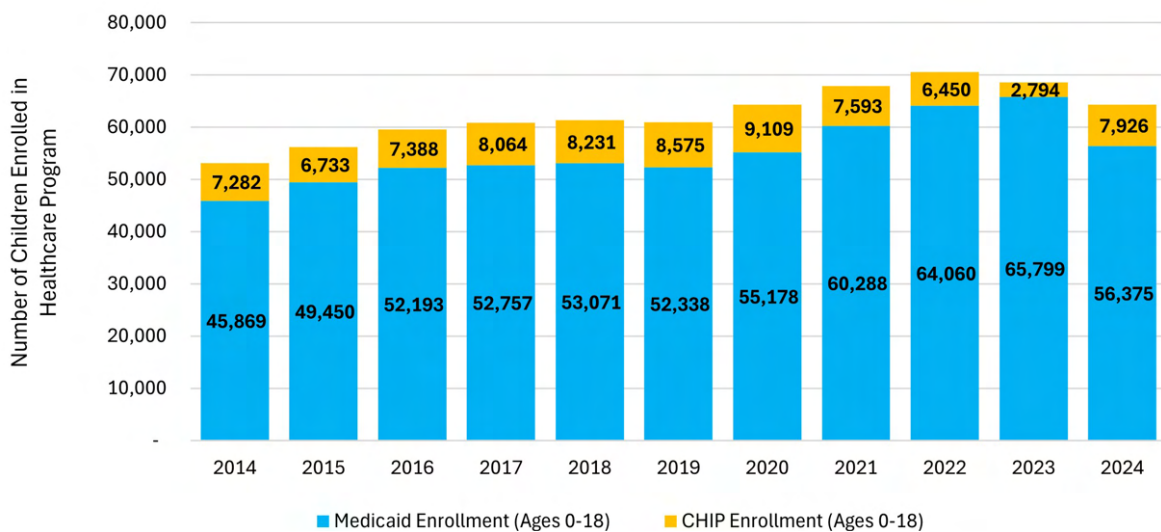
The teen pregnancy rate in Delaware County fell from 23 to 18 pregnancies per 1,000 girls aged 15-19<sup>89</sup>

There is one licensed mental health provider for every 290 residents



From 2014 to 2023, Medicaid enrollment for children in Delaware County steadily increased, peaking at 65,799 in 2023.<sup>94</sup> This upward trend reflects both a growing reliance on public health insurance and the effectiveness of Medicaid in filling healthcare access gaps for low-income families. However, following the reinstatement of annual renewal requirements in April 2023, Medicaid enrollment dropped sharply in 2024 to 56,375 – a loss of 9,424 children. This is primarily due to post-pandemic procedural disenrollments associated with changes in federal rules requiring families to re-enroll. (The process is often referred to as “Medicaid unwinding.”)

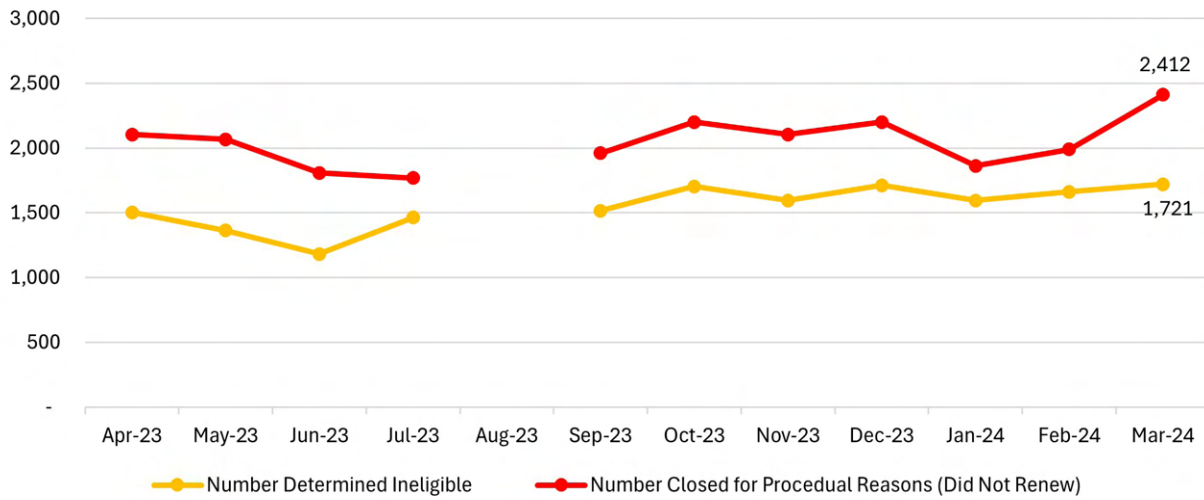
### New Downward Trend in Medicaid Enrollment Likely Means Fewer Children Have Health Insurance<sup>95</sup>



For many families, the complexity of Medicaid re-enrollment requirements – such as submitting digital documents or meeting strict deadlines – proved insurmountable. Families with housing instability, limited digital access, or limited English proficiency are disproportionately impacted, as these obstacles hinder their ability to complete re-enrollment processes on time. Without Medicaid, children with diagnosed health conditions lose access to specialized services, risking gaps in care and higher out-of-pocket costs.

Since Medicaid renewal requirements resumed, families in Delaware County have faced significant challenges in maintaining this coverage. Between April 2023 and March 2024, more than 2,000 Delaware County children lost their Medicaid coverage every month not because of ineligibility, but because of procedural barriers stemming from the unwinding.<sup>96</sup>

## The Number of Children Disenrolled from Medicaid is Rising <sup>97</sup>



Furthermore, children with special health needs are eligible for Medicaid without regard to family income. Many special needs children are enrolled in employer-based health insurance which typically does not cover essential mental health services. In 2024, Delaware County counted 5,041 children enrolled on Medicaid based on a diagnosed disability, including physical, intellectual, developmental, or psychiatric disability. This is an increase of almost 750 children since 2022 despite the high percentage of disenrollment.<sup>98,99</sup> Loss of coverage for procedural reasons disproportionately affects children with special health needs whose access to essential mental health services depends on maintaining Medicaid enrollment.

**Medicaid enrollment dropped sharply in 2024 to 56,375 – a loss of 9,424 children**

When children lose Medicaid coverage, they often miss preventive care and treatment for chronic conditions, as well as essential mental health services. For example, a child with untreated asthma may require emergency care for preventable attacks, while a child with a behavioral health condition may face treatment delays that exacerbate their symptoms.

### Environmental Factors Increase Childhood Illness

Beyond healthcare access, environmental health justice remains a critical issue in Delaware County where systemic inequities expose marginalized communities to greater environmental hazards. Older housing, poor indoor air quality, and exposure to environmental stressors like air pollution contribute to rising childhood asthma rates, preterm births, and lead poisoning.

These systemic inequities highlight the urgent need for comprehensive policies that address both the environmental and social determinants of health, ensuring that all children, regardless of race or income, have access to safe housing, clean air, and quality healthcare.

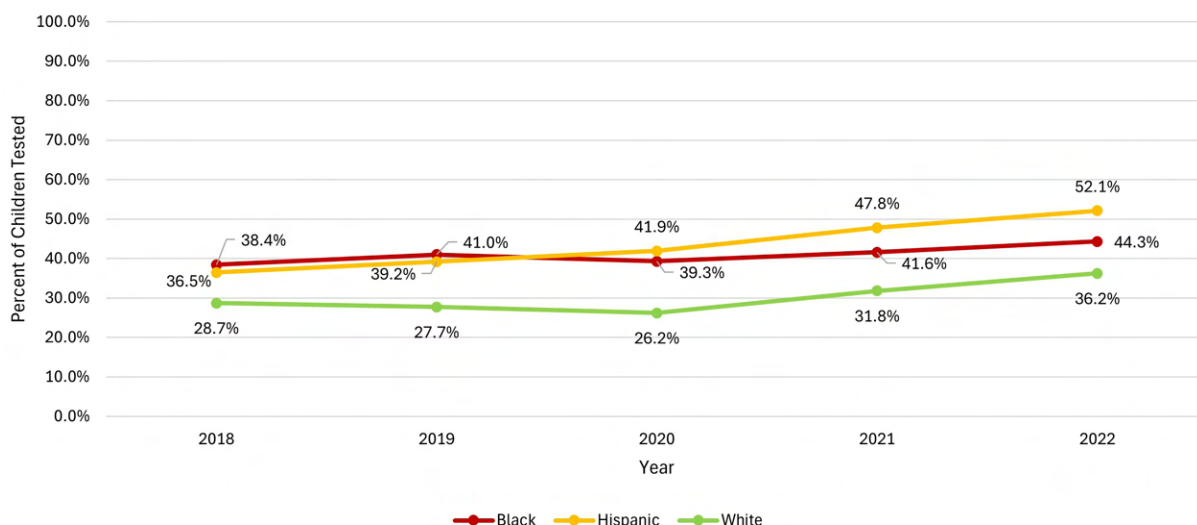
### **Lead Toxins Continue to Cause Permanent Harm**

Lead education and prevention measures by county agencies are critical. Lead exposure is a significant health risk for children in Delaware County, particularly in areas where 81% of homes were built before lead-based paint was banned in 1978.<sup>100</sup> Lead poisoning is linked to irreversible cognitive and behavioral damage, contributing to poorer academic performance and long-term economic disadvantages for affected children.<sup>101</sup>

Additionally, the financial burden on healthcare and education systems is significant, as children with elevated blood lead levels (EBLL) often require specialized medical care and support services.

This exposure poses severe risks to cognitive, behavioral, and physical development. Data from 2022 shows that only 40% of Delaware County children under the age of two were tested for lead poisoning, which is an improvement over previous years. Hispanic children had the highest lead testing rates (52.1%), followed by Black children (44.3%) and white children (36.2%). These higher rates of testing among Hispanic and Black children are linked to higher rates of Medicaid coverage within these populations; Medicaid requires lead testing at least twice before the age of two.

### **Less than 50% of Children are Tested for Lead Exposure <sup>102</sup>**



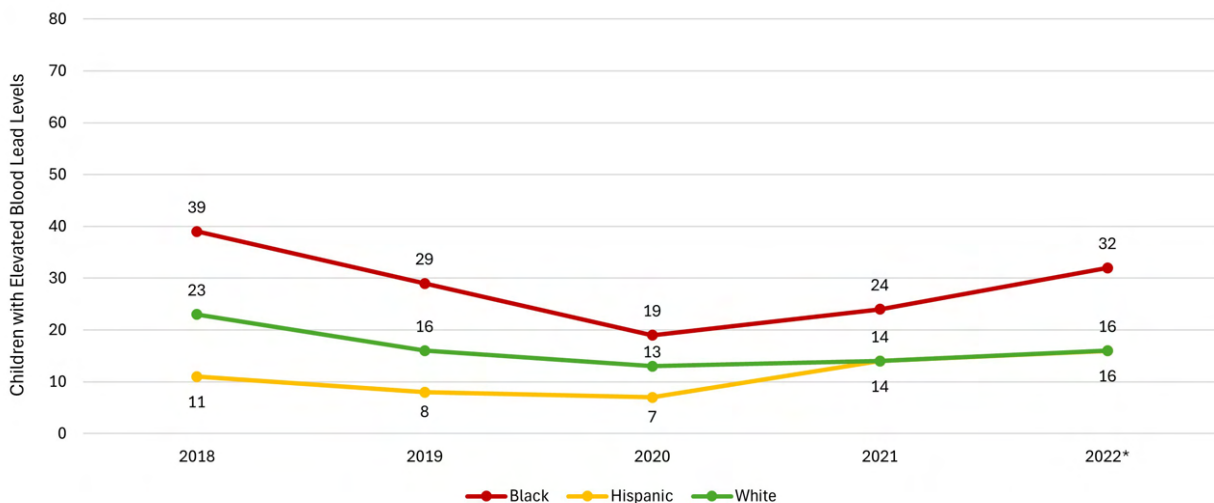
However, these testing rates also underscore systemic inequities, as these communities are more likely to live in older housing with significant lead hazards. Furthermore, despite improved testing rates compared to previous years, about 60% of Delaware County children were still not screened for lead, leaving a significant portion of the population vulnerable to undetected exposure.<sup>103</sup>



Black children continue to experience disproportionately high rates of EBLL, driven by greater exposure to outdated housing with lead-based paint.<sup>104</sup> This disparity reflects broader systemic inequities tied to housing and income, which limit access to safer living environments and remediation resources. Low-income families may lack the resources to move to safer housing, afford private abatement services, or negotiate abatement services from their landlord. The connection between lead exposure and low-income housing highlights the compounded risks faced by families already experiencing economic challenges.

In 2022, the CDC lowered the blood lead reference level from 5 µg/dL to 3.5 µg/dL, reflecting growing evidence that no level of lead exposure is safe for children.<sup>106</sup>

### Black Children Face Twice the Risk of Lead Exposure<sup>105</sup>

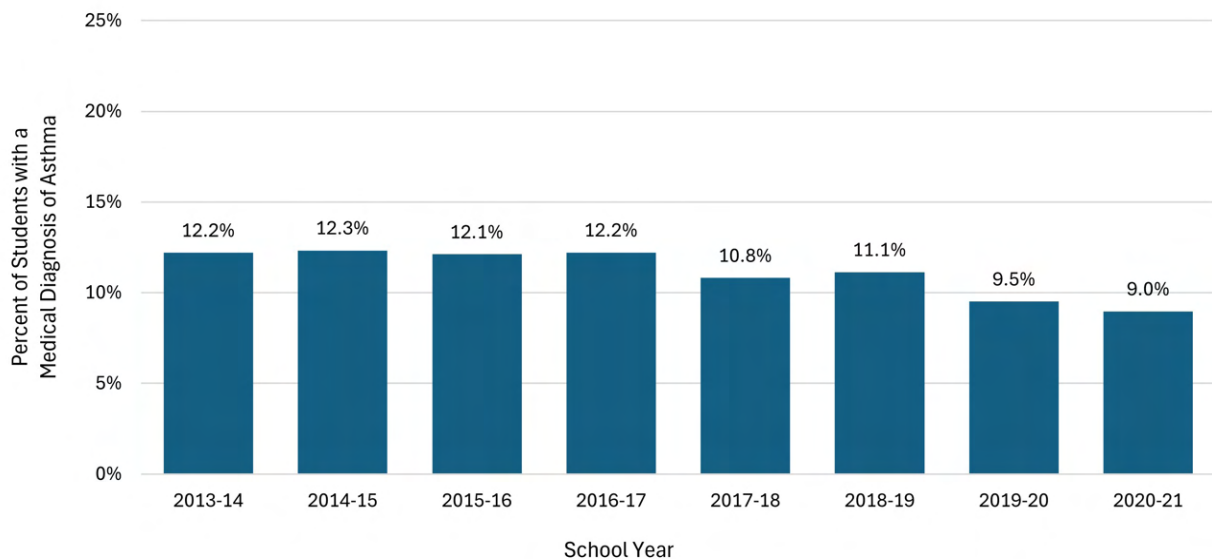


This adjustment enhances early detection of lead exposure’s harmful effects but may create the perception of rising EBLL rates when, in fact, the change reflects a more sensitive standard. Lead education and prevention measures by county agencies are therefore critical.

### *Progress on Childhood Asthma*

Childhood asthma remains a key environmental health concern in Delaware County. While the county has seen progress in reducing asthma rates – from 12% in 2013 to 9% in 2021 – Black and low-income families continue to bear a disproportionate burden.<sup>107</sup> Poor housing conditions, including mold, pests, and inadequate ventilation, are significant contributors to asthma symptoms. These environmental triggers exacerbate respiratory health disparities, leaving affected children at higher risk of missed school days, hospital visits, and chronic complications.

### **Share of Students with Asthma Dropped by Three Points<sup>108</sup>**



Progress in asthma reduction highlights the potential for interventions to improve health outcomes when addressing root causes. However, systemic inequities in housing quality and access to healthcare mean that many children remain vulnerable. Improving indoor and outdoor air quality and expanding public health initiatives targeting asthma triggers are essential steps toward ensuring equitable outcomes for all children.

### **Increasing Diversity in the County Brings Black Maternal Health Disparities to the Foreground**

Environmental health disparities in Delaware County also extend to maternal and infant health, as evidenced by rising preterm birth rates. From 2016 to 2023, overall preterm births across all races have plateaued around 9%. When disaggregated by race, however, disparities emerge. Black mothers experience the highest rates of preterm births at 13%, followed by 9% for Hispanic mothers, 8% for Asian/Pacific Island mothers, and 8% for white mothers.<sup>109</sup> These disparities highlight the disproportionate burden on Black mothers, who consistently face the highest rates in Delaware County and across Pennsylvania. Environmental stressors, including air pollution, inadequate and/or unstable housing, and limited access to quality prenatal care, play a significant role in these inequities.

However, progress is being made through legislative action. In 2024, the Pennsylvania state legislature passed two key provisions that extend Medicaid coverage for doula services, and raise awareness about postpartum depression and centralize counseling resources. These measures aim to provide critical support for pregnant and postpartum individuals, especially in underserved communities.<sup>110</sup> While these efforts are a step forward, more work needs to be done.

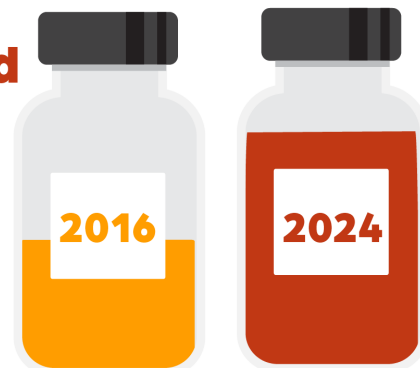
### **Vaccination Compliance Rates Worsened**

Childhood vaccination rates in Delaware County have experienced troubling declines over the past decade, signaling missed opportunities to protect children from preventable diseases. Vaccines such as DTaP, MMR, and varicella are essential for children under age six to build immunity against diphtheria, tetanus, pertussis (whooping cough), measles, mumps, rubella, and chickenpox.

Rising vaccine exemption rates put children’s lives at risk and increase the likelihood of disease transmission in schools and communities. Nationwide, routine vaccination rates for kindergartners declined during the pandemic, dropping from 95% to 93% during the 2020-21 and 2021-22 school years after a decade of stability.<sup>111</sup> Coverage failed to return to pre-pandemic levels in 2022-23, compounded by vaccine misinformation, hesitancy, and more exemptions.<sup>112</sup>



The share of children in Delaware County starting school without required vaccinations **doubled** since 2016.



From 2016 to 2024, the exemption rate of Delaware County kindergarteners more than doubled, from .8% to 1.9%.<sup>113</sup> While this rate may seem small, it jeopardizes herd immunity which requires high coverage for many diseases. For example, there must be a minimum 95% measles vaccination rate to prevent an outbreak.<sup>114</sup> Among older children, the vaccine booster rate has stagnated at 87% for years, leaving young people exposed to preventable diseases.

These shifts have real-world consequences. In 2023, Delaware County reported just one case of pertussis. By 2024, that number had surged to 182 cases, contributing to Pennsylvania's tenfold increase to over 2,000 cases statewide—the highest rate in the nation.<sup>115</sup> While historically high vaccination rates have prevented large-scale outbreaks of diseases like measles and meningitis, the resurgence of pertussis underscores the urgent need to reverse these trends.

### *Young People Still Struggle with their Mental Health*

One in five children experiences a mental, emotional, or behavioral health disorder.<sup>116</sup> Alarming, in Delaware County this translates to at least 25,200 children, and fewer than half of them will receive the treatment they need because of barriers to care. This crisis is exacerbated by the shortage of mental health providers, a systemic issue seen nationwide. Families in Delaware County frequently report significant challenges to accessing timely and appropriate care for their children, highlighting a critical gap in the local system. There is only one licensed mental health provider for every 290 Delaware County residents.<sup>117</sup>

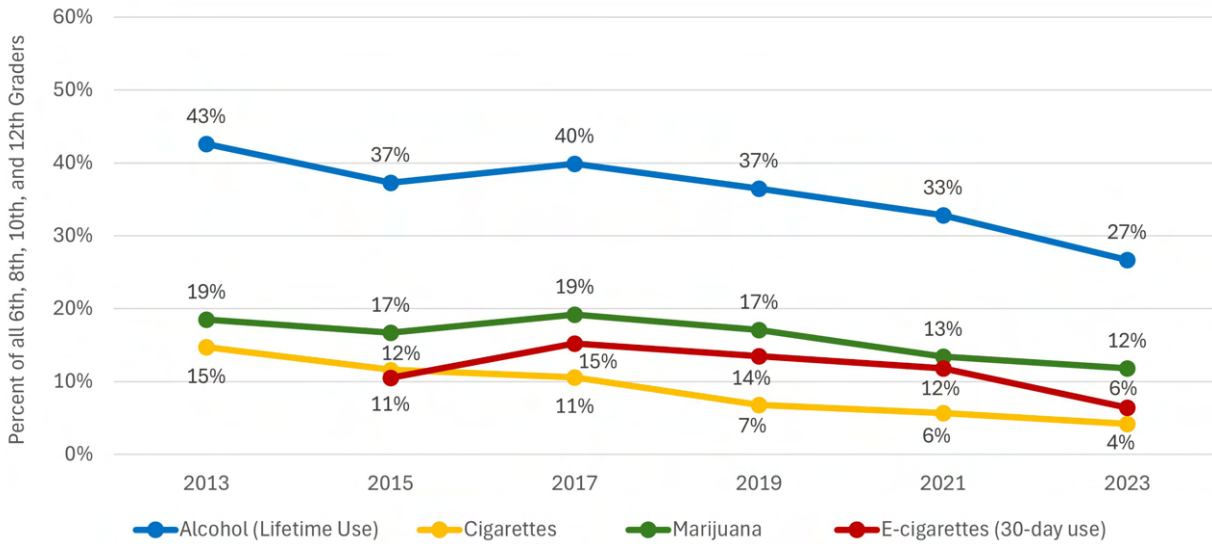
### *Teen Drinking, Drugs, and Smoking All Decline*

Risk behaviors are important measures when considering youth mental health because research consistently has shown a strong association between engaging in risk behaviors and negative mental health outcomes. The CDC defines risk behaviors as actions that increase the likelihood of injury, disease, or other negative health outcomes. Risk behaviors include lifetime use of substances including alcohol, tobacco, marijuana, and e-cigarettes (vaping).

Across all risk behaviors, substance use plummeted in the last decade. The percentage of Delaware County students grades six to 12 who report lifetime use of alcohol has dropped from 46% of students in 2013 to only 27% in 2023. Similarly, marijuana use fell from 19% to 12%, and cigarette use declined from 15% to 4% over the same period.<sup>118</sup>

According to Delaware County health officials, the decrease in these risk behaviors does not appear to be attributable to any specific public health campaign or intervention.

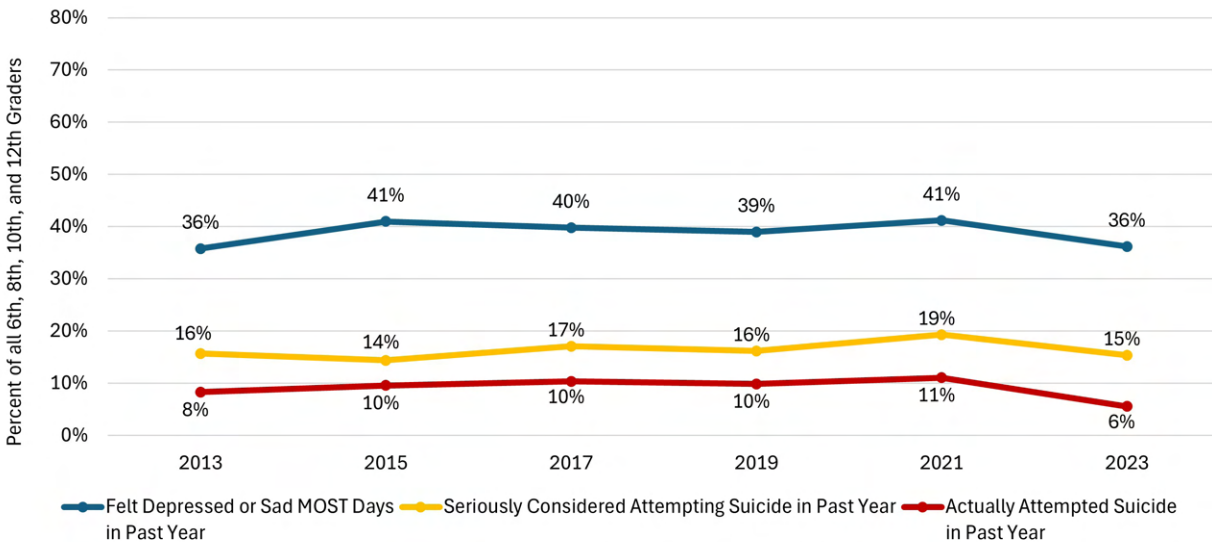
### Risky Youth Behaviors Show Precipitous Drop <sup>119</sup>



### Teen Depression, Anxiety, and Suicide - Red Flag Trends

The Pennsylvania Youth Survey (PAYS) has shown a consistently high prevalence of mental health symptoms over the past decade.<sup>120</sup> Although Delaware County’s data mirrors statewide and national trends with fewer children engaging in risk behaviors, this decline has not corresponded with an improvement in mental health, with children continuing to experience high rates of depression, anxiety, stress, and suicidal ideation. Children and youth have been struggling with the same levels of depression and anxiety for the last decade, although the perception is that mental health challenges spiked only during (and because of) the pandemic.

### Stubbornly High Indicators of Mental Distress Went Unabated <sup>121</sup>





Among 6th to twelfth graders in Delaware County, the percentage of youth who reported feeling sad or depressed most days in the past year remained relatively stable, starting at 36% in 2013 and ending at 36% in 2023, rising to 41% in 2021 in relation to COVID school closures.<sup>122</sup>

In Delaware County, students who considered and attempted suicide peaked in 2021, although the trendline shows less dramatic change – 15% in both 2013 and 2023.<sup>123</sup> This is in alignment with the data on depression and sadness, showing that levels of suicidal ideation have remained relatively consistent over the last decade. While the percentage of students who attempted suicide dropped from 8% in 2013 to 6% in 2023, the overall trendline shows only a slight decrease over time. It is possible that the 2023 data is an outlier and should be monitored closely in the coming years.

This contradiction – improved behavior paired with declining well-being – points to the profound impact of technology and social media. The U.S. Surgeon General issued a health advisory that “social media can have profound risk of harm to the mental health and well-being of children and adolescents.”<sup>124</sup> Emerging research highlights how smartphones and social media have fundamentally reshaped how children interact with one another, often leaving them more isolated, less engaged in-person, and more depressed.<sup>125</sup>

Youth interactions increasingly occur online, contributing to a decline in in-person risky behaviors like substance use. However, the isolation of digital interactions may exacerbate mental health challenges, lacking the richness of face-to-face connections.

Delaware County health officials report rising depression and despair among children, trends not fully reflected in current PAYS data. The complex relationship between risk behaviors and mental health underscores the need for urgent public health solutions, including improved access to mental health care, healthy technology use, and fostering genuine in-person connections.

Tracking youth mental health outcomes requires more robust data at the county level. Since its launch in July 2022, the national 988 Lifeline, a 24/7 crisis resource, has answered 2,261 calls from Delaware County residents.<sup>126</sup>

As local 988 call centers become more established, monitoring their impact will be crucial to addressing the community’s mental health needs.



The U.S. Surgeon General issued a health advisory that “social media can have profound risk of harm to the mental health and well-being of children and adolescents.”



## Child Welfare & Juvenile Justice

### Ten Year Indicators for Child Abuse Stable, But Indicators of Family Distress Rise

Children have the best chance at a bright future when they grow up with their needs met in their own homes, families, and communities – without the trauma of maltreatment or separation from their parents. Decades of research shows that family adversity, including poverty, is linked to a higher occurrence of abuse and neglect.<sup>127</sup> Abuse, neglect, and placement in foster care are all associated with a greater likelihood of mental health challenges, substance use, and poor educational outcomes.<sup>128,129,139</sup>

Over the past eight years, the number of substantiated child abuse and neglect reports in Delaware County has remained relatively steady, ranging from a low of 84 reports in 2019 to a high of 112 in 2020.<sup>131</sup> Experts agree that the increase in overall reports and substantiated/valid reports following the 2020 pandemic can be attributed to several factors, such as families’ return to regular contact with schools, medical offices, social services, and other reporting sources, along with the economic and social toll of the pandemic on family stability and well-being.

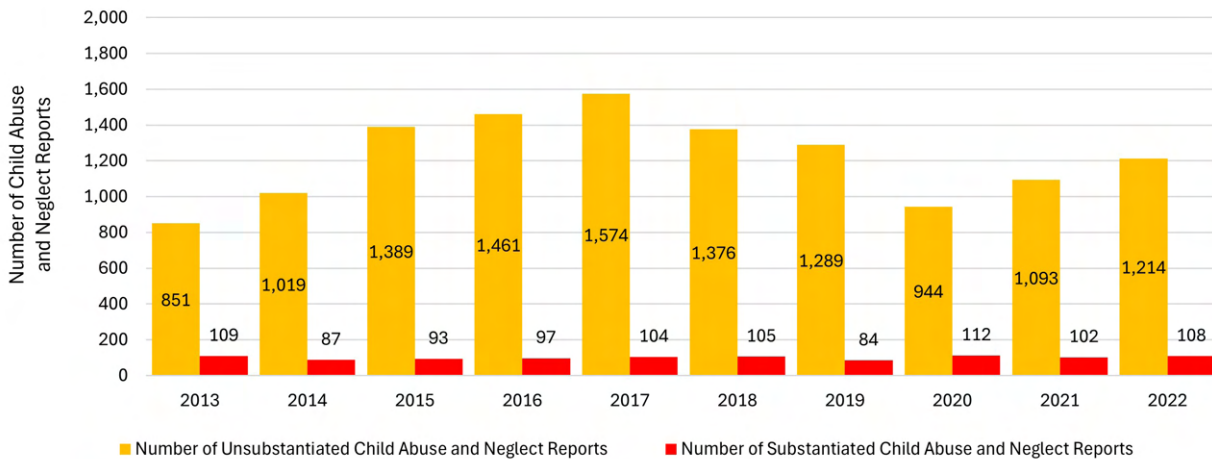
### CHILD WELFARE FAST FACTS FOR DELAWARE COUNTY

- 108 substantiated reports of child abuse and neglect
- 4,156 children receiving in-home services
- 99 children entering foster care
- 44 children in congregate care (institution and group home)

### JUVENILE JUSTICE FAST FACTS FOR DELAWARE COUNTY

- 1,202 youth arrests
- 36 secure detention admissions
- 28 long-term facility placements

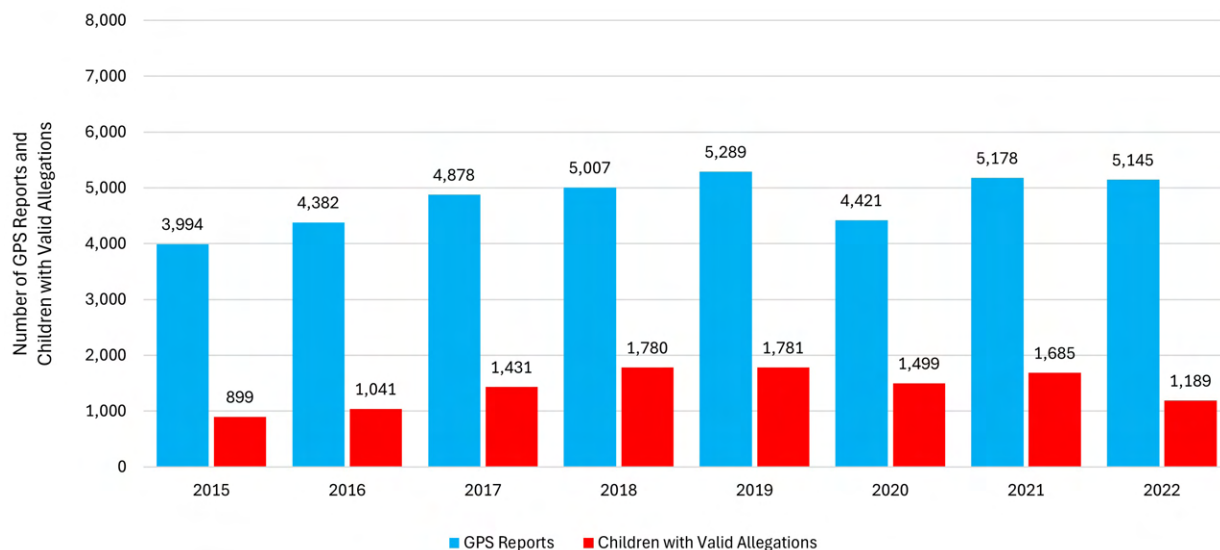
**Substantiated Cases of Abuse or Neglect Return to Ten Year High** <sup>132</sup>



If a report does not rise to the level of abuse or neglect but states that a family needs services, it is assigned as General Protective Services (GPS).

The number of valid GPS reports has fluctuated over the past eight years, increasing from 899 in 2015 to a high of 1,781 in 2018, and then declining again, with 1,189 valid reports in 2022.<sup>133</sup>

### Annually, More than 1,000 Children and their Families Need Services to Reduce the Risk of Abuse and Neglect<sup>134</sup>



Instead of removing children from the home when there are no immediate safety threats, Delaware County Children and Youth Services refers families to community supports, like mental health or housing services, and continues to work with them. In 2022, 4,156 Delaware County children and their families received in-home services to address needs related to safety, risk of harm, and overall child and family well-being.<sup>135</sup> This represents a 13% increase from 2014, when 3,619 children received services in their homes.<sup>136</sup>

This trend reflects a shift in focus toward maintaining families safely together and allocating resources to concrete supports and other services that prevent foster care placement.

#### *Fewer Children are Removed from their Families*

In 2022, a total of 361 Delaware County children were in foster care, a significant decrease from 733 in 2014.<sup>137,138</sup> Primary reasons for out-of-home placement include parental inability or failure to meet children's needs, parental substance use, and parental mental health.



13% more children and their families are receiving in home services associated with abuse or neglect from 2014 to 2022.



Across the country and the state fewer children are being removed from their homes. This shift is a result of federal policy changes embodied in the Family First Prevention Services Act of 2019, which provides federal reimbursement to states and jurisdictions for prevention and support services.

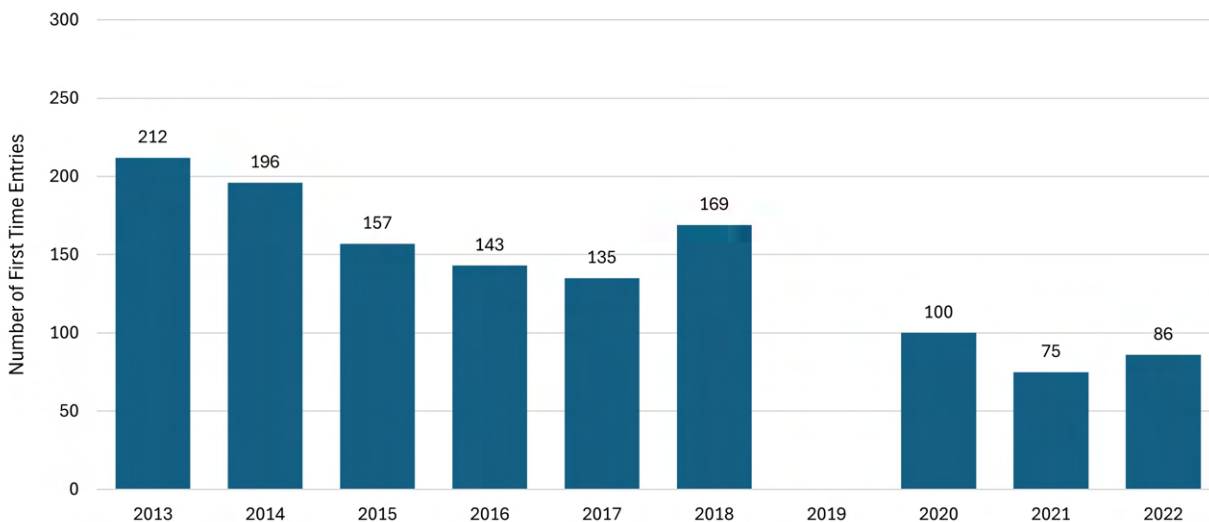
The adoption of the federal policy change has taken hold in Delaware County where the number of children removed from their homes dropped by almost two-thirds over the last eight years, from 272 children in 2014 to 99 in 2022.<sup>139</sup> When children cannot be safe at home, the priority is to place them with a relative before sending them to a licensed foster home. However, over two-thirds of children in foster care in Delaware County are placed in non-relative foster homes, and fewer than 20% are placed with relatives.<sup>140</sup>

Racial disproportionality continues to pervade the system in Delaware County, with Black children representing 49% of the total foster care population but only 27% of the total child population. This overrepresentation exists not just locally, but across the Commonwealth and nationally.<sup>141</sup>

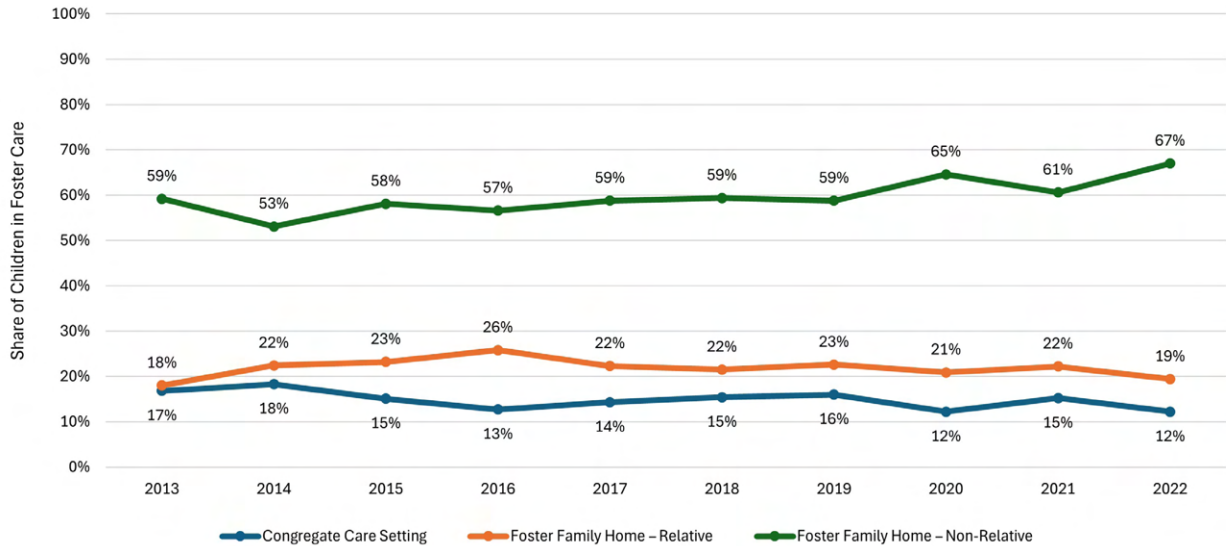
### Hidden Foster Care

What is not reflected in the data are the informal arrangements where children are taken in by relatives outside of a formal court-supervised placement. Under these circumstances, children benefit from being placed with family instead of someone they do not know. However, without the intervention of the court, these caregivers – who are often struggling to make ends meet themselves – are only eligible for certain public benefits and miss out on the financial assistance they would receive in the formal system, like a foster care subsidy.

**County Measures to Support Children Keep Foster Care Cases Low** <sup>142</sup>



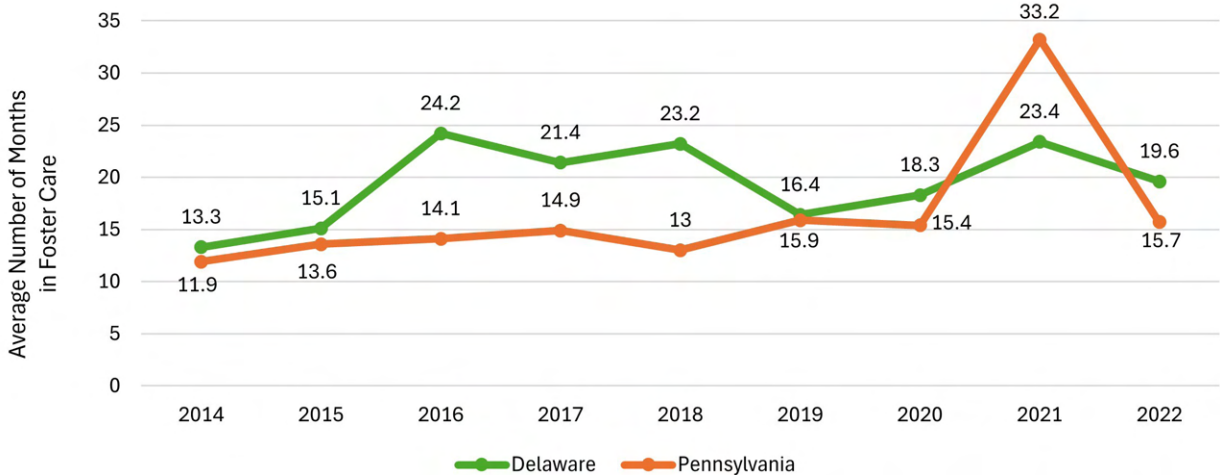
## Delaware County Keeps 88% of Foster Children Out of Congregate Care. Majority of Children Needing Foster Care Placements are with Non-Relative Foster Parents <sup>143</sup>



### Real Challenges to Permanency for Some Foster Children

Foster care is meant to be a temporary arrangement for children while their families work to address safety and risk factors at home. But not all children are fortunate to return to their parents or find a “forever home.” There are young people who “age out,” meaning they turn 21 years old and must leave the system and fend for themselves without the caring safety net of a permanent caregiver. Sadly, these young adults are more likely to have long-term education, housing, employment, and mental health challenges than those with stable long-term caregivers.<sup>144,145</sup>

## Children in Delaware County Stay in Foster Care Longer than the Statewide Average <sup>146</sup>



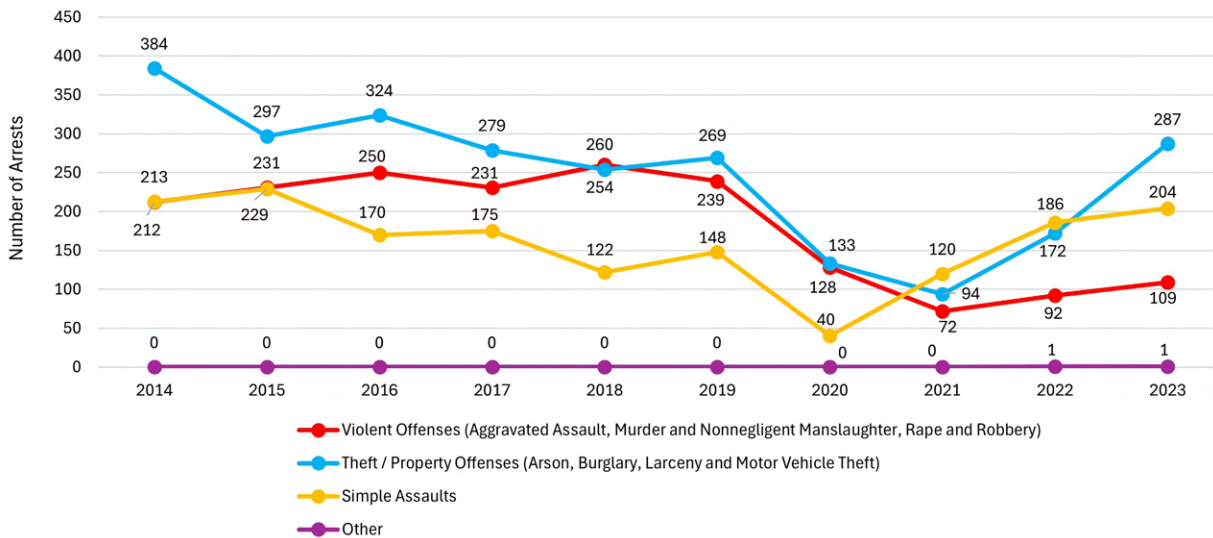
Children in Delaware County are remaining in out-of-home care longer than the statewide average and are aging out of foster care at rising rates. This may be because of complex child and family needs that require additional time and effort, understaffing at the agency, and a lack of adequate mental health and substance abuse services in the community.

### Juvenile Justice

When children have their needs met in their communities, they’re less likely to get involved in the legal system.<sup>147</sup> But when young people make mistakes and break the law, locking them up in juvenile institutions is rarely the best course of action.<sup>148</sup> Children and teens who are locked up have lower educational outcomes, significant mental health issues, and lower earning potential as adults. Youth who are incarcerated are up to 80% more likely to be rearrested within three years of release, and they’re more likely to be locked up or placed on probation as adults. These young people are also separated from their families and their communities and do not have opportunities to learn from their mistakes and make amends to the people they hurt.

Children locked up are also extremely incredibly vulnerable to the adults in charge of the institutions. Shocking instances of physical, emotional, and sexual abuse by staff are all too common. For example, the Glen Mills Schools, a youth residential center in Delaware County, was shut down in 2019 by the state Department of Human Services after an investigation revealed decades of abuse. The Delaware County juvenile detention facility in Lima closed in 2021 after similar reports of rampant abuse. Fortunately, county leaders have not opened another county-operated detention facility since, although Glen Mills was permitted to open under a new name.

**Youth Violent Crime Rate Drops by 50%  
Other Offenses Dip Lower than Ten Year High** <sup>150</sup>



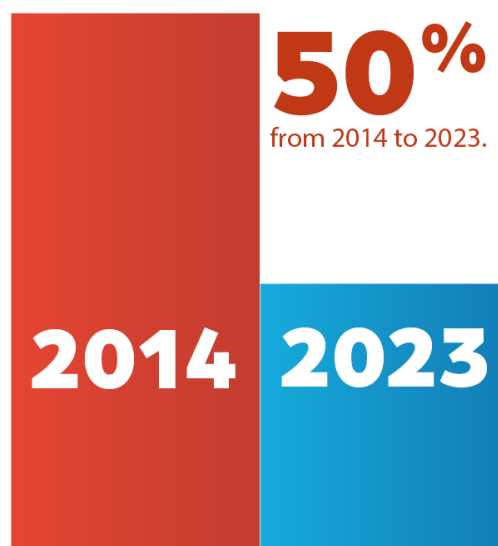
Youth crime, arrests, and incarceration in Delaware County and across Pennsylvania declined from 2014 to 2021, with an uptick since the pandemic.<sup>150</sup> The highest jump (66%) was in arrests for property crimes. Arrests for violent offenses and simple assaults, like fights in school, increased just 9% and 10% respectively.

While income data is currently unavailable for youth in the juvenile justice system, the uptick in thefts and other property offenses further underscores the economic hardships faced by young people and their families, as well as a lack of available community-based youth activities.

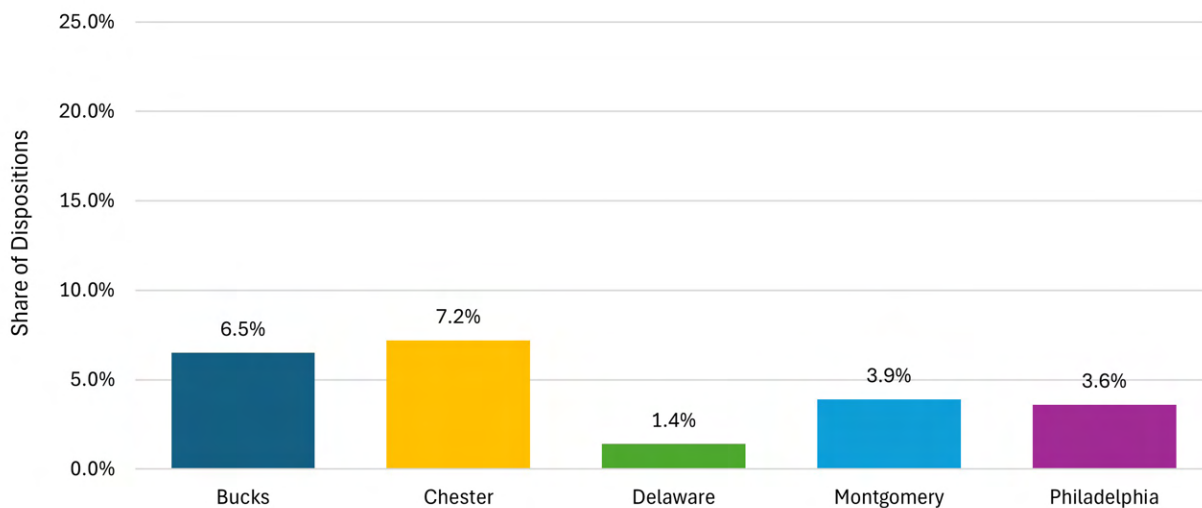
Delaware County held just 36 youth in secure detention, the fewest of the southeastern Pennsylvania counties. (Placement means a long-term out-of-home program.) Delaware County also had the lowest share of placement dispositions at only 1.4%.<sup>151</sup> (Disposition is the outcome after the court finds that a youth has committed an offense.)

Delaware County's low rate of overall youth incarceration can largely be attributed to a collective effort among county entities and community partners to divert youth from formal court processing and keep children who are adjudicated delinquent close to home and out of facilities.

Violent crime caused by children in Delaware County dropped by



### Delaware County has the Lowest Share of Long-Term Juvenile Justice Placements in the Region<sup>153</sup>



In 2023, the county diverted just under two-thirds of new allegation dispositions. There were 780 total delinquency dispositions in the county, just 28 facility placements, and two transfers to adult court.<sup>152</sup>

The remaining young people had their charges dismissed or withdrawn or received less restrictive interventions like probation.

Despite this progress, racial disproportionality is egregious in the juvenile justice system in Delaware County and across Pennsylvania. In Delaware County, Black youth represent most delinquency dispositions (65%) and detention admissions (81%), despite comprising just 27% of the county youth population.<sup>154</sup>





## Local and County Recommendations: Delaware County

### In Early Childhood Education, Delaware County must:

- Utilize county-level funds, in partnership with philanthropic organizations, to recruit and retain the early childhood workforce. Examples include Montgomery County, where \$4 million was allocated out of the Montgomery County Recovery Plan for the Childcare Operation Recovery Grant Program, which provides operational grants to licensed child care programs, and York County where the ECHO Innovation Award grants \$25,000 to \$50,000 to early childhood education programs to pilot innovative projects that expand the number of children and families served or increase the quality of care and education provided.
- Partner with philanthropic organizations to create a facilities fund for providers to increase the supply of high-quality early childhood programs. Like Philadelphia's Fund for quality or the Harris County (Texas) SHINE Child Care Facilities Fund, these funds can provide financial assistance to providers for capital improvements that advance program quality.
- Provide forgivable start-up loans to providers opening child care programs, like BLOOM Business Empowerment Center, a program of the York County Economic Alliance that provides forgivable loans ranging

### To Improve K-12 Public Education Outcomes, Delaware County School Districts must:

- Expand access to full-day kindergarten so that all children can enroll regardless of what school catchment they live in.
- Invest in evidence-based instructional programming and teacher training programs to target additional support towards students with acute academic needs and students living in poverty. This includes high-impact tutoring programs and parent engagement programs that teach family members how to support their children with coursework.
- Improve working conditions to retain educators and other school staff. This will look different in each school district and may include adjusting salaries, reducing class sizes and workloads, and creating opportunities for career advancement.

## Local and County Recommendations: Delaware County

### For Improved Child Health Outcomes, Delaware County must:

- Prioritize maintaining and communicating the Vaccines for Children (VFC) Program, which ensures equitable access to lifesaving vaccines for children in need.<sup>155</sup>
- Counties must build upon the use of county mental health block grants and opioid settlement funds to invest in school-based behavioral health programs and support expansion of prevention and early intervention programs to meet the needs of students and families in the county.
- Counties should encourage local municipalities to adopt and enforce strong lead-safe housing ordinances, including mandatory lead-safe certifications for rental properties built before 1978. Counties should coordinate to ensure funding, technical assistance, and public education to expand and sustain these efforts, protecting all families from lead hazards in their homes.

### To Improve Child Welfare, Delaware County must:

- Continue and expand as needed the use of concrete and economic supports to prevent child welfare system involvement and placement in foster care. A growing body of evidence suggests that economic and concrete supports (e.g., food, transportation assistance) are key to the prevention of maltreatment and child welfare involvement.
- Increase focus on children and families lingering in the system and implement the array of services that would best promote their safety, permanency, and well-being.
- Explore the extent to which informal relative caregiving arrangements exist and ensure these caregivers have adequate resources to provide for children in their care.

### To Improve the Juvenile Justice System, Delaware County must:

- Use public funds to ensure a robust community-based service array to include juvenile justice prevention services, expanded diversion options, and evidence-based alternatives to incarceration.

**For Improved Economic Mobility, Delaware County must:**

- Invest in high school and community college career relate learning programs that increase share of individuals with postsecondary training and occupational credentials.
- Identify gaps in access to post secondary training and high school preparation to supporting planning and programming for boosting social mobility.

## State Recommendations

**In Early Childhood Education, State Lawmakers must:**

- Further increase payments to high-quality programs, incentivizing providers to participate in the STARS program.
- Make child care more affordable for working families by increasing eligibility for subsidy care by raising the household income threshold for families. Currently, families are only eligible for subsidies if they make up to 200% of the federal poverty level (FPL) and public pre-k (Pre-K Counts) if they make less than 300% of FPL. Some states have increased the threshold to as high as almost 400% of FPL, such as New Mexico.
- Fully reimburse early childhood providers who receive child care subsidies for low-income children for the total cost of care. The current rate child care providers are paid is based on what families can afford, not what it costs to operate. This reform would allow providers to receive more reliable payments, budget effectively for staffing costs, and increase openings for more children.
- Create a refundable child tax credit. California, Colorado, Maine, Maryland, Massachusetts, Minnesota, New Jersey, New Mexico, New York, Oregon, and Vermont all provide refundable tax credits which address one of the primary drivers of child-well-being: family economic well-being.

## State Recommendations

### To Improve K-12 Public Education Outcomes, State Lawmakers must:

- Fully fund the remaining \$4 billion adequacy shortfall within four years. By the 2029-30 school year, every child attending public school must have their basic academic needs met and school districts must have stable funding to invest in their educator workforce and high-quality academic services.
- Direct the Pennsylvania Department of Education to create a list of approved high-quality, evidence-based curricula that meets industry standards for English and math. Ensure that every school is using these instructional materials to advance student learning and differentiate instruction based on their students' needs.
- Fully fund student teacher stipends to address the statewide educator shortage, remove financial barriers for prospective teachers, and incentivize prospective educators to complete their student teaching placement in schools with high teacher.
- Create a standard statewide cyber charter tuition payment system to align cyber student payment with student needs, the way all other public schools are funded, adjusted to reflect reduced costs needed for cyber instruction.
- Increase state funding for Career and Technical Education to increase enrollment and purchase modern materials and equipment that prepares students for today's industry standards.



## State Recommendations

### For Improved Child Health Outcomes, State Lawmakers must:

- Maximize Medicaid funding to substantially improve children’s mental health in Pennsylvania by:
  - Expanding the scope of reimbursable services to include prevention, early intervention, and less intensive services known as Tier One and Tier Two supports.
  - Broadening the types of providers certified and eligible to deliver services at each tier of intervention to increase access to diverse and culturally competent professionals.
  - Ensuring that the definition of medical necessity is fully applied to authorize mental health services and payments for all eligible children.
  - Integrating mental health services for parents and young children in pediatric primary care settings.
  - Centering schools as critical partners in mental health care systems and payor networks.
- Invest in children’s health by expanding health insurance coverage to 6,770 uninsured children in Delaware County.
- Protect Pennsylvania children by ending lead poisoning through guaranteeing all children get tested twice before the age of two for lead; and pass local ordinances that require all dwelling to undergo lead safety inspections.



## State Recommendations

### **To Improve Child Welfare, State Lawmakers must:**

- Expand access to community-based mental health and substance use services for both adults and their children. Ensuring families can receive these services in a timely manner will reduce foster care placements and promote permanency for children, whether they are reunited with their parents or have a permanent home with a relative caregiver or adoptive parent.

### **To Improve the Juvenile Justice System, State Lawmakers must:**

- Create a funding mechanism to support new or existing diversion programs to serve more youth, accessible by county entities including county departments of human services, district attorney's offices, and offices of juvenile probation.
- Pass legislation that requires diversion for certain low-level offenses and promotes the use of community-based alternatives to incarceration, which will limit youth incarceration.
- Support the development of multi-county agreements for shared usage of existing detention facilities or operate regional facilities that multiple counties can access.

### **For Improved Economic Mobility, State Lawmakers must:**

- Increase the minimum wage consistent with New York and New Jersey
- Pass Paid Family and Medical Leave. Sixty-six percent of Pennsylvania workers do not have access to paid family and medical leave. Passing the bill would be a game changer for families in Pennsylvania, improving family well-being and boosting the Commonwealth's economy.

## Endnotes

Endnotes for this report can be found at:

[www.childrenfirstpa.org/delcoendnotes2025](http://www.childrenfirstpa.org/delcoendnotes2025)

Children First, formerly known as Public Citizens for Children and Youth (PCCY), serves as the leading child advocacy organization improving the lives and life chances of children in southeastern Pennsylvania.

Children First undertakes specific and focused projects in areas affecting the healthy growth and development of children, including child care, public education, child health, juvenile justice, and child welfare.

Through thoughtful and informed advocacy, community education, targeted service projects, and budget analysis, Children First watches out and speaks out for children and families.

Children First serves the families of Bucks, Chester, Delaware, Montgomery, and Philadelphia counties as well as children across the Commonwealth. We are a committed advocate and an independent watchdog for the well-being of all our children.

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