



# The State of Child Wellbeing in Collier County, Florida 2017

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## Acknowledgements

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The Naples Children & Education Foundation graciously thanks all of the interviewees, survey respondents, and other partners whose input was invaluable for completing this study. Your generosity in time and wisdom was only surpassed by your commitment to improving the lives of Collier County's children.

We also want to thank the team at Civitas Strategies, LLC for coordinating and participating on this project.

# Introduction

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The Naples Children & Education Foundation (NCEF) commissioned Civitas Strategies to conduct a 2017 study of Collier County, Florida to comprehensively describe the current conditions and needs of children in Collier County using the most up-to-date and relevant data. Further, NCEF also wanted to identify opportunities to improve the physical, emotional, and educational lives of the county's neediest children and adolescents, so the effort included an examination of the services and systems trying to meet the needs of Collier County's children in poverty.

This study was developed at the behest of NCEF trustees and administrators, as part of their ongoing efforts to provide informed and impactful grant-making in support of local organizations improving the lives of children. But is also intended to serve a broader audience as a resource for all philanthropic organizations, non- and for-profit service providers, and community leaders interested in the state of child wellbeing in Collier County.

NCEF has been committed to providing timely data on child wellbeing for over 12 years. This study is the latest installment in this ongoing effort, building on previously published NCEF studies in 2005, 2010, and 2015. This year's publication sought to provide a comprehensive landscape of child wellbeing in Collier County; therefore, a more streamlined set of data was used in an effort to provide a more focused examination of the measures



most essential to Collier County's child wellbeing, as well as to NCEF's mission and philanthropic interests. Wherever possible, data are presented back to the initial 2005 study to provide a longitudinal perspective. In addition to selected metrics, the dataset was supplemented with qualitative interviews with carefully chosen, local experts and an online survey conducted with NCEF partners and grantees. All new measures constitute further evidence of NCEF's profound commitment to the continued advancement of its mission to support high-quality, sustainable services to the at-risk and underserved children of Collier County.

## Selection of Metrics

To identify the metrics best suited to this study, NCEF and Civitas Strategies considered the previous editions of child wellbeing in Collier County, national “best-practice” studies of child wellbeing from across the United States, the base of research associated with different metrics, and the severity of impact of the metrics on the lives of child development from birth through adulthood. NCEF selected fewer metrics for this study with an eye to those that can provide a broad picture by concurrently connecting to multiple variables of child wellbeing. For example, the decision was made to include school attendance, a metric that has not been included in the past reports, because current research shows that chronic absenteeism is highly indicative of a child’s likelihood to fail classes in elementary and middle school, and drop out in high school.<sup>1</sup> A summation of the metrics selected and the corresponding trend in data is presented in the Summary of Findings below.

## The Study

This study follows a similar flow to that used in the previous editions. The first section will present the methodology used to collect data. Next, data and analysis on the 16 key indicators will be presented. An additional section was added to briefly describe two other important, but difficult to measure, factors affecting child wellbeing in Collier County — the impact of Hurricane Irma and collective-impact initiatives. Recommendations based on all the data follow in the final section.

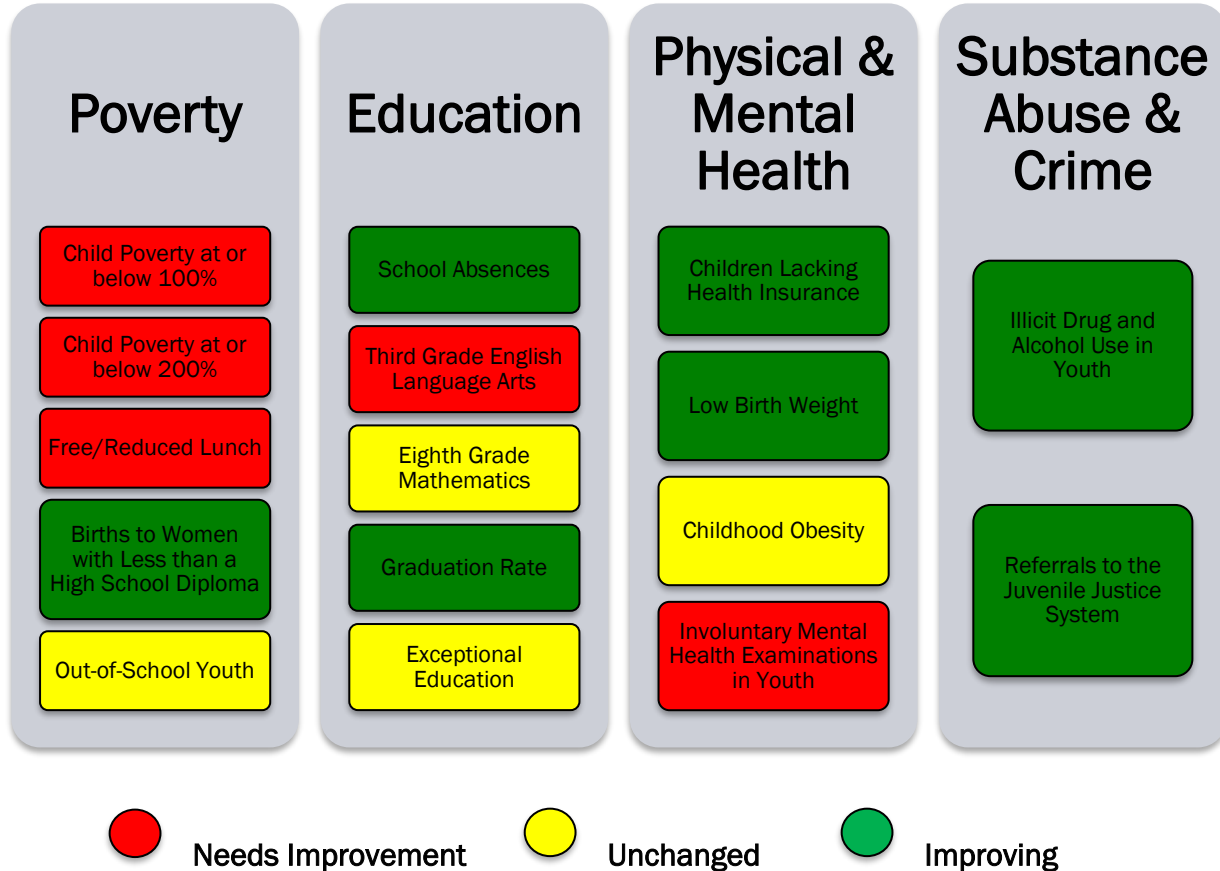


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<sup>1</sup> Portraits of Change: Aligning School and Community Resources to Reduce Chronic Absence, Attendance Works and Everyone Graduates Center, September 2017.

## Summary of Findings

Throughout the study data from the most recent year available was compared to that going back to 2005, whenever possible, to provide a trend since the first Child Wellbeing Study was commissioned by NCEF. The following figure summarizes the trend in each metric from 2005 (or as early as possible) to the most recent data available.



As illustrated, gains on a number of metrics have been made in each of the four key areas, poverty, education, physical and mental health, and substance abuse and crime. However, trends have been neutral or negative in nine metrics — indicating the need for further efforts to support Collier County’s children. The trends for each of the metrics are detailed in the corresponding section of the report. However, before delving into those results, it is important to review how data were collected and analyzed.

## Methodology

Civitas Strategies collected both qualitative and quantitative data to inform this study. These data were analyzed by the Civitas Strategies team to identify overall trends in child wellbeing and opportunities to advance the lives of Collier County's most vulnerable children. The specific methodology used is detailed below.

### Quantitative and Documentary Data

In collecting quantitative data there was a strong emphasis on selecting publicly available datasets. The rationale for this was twofold. First, publicly available data tend to have a higher level of credibility with community leaders and elected officials than data collected on an ad hoc basis and are seen as being neutral to particular micro-trends or interests. For example, the U.S. Census is highly regarded methodologically and provides solid data for comparison over time since this strong methodology has changed little in recent years. Second, these datasets can be more easily updated creating the opportunity for more frequent and current comparisons and analysis of trends in Collier County.

The quantitative collection effort began by reviewing similar and highly reputable studies from across the nation in order to identify "best practice" metrics used to gauge child wellbeing. In addition, a literature review of current child and adolescent-focused quantitative research was completed as well as conducting interviews with multiple stakeholders in the Collier County child services landscape. Upon completion, Civitas Strategies and NCEF leadership collaborated to review over 75 indicators of child wellbeing. Through this collaboration, the cohort was narrowed down to 16 indicators, which were the most compelling and research-based metrics of child wellbeing available, based on their:

- Ability to portray child wellbeing (as shown in field research).
- Resonance with local experts (see more detail about qualitative data collection below).
- Reliance on publicly available and trusted data sources.
- Likelihood of continued collection to ensure the same measures can be used in future reports.

Wherever possible, data were collected for each metric going back to 2005 to allow for a longitudinal snapshot of wellbeing since it was first formally studied by NCEF.

We also used documentary data in the form of relevant and existing reports, plans, and studies published in or about Collier County and Florida. There are a number of extremely helpful documents issued by local nonprofits and government agencies that help provide a deeper understanding of the wellbeing of Collier County's children.

For example, we referred to Florida Department of Health's 2016 and 2017 publications of the Collier County Community Health Improvement Plan. We also crosschecked our data and data sources with data from Community Foundation of Collier County's 2016 Vital Signs Report. The 2013 Collier County Florida Health Assessment report, prepared by The Health Planning Council of Southwest Florida, Inc., provided some useful data sources, and The Substance Abuse Indicator Report, produced by Drug Free Collier, also gave us some valuable information when seeking specific data.

This body of documents developed by a bevy of organizations was supplemented with internal data from NCEF, including reports from grantees and analyses of the impact NCEF is having through its investments in Collier County.

### **Qualitative Data**

Qualitative data supplemented both the publicly available quantitative data and the existing documentary data. These data were used for two reasons. First, quantitative and documentary data largely provide a lagging picture of the world. That is, these data tell us what has happened, not what will happen. Qualitative data can be used to get a sense of future trends, that is, where the community is heading. Second, qualitative data can fill in many of the behavioral, perceptual, and other parts of the landscape that cannot easily, or in some cases at all, be quantitated. For example, an indicator may show there is great need for a given service, but that may not tell us how the service will need to be delivered or managed to ensure the greatest uptake by families. As another example, quantitative data may suddenly rise in a given year or decrease. Qualitative data can help us understand what may have happened in the community to affect that number for a short period.

This study relies on two qualitative datasets. First, surveys were sent to all of NCEF grantees, in total 47 organizations were included. Reflecting NCEF investment strategies, this group included a wide array of nonprofit organizations in Collier County, large and small, community based and institutional. In total, 35 organizations responded (a 74% response rate) and largely reflected the wider group of grantees (i.e., those who responded and those did not).

Second, NCEF and Civitas Strategies selected 20 thought leaders with expert-level knowledge on Collier County children and poverty for one-on-one interviews. Selections were made to include representatives from health, education, community-based human services, child and youth services, domestic violence, the academy, and philanthropy. All of the contacted interviewees participated, and provided invaluable input to the study.

These interviews followed a qualitative data collection system developed by Civitas Strategies that has been used and refined in over 5,000 interviews on various projects across the United States. Specifically, these interviews were used to better understand:

- **Relevant metrics** for evaluating the state of child wellbeing that will be valid and respected by leaders throughout the county to ensure a focus on the implications of the data and not the sources.
- **Future trends** that may affect the lives of Collier County's most vulnerable children, their likelihood of coming to pass, and how they may be mitigated.
- **Current strengths and gaps** in Collier County's health and educational services for children to understand how needs are being met or could be met more effectively.
- **Opportunities for community investment** in supporting Collier County's children in poverty that will have the greatest impact on their lives.

In addition to inform the study, anonymous quotes from qualitative datasets are included from time to time to further advance understanding of child wellbeing.



## **Analysis and Observations**

The Civitas Strategies team analyzed all the data collected, quantitative and qualitative, to identify trends over time but also opportunities to improve the lives of Collier County's children in poverty. Quantitative data were plotted over time, whenever possible going back to 2005, using charts similar to those that appear in this report. A contentment analysis was conducted on all qualitative data. The entire Civitas Strategies team participated in the analysis and considered the overall trends, potential negative or positive impact on the lives of children now and into adulthood, and the collective wisdom of the team from working in communities throughout the United States.

## **The Study Authors**

The 2017 Study of Child Wellbeing in Collier County was conducted as a collaboration between the Naples Children & Education Foundation and Civitas Strategies. Civitas Strategies ([www.civstrat.com](http://www.civstrat.com)) is a nationally recognized consultancy firm serving public-serving organizations across a variety of industries. Gary Romano, President and CEO of Civitas Strategies, was the study director and a co-author. Abby King, Senior Associate for Civitas Strategies, was the study's co-author. Bonnie Clapp, Associate for Civitas Strategies, served as a principal research analyst.

# Metrics of Child Wellbeing in Collier County

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The metrics of child wellbeing are presented in five sections:

- **Section 1: Demographics** – shares basic demographic data and trends in Collier County to provide a basis for understanding the community at large.
- **Section 2: Poverty** – uses multiple metrics to understand the overall trends of poverty.
- **Section 3: Education** – shows the performance of Collier County's students at key benchmarks on their journey to careers and independence.
- **Section 4: Physical and Mental Health** – paints a picture of the physical and mental wellbeing of children and youth in Collier County.
- **Section 5: Substance Abuse and Crime** – which includes metrics on risky behavior among children and youth.

All metrics focus on quantitative data trends and are supplemented with data from the qualitative data sources.



## Section 1: Demographics

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Collier County continues to be one of the fastest-growing municipalities in the nation. From 2005 to 2014, the County added over 15,000 residents<sup>2</sup>. Furthermore, the Office of Economic and Demographic Research estimates Collier County's population will grow to over 435,000 by 2030<sup>3</sup>.

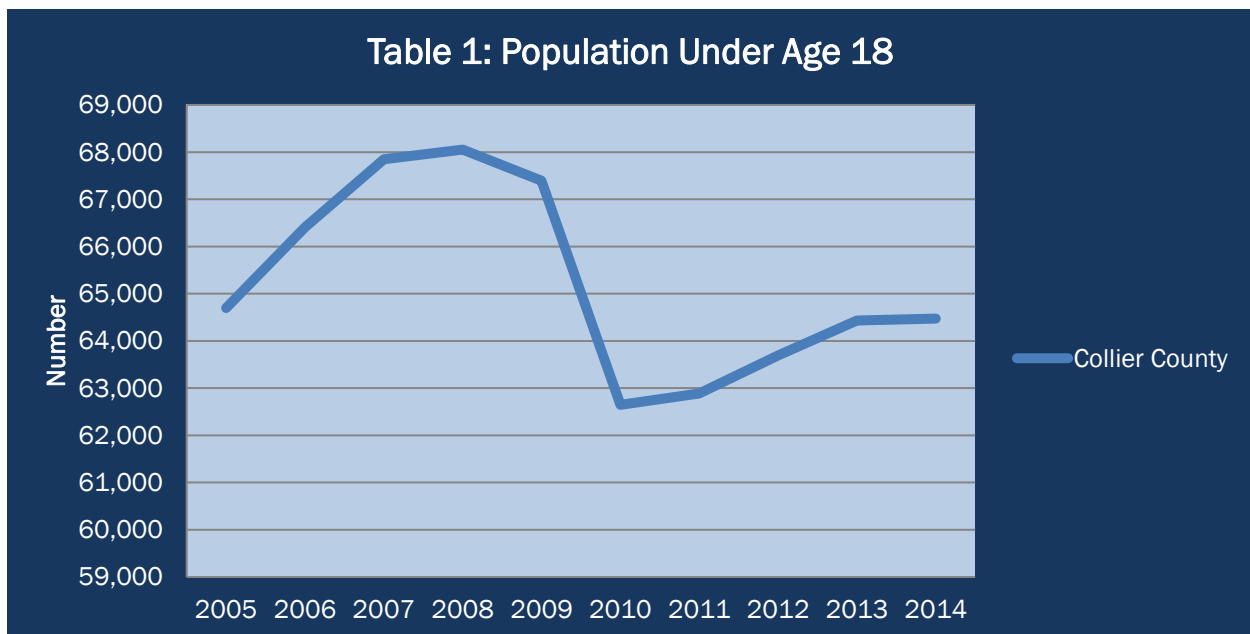
Interestingly, since that time, the population of children and youth under 18 (see Table 1) increased and then decreased but is once again trending upward. This trend may continue as projections for the growth of the under 18 population do show an increase through 2030 — predicting the addition of about 10,000 children.



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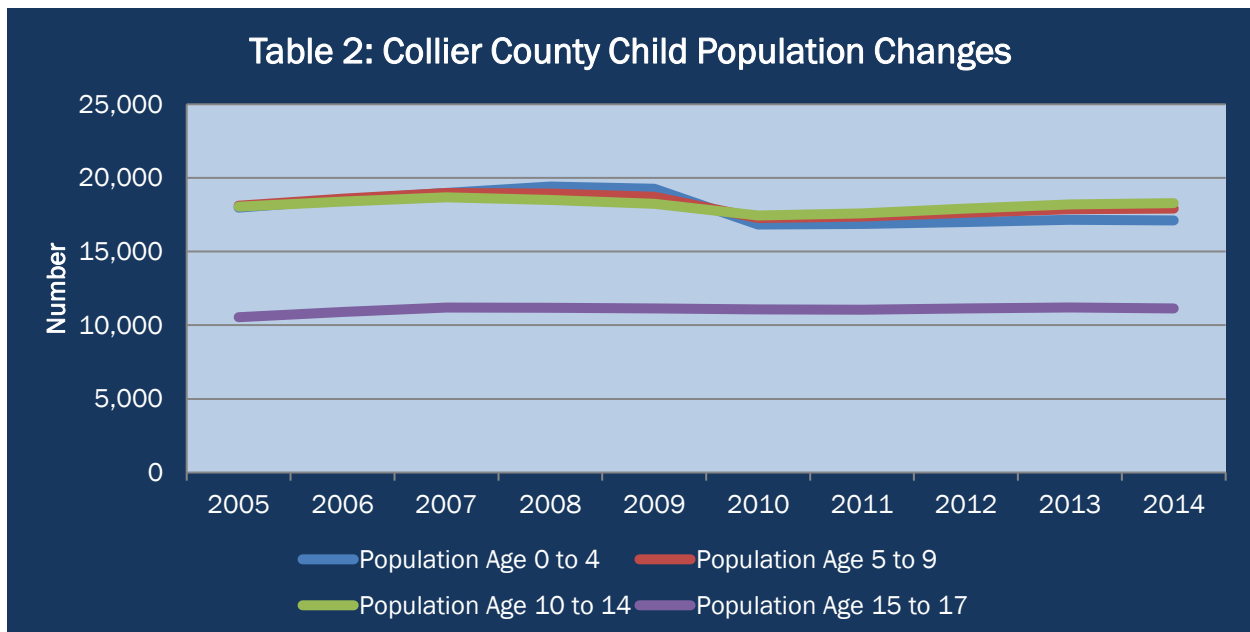
<sup>2</sup> Data Access and Dissemination Systems (DADS). (2010, October 05). American Fact Finder. Retrieved from <https://factfinder.census.gov/faces/tableservices/jsf/pages/productview.xhtml?src=bkmk>

<sup>3</sup> Office of Economic & Demographic Research The Florida Legislature. (n.d.). Retrieved May 31, 2017, from <http://edr.state.fl.us/Content/population-demographics/data/>



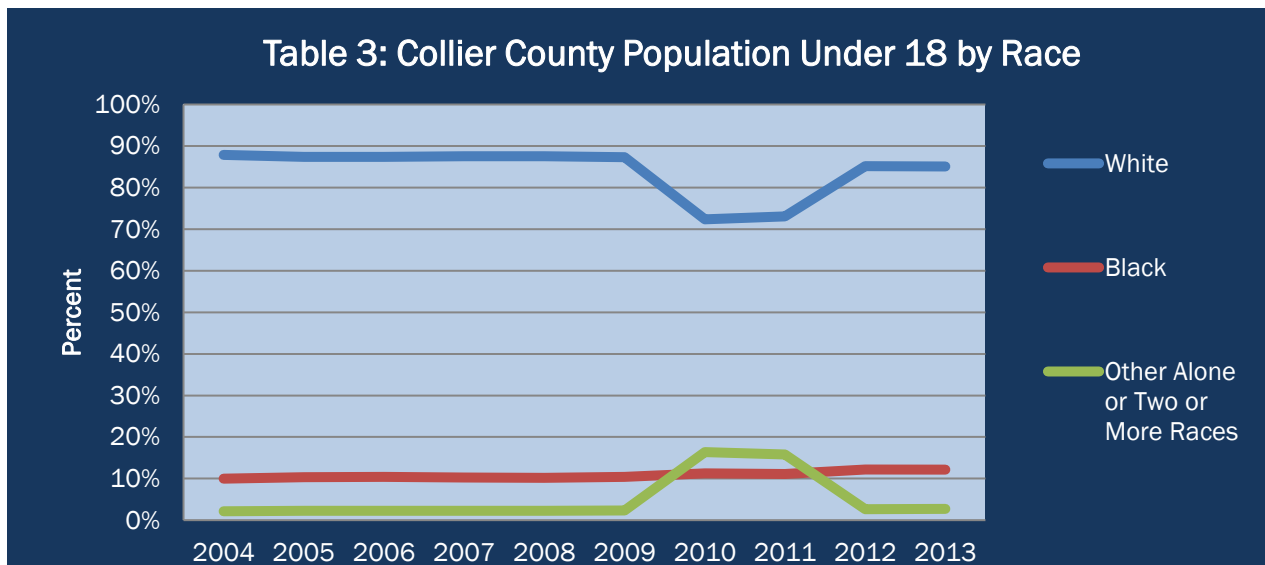
**Source for 2017 Data:** Population under age 18 | KIDS COUNT Data Center. (n.d.). Retrieved October 14, 2017, from <http://datacenter.kidscount.org/data/tables/584-population-under-age-18?loc=11&loct=5#detailed/5/1870/false/869,36,868,867,133/any/1377,15498>

The age cohorts of children and youth (see Table 2) follow a similar trend, with relatively little change since 2005.



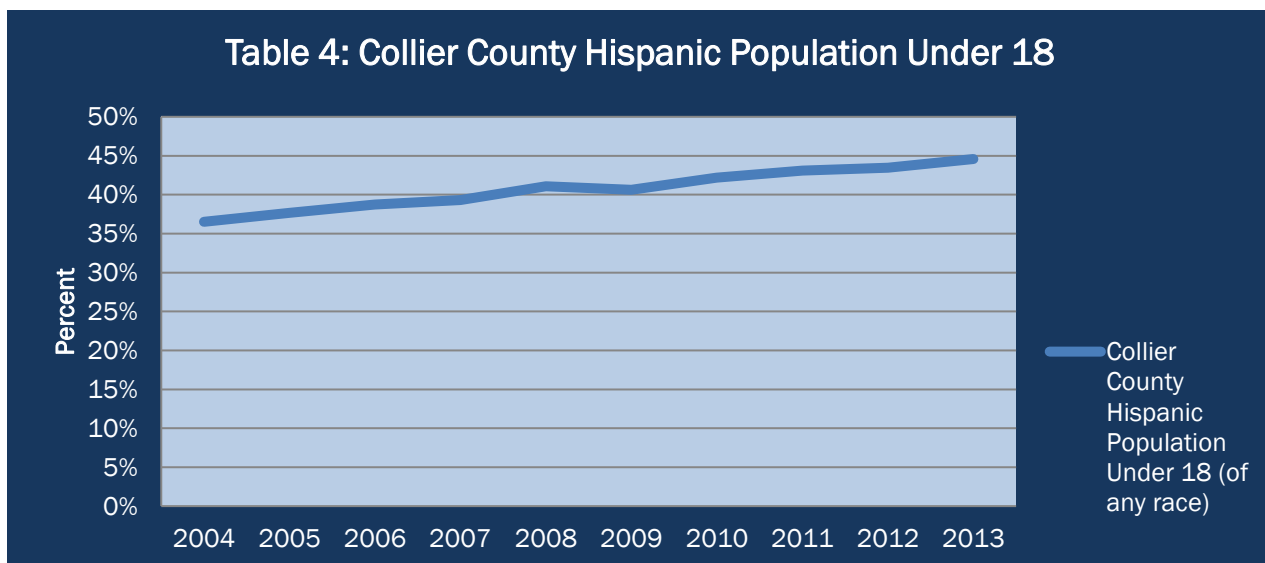
**Source for 2017 Data:** Population age 0 to 17 | KIDS COUNT Data Center. (n.d.). Retrieved October 14, 2017, from <http://datacenter.kidscount.org/data/tables/585-population-age-0-to-4?loc=11&loct=5#detailed/5/1870/false/869,36,868,867,133/any/1379>

Tables 3 and 4 provide a breakdown of the population of children and youth by race and ethnicity. It is important to note that “Hispanic” includes persons who classified themselves in one of the specific Hispanic or Latino categories and may be of any race. Accordingly, the data utilize breakouts by race (Table 3) and by Hispanic ethnicity (Table 4). Examining both tables concurrently, the number of children and youth reported as Hispanic has and is growing significantly while those in other categories are remaining relatively unchanged.



**Source for 2017 Data:** Population under age 18 by race and ethnicity - 2004 - 2013 | KIDS COUNT Data Center. (n.d.). Retrieved October 14, 2017, from <http://datacenter.kidscount.org/data/tables/5243-population-under-age-18-by-race-and-ethnicity-2004-2013?loc=11&loct=5#detailed/5/1870/false/36,868,867,133,38/107,133,3962,613/11726>

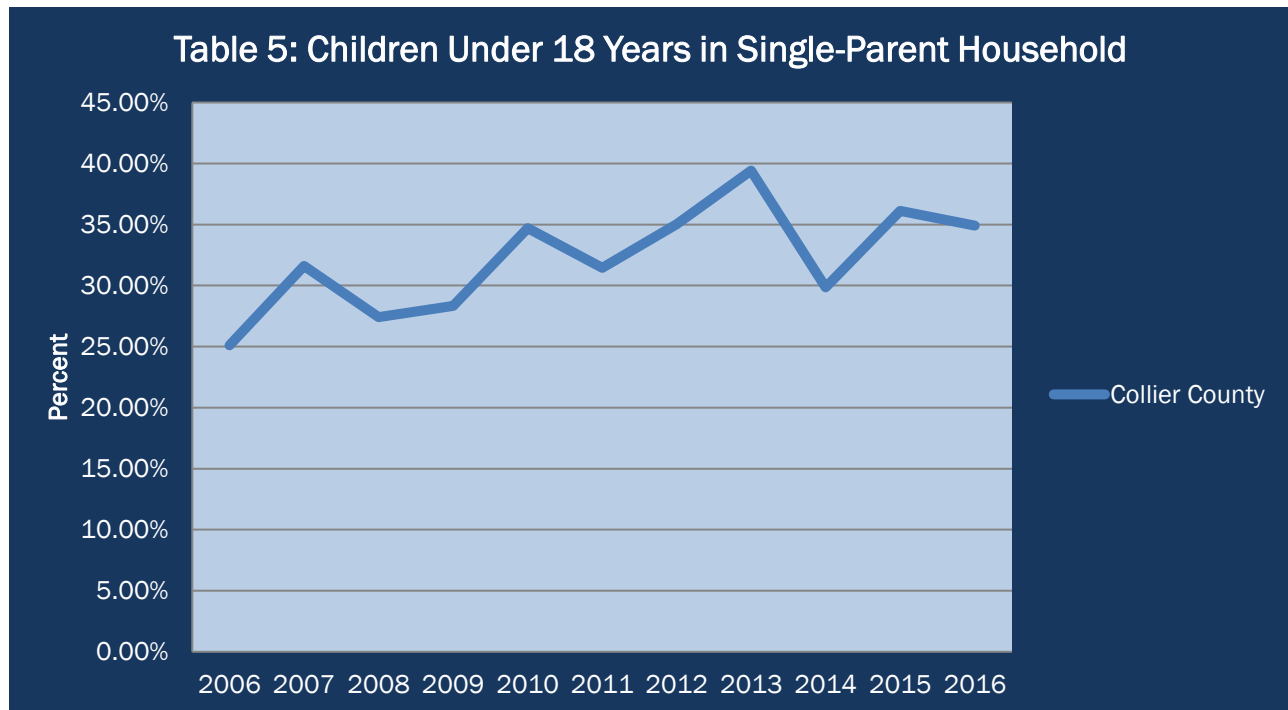
**Note:** In the 2010 edition this data was drawn from Collier County Department of Health and the Collier County Public Schools



**Source for 2017 Data:** Population under age 18 by race and ethnicity - 2004 - 2013 | KIDS COUNT Data Center. (n.d.). Retrieved October 14, 2017, from <http://datacenter.kidscount.org/data/tables/5243-population-under-age-18-by-race-and-ethnicity-2004-2013?loc=11&loct=5#detailed/5/1870/false/36,868,867,133,38/107,133,3962,613/11726>

**Note:** In the 2010 edition this data was drawn from Collier County Department of Health and the Collier County Public Schools.

Research has shown that single-parent households can have additional stress with fewer supports. Accordingly, Table 5 presents the percentage of households in Collier County with only one parent present — this number has risen from 25.11% in 2005 to 34.9% in 2016.



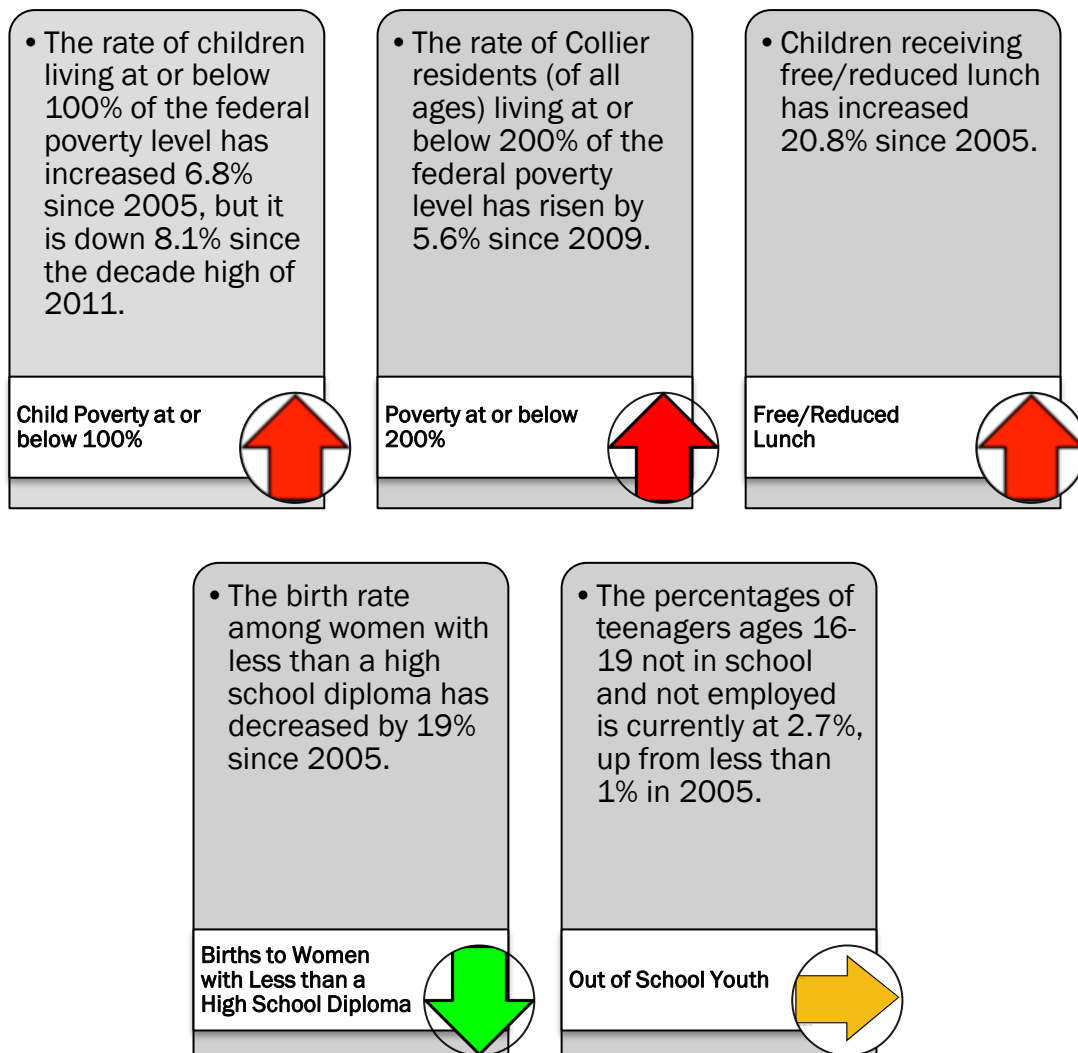
**Source for 2017 Data:** Data Access and Dissemination Systems (DADS). (2010, October 05). HOUSEHOLD TYPE FOR CHILDREN UNDER 18 YEARS IN HOUSEHOLDS. Retrieved October 14, 2017, from [https://factfinder.census.gov/faces/tableservices/jsf/pages/productview.xhtml?pid=ACS\\_16\\_1YR\\_B09005&prodType=table](https://factfinder.census.gov/faces/tableservices/jsf/pages/productview.xhtml?pid=ACS_16_1YR_B09005&prodType=table)

## Section Two: Poverty

Poverty is defined many ways, depending on the purpose and source of the definition. It is difficult to identify one metric that fully encompasses the scope of poverty. In order to form a comprehensive picture of poverty rates in Collier County, Civitas Strategies and NCEF leadership collaborated in selecting four metrics that in combination best represent the current landscape:

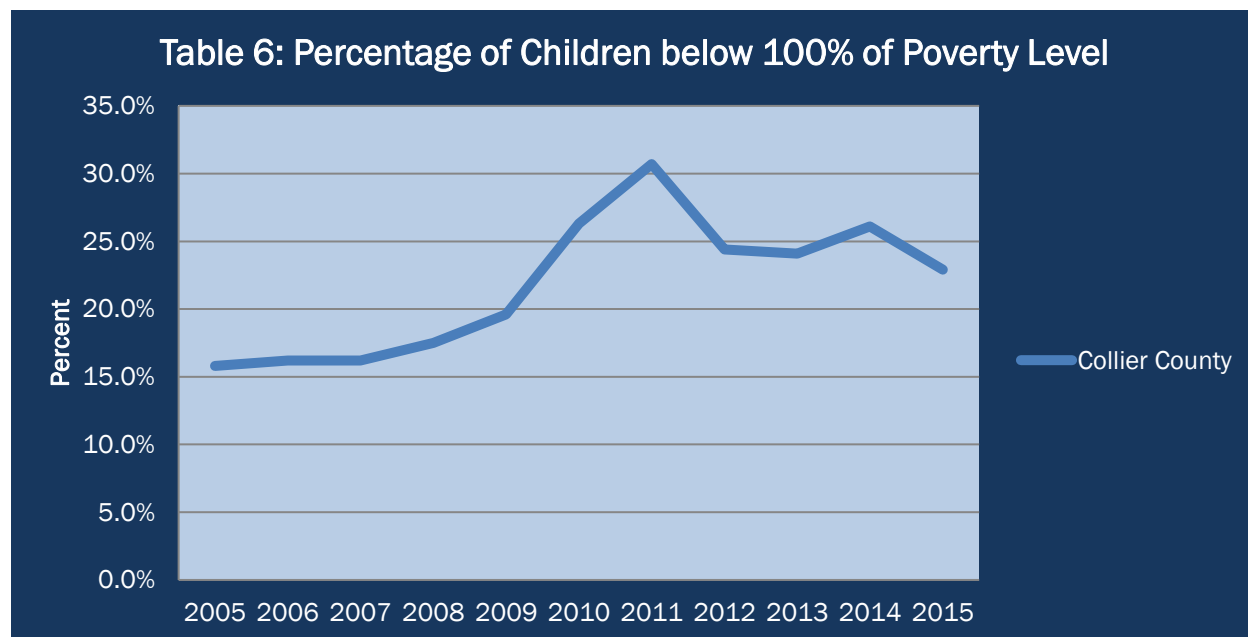
- The number of children living at or below 100% of the federal poverty level.
- Collier County residents (children and adults) living at or below 200% of the federal poverty level.
- The number of children in Collier County receiving free or reduced lunch.
- The number of children statewide living at or below the 200% poverty level.

Each of the identified metrics is represented in the tables following, with an accompanying descriptor of the metric's relevance.



## Metric 1: Children Living At or Below the 100% Federal Poverty Level

The rate of children living at or below 100% of the federal poverty level has increased 6.8% since 2005, but it is down 8.1% since the decade high in 2011.



**Source for 2017 Data:** Children under age 18 in poverty | KIDS COUNT Data Center. (n.d.). Retrieved October 14, 2017, from <http://datacenter.kidscount.org/data/tables/5320-children-under-age-18-in-poverty?loc=11&loct=2#detailed/5/1870/true/573,869,36,868,867/any/11837>

**Note:** In the 2010 edition this data was drawn from Florida Department of Health. (2010). Tallahassee: Florida Department of Health.

The first metric examined is the rate of children living at or below 100% of the poverty level established by the U.S. federal government. The poverty level in the U.S. reflects a high level of economic insecurity and vulnerability. To give context, the federal poverty threshold for a family of four in 2017 is \$24,600. This metric is often used as the cornerstone for any child wellbeing assessment, as children growing up in chronic poverty are more likely to experience malnutrition, be exposed to environmental toxins, become victims of abuse and violent crimes, have low-quality early learning experiences, attend chronically low-performing schools, and engage in risky behavior (substance abuse, early sexual activity) at a young age<sup>4</sup>. Unsurprisingly, children in poverty have an increased risk for having a low birth weight, impaired cognitive functioning, chronic health conditions, and mental health issues. Furthermore, a childhood in poverty has a strong correlation to an adult life in poverty, further advancing an inter-generational cycle of poverty.

Unfortunately, as indicated in Table 6 the rate of children living at or below 100% of the federal poverty level has increased 6.8% since 2005. It is important to note the rate has fallen 8.1% since the decade high in 2011.

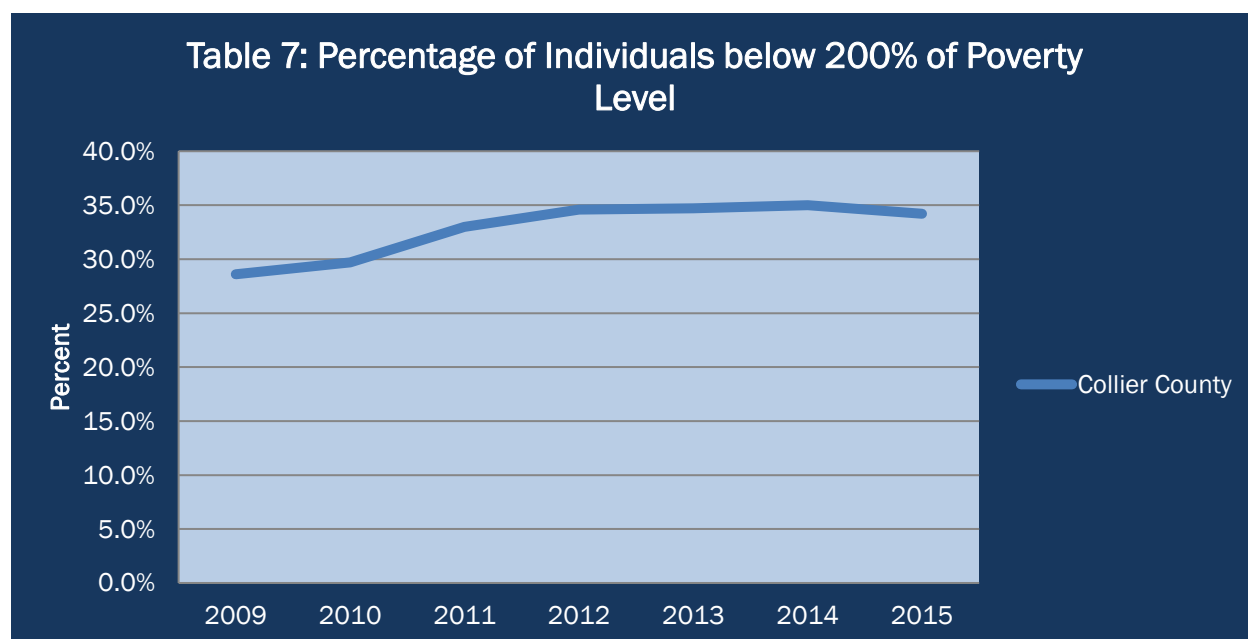
<sup>4</sup> *Indicators of Child and Youth Well-Being* (Rep.). (2016, December). Retrieved [https://www.childtrends.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/12/04\\_Poverty.pdf](https://www.childtrends.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/12/04_Poverty.pdf)



Understanding why a family falls and remains below the federal poverty line is a complex issue. However, the qualitative research conducted for this study indicated that rising housing costs are a continuing challenge for many families in Collier County. Housing costs consume a larger percentage of household budgets than in years past. Interviewees reported that while Collier County's economy is growing, new job opportunities are often not in commuting distance of families in poverty, creating an accessibility barrier. This issue is further exacerbated by Collier County's lack of easily accessible public transportation. According to the experts tapped for this study, this culmination of issues has led to higher rates of unemployment in some communities, as well as the inability to access child wellbeing services. Additionally, some of the thought leaders interviewed suggested that increased addiction rates to street drugs (particularly heroin) may also play a key role in rising rates of family poverty.

## Metric 2: Collier Residents (All Ages) Living at 200% of the Federal Poverty Level

The rate of Collier residents (of all ages) living at or below 200% of the federal poverty level has risen by 5.6% since 2009.



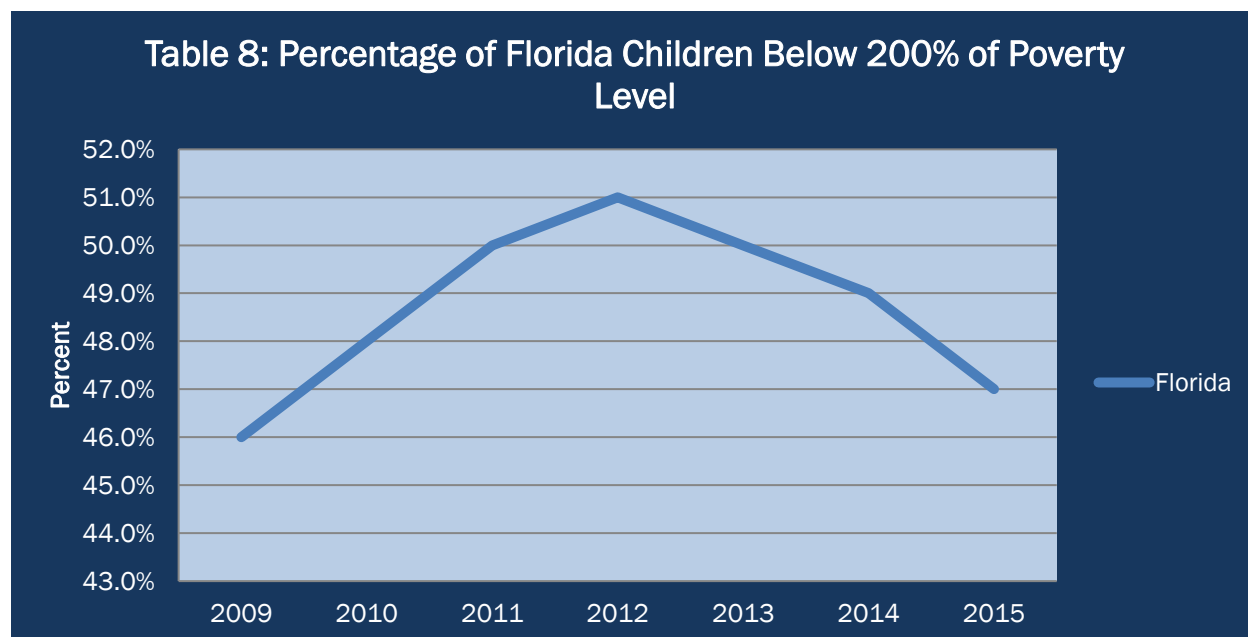
**Source for 2017 Data:** Percentage of individuals below 200% of poverty level | Florida Department of Health (n.d.). Retrieved October 14, 2017 from <http://www.flhealthcharts.com/charts/OtherIndicators/NonVitalIndRateOnlyDataViewer.aspx?cid=0461>

**Note:** In the 2010 edition this data was drawn from Florida Department of Health. (2010). Tallahassee: Florida Department of Health.

The measure of 200% of the federal poverty line is a metric often used to define a broader scope of poverty. It includes not only the most economically vulnerable families but also the “working poor,” that is, families with wage-earners working at least half time, but who still struggle to get by financially, and to provide adequately for the needs of their children. The 200% federal poverty threshold for a family of four in 2017 is \$49,200. When examining

trends in poverty, it is important to consider this metric, as children living at this level are still vulnerable to the range of risk factors linked to childhood poverty, as outlined under Metric 1. Additionally, families under 200% of the poverty line have little or no savings or access to emergency credit, meaning they are often one emergency expense away from being below poverty.

At the writing of this report, the percentage of children in Collier County living at 200% of the poverty level is unavailable from the U.S. Census. However, to provide this snapshot, the rate of all Collier County residents (children and adults) was used. Similar to the rate for families in 100% of poverty, those at 200% are increasing as a percentage of total residents, though in the most recent years is showing an early decrease.



**Source for 2017 Data:** Percentage of individuals below 200% of poverty level | Florida Department of Health (n.d.). Retrieved October 14, 2017 from <http://www.flhealthcharts.com/charts/OtherIndicators/NonVitalIndRateOnlyDataViewer.aspx?cid=0461>

**Note:** In the 2010 edition this data was drawn from Florida Department of Health. (2010). Tallahassee: Florida Department of Health.

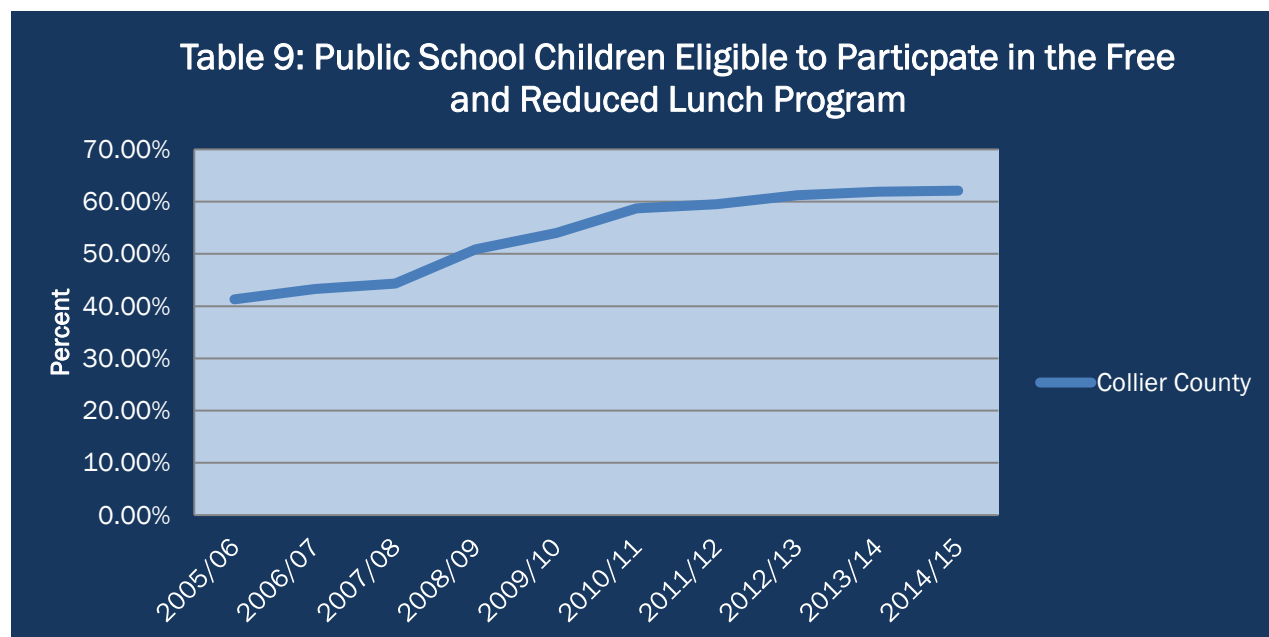
Though the U.S. Census does not publish county-level data for Collier County on the number of children below 200% of the poverty line, data are available at the state level. Though these numbers encompass all of the state of Florida, they still can be useful in providing some insights into local trends.

According to the data, the percentage of children in Florida living at or below 200% of the federal poverty level was on the rise from 2009 to 2012, but is currently on the decline. This metric is critical to formulating a comprehensive picture of the current state of poverty in Collier County, because it demonstrates that by all county-based measures, poverty rates in Collier (for both children and adults) are on the rise at a time when poverty rates for children in Florida are on the decline. As noted above, the reasons for this discrepancy are both varied and complex. However, the qualitative data indicate that myriad causal factors collectively

unique to the Collier landscape, such as escalating housing costs, a rise in substance addiction, and a lack of post-secondary college and career-training opportunities, may serve as contributing factors.

### Metric 3: Free/Reduced Lunch

The number of children receiving free or reduced lunch in Collier County has increased 20.8% since the 2005-06 school year.



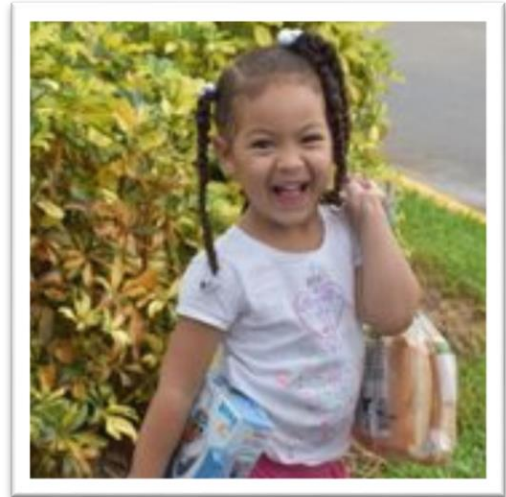
**Source for 2017 Data:** Students eligible to participate in free/reduced lunch | KIDS COUNT Data Center. (n.d.). Retrieved October 14, 2017, from <http://datacenter.kidscount.org/data/tables/5403-students-eligible-to-participate-in-free-reduced-lunch?loc=11&loc=5#detailed/5/1870/false/1601,1526,1445,1250,1069/any/12082,11928>

**Note:** In the 2010 edition this data was drawn from Collier County Public Schools. (2010). Naples.

Another nationally recognized indicator of poverty is the percentage of students receiving free and reduced-priced lunch. These are students who under the USDA guidelines are living at or below 130% of the federal poverty level and therefore qualify for a full lunch subsidy, or between 131% and 185% of the federal poverty level and qualify for a partial lunch subsidy, to ensure their nutritional needs are met. This metric is used nationally, and particularly in K-12 education, to determine the concentration of poverty in specific communities and to understand poverty trends. However, this metric only includes data on children K-12, and does not consider children ages 0-5 (a subgroup disproportionately present among families in poverty), and so should be examined in conjunction with other metrics to assess poverty levels in a specific locale.

As the data show, the percentage of students who qualify in Collier County has steadily continued to rise since NCEF commissioned the first Child Wellbeing Study in 2005. These data, combined with the statistics on Collier's increasing population (see Table 1), indicate that there are currently a larger number of children in poverty to serve throughout the county than ever before.

Stakeholders interviewed and surveyed identified childhood hunger as a continually pressing problem in Collier County. One local expert estimated, based on data and experience, that as many as one in four Collier County children experiences hunger daily. This is supported by the Child and Family Hunger Data from the 2010 Hunger Study, as cited in the School District of Collier County's Strategic Planning and Needs Assessment, 2011-2012, which states that "37% of children experience hunger in SW Florida, 2010<sup>5</sup>." One subgroup of particular concern are families experiencing temporary or situational poverty due to a job loss or significant expense (such as the cost of a medical procedure). These families may only qualify for county services for 3-6 months, and may not be consistently represented in county statistics, but are experiencing the impact of childhood hunger. Stakeholders also cited ongoing difficulty providing nutritional services to children during summer and holiday vacations. With NCEF's support, organizations across the county have taken steps to address the need via the funding of mobile food distribution programs (such as NCEF's Children's Hunger Initiative: Lunch Boxes of Love) and summer programs providing meals to participants. However, the increased rates in free and reduced lunch previously mentioned indicate that year-round access to nutritious food for children is a growing problem in Collier County.

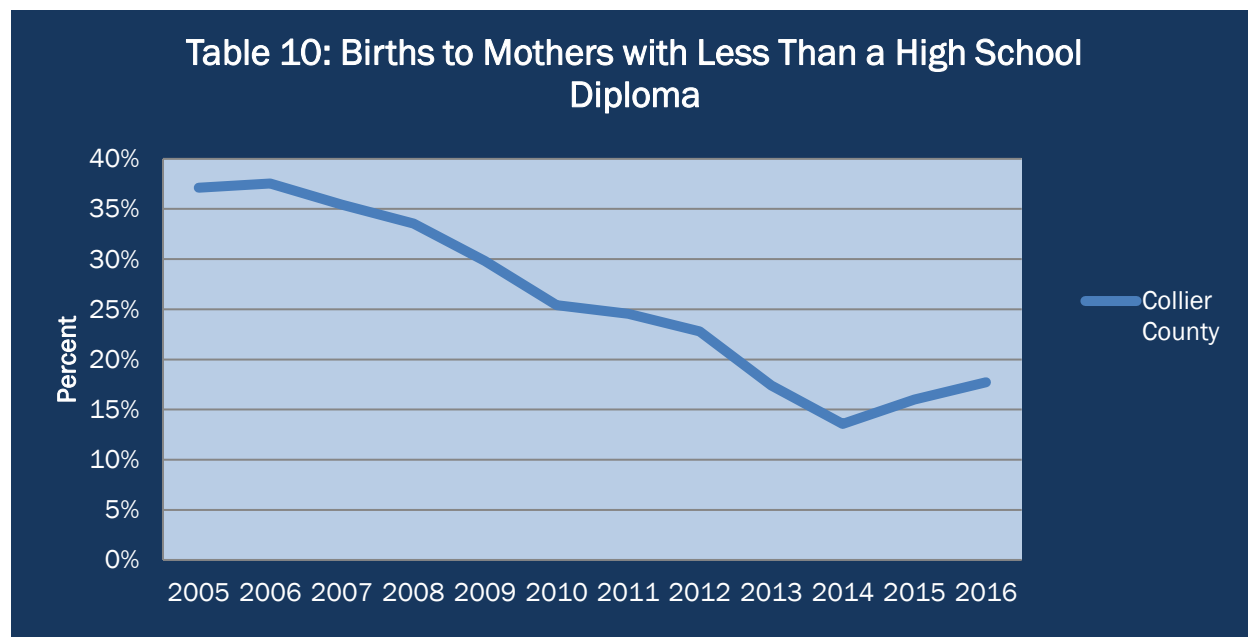


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<sup>5</sup> *Community Demographics*. Community Foundation of Collier County, <http://www.cfcollier.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/05/CFCC-Vital-Signs.pdf>. Retrieved on October 14, 2017.

## Metric 4: Births to Women with Less than a High School Diploma

The birth rate among women with less than a high school diploma has decreased 19% since 2005.



**Source for 2017 Data:** Florida Birth Query System | Florida Department of Health (n.d.). Retrieved October 14, 2017, from <http://www.flhealthcharts.com/FLQUERY/Birth/BirthRpt.aspx>

The birth rate among women without a high school diploma is a nationally recognized indicator of the impact of poverty, due to the significant challenge it presents to developing economic independence. Multiple studies available in the public domain demonstrate the increasing criticality of both a high school diploma and higher education/technical training credentials to earning a living wage. Unsurprisingly, the workforce challenges presented to mothers with less than a high school diploma are correlated with an increased likelihood of living in poverty and not being able get out of it.

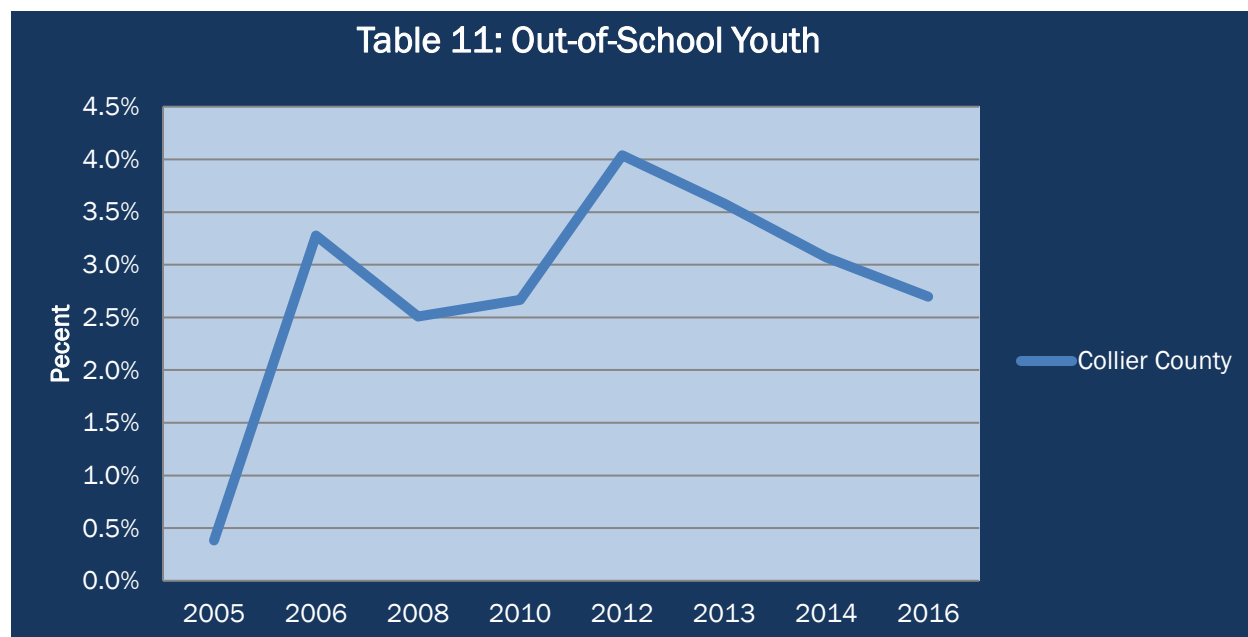
It is encouraging to know that the percentage of new mothers in Collier County without high school diplomas has decreased significantly, from 37% in 2005 to 18% in 2016. This positive change correlates to the improved graduation rate in Collier County (see Table 15) and may be attributable to the efforts of NCEF, Collier County Public Schools, and local community-based organizations to improve the academic supports available to high school students. It also suggests that factors other than access to education (such as rising housing costs and the impact of substance abuse) may play a more primary role in Collier County's rising poverty rates.

Although Collier County is experiencing a positive trend in this arena, several stakeholders still noted a need for building parental skills in order to boost parental confidence and ability to support their children's education and ensure the educational success of their children. This concern for parental-skills building is generally for families in poverty (especially non-citizens), but particularly for parents with lower levels of education who have an even greater difficulty in effectively navigating the educational system, advocating for their children's needs, and

ensuring their educational success. This factor may play an outsized role in children with specialized academic, behavioral, or medical needs receiving the services they need to thrive.

### Metric 5: Out-of-School Youth

The percentage of teenagers ages 16-19 not in school and not employed is currently at 2.7%, up from less than 1% in 2005.



**Source for 2017 Data:** Data Access and Dissemination Systems (DADS). (2010, October 05). SEX BY SCHOOL ENROLLMENT BY EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT BY EMPLOYMENT STATUS FOR THE POPULATION 16 TO 19 YEARS. Retrieved October 14, 2017, from <https://factfinder.census.gov/faces/tableservices/jsf/pages/productview.xhtml?src=bkmk>

Teenagers ages 16-19 who are neither in school nor employed constitute a subgroup of the population that is significant to follow, as they face a range of economic and wellbeing challenges, both now and in the future. This group is notably one of the most difficult populations to identify and provide wellbeing services for, as the teenagers' interactions with need-monitoring institutions and community-based service providers may be very limited, leaving them highly susceptible to a multitude of risk factors and an increased likelihood of unemployment, poverty, and criminality.

As Table 11 shows, the number of out-of-school youth in Collier County has risen approximately 2.3% since NCEF commissioned the original Child Wellbeing Study in 2005. (Please note: data were unavailable for 2007, 2009, 2011, 2015).

The reasons behind the rise in out-of-school youth in Collier County are likely myriad and complex. It is noteworthy that the increase in the rate of 16- to 19-year olds not in school and not employed is occurring while Collier County's economy is growing. (The unemployment rate in Collier County has been steadily declining in recent years, from a high of 12.9% in August 2009 to an August 2017 rate of 4.7%<sup>6</sup>). The inability of this subgroup to obtain gainful

<sup>6</sup> Unemployment Rate in Collier County, FL. (2017, September 27).

employment may be indicative of the increased need for continued education or specialized technical skill in today's economy. Many interviewees cited the urgent need to improve access to high-quality technical and computational skill training in the public schools. Interviewees also noted the lack of access to current technology in some of Collier County's underserved communities, especially those in rural geographies.



## Section 3: Education

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The quality of the education a child receives is paramount to his or her ability to flourish as an adult, and is often considered the primary indicator of that child's capacity to rise above the level of poverty into which he or she is born. The following section examines trends in the Collier County public school system's capacity for achieving positive student outcomes, as measured by a set of nationally recognized metrics for assessing school success, specifically:

- School Absences.
- Grade Students Scoring Proficient (Level III and Above) on the Standardized Florida Reading Test.
- 8<sup>th</sup> Grade Students Scoring Proficient (Level III and Above) on the Standardized Florida Mathematics Test.
- Graduation Rate in Collier County.
- Students Enrolled in Exceptional Education Programs.

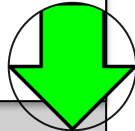
Each of the identified metrics is represented in the tables following, with an accompanying descriptor of the metric's relevance.





- Since 2005, the rate of student absence from school has shown a slight decrease of 3.2% and overall has been at relatively low rates.

### School Absences



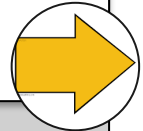
- The number of third grade students scoring proficient (level III or above) on Florida's standardized reading test has dropped 14% since 2011. However, due to changes in testing protocols and a lack of comparable data over the past seven years, this trend should not be considered conclusive (see metric descriptor for further detail).

### Third Grade English Language Arts



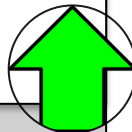
- The percentage of 8th grade students scoring proficient (level III or above) on Florida's standardized mathematics test has remained relatively stable since 2012 (between 61% and 67%), with the exception of an all-time low in 2014 (39%). However, due to changes in testing protocols and a lack of comparable data over the past seven years, this trend should not be considered conclusive (see metric descriptor for further detail).

### Eighth Grade Mathematics



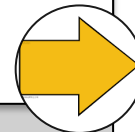
- The graduation rate in Collier County has been rising steadily for a decade. Data show a 14.5% increase between the 2005-06 and 2015-16 school years.

### Graduation Rate



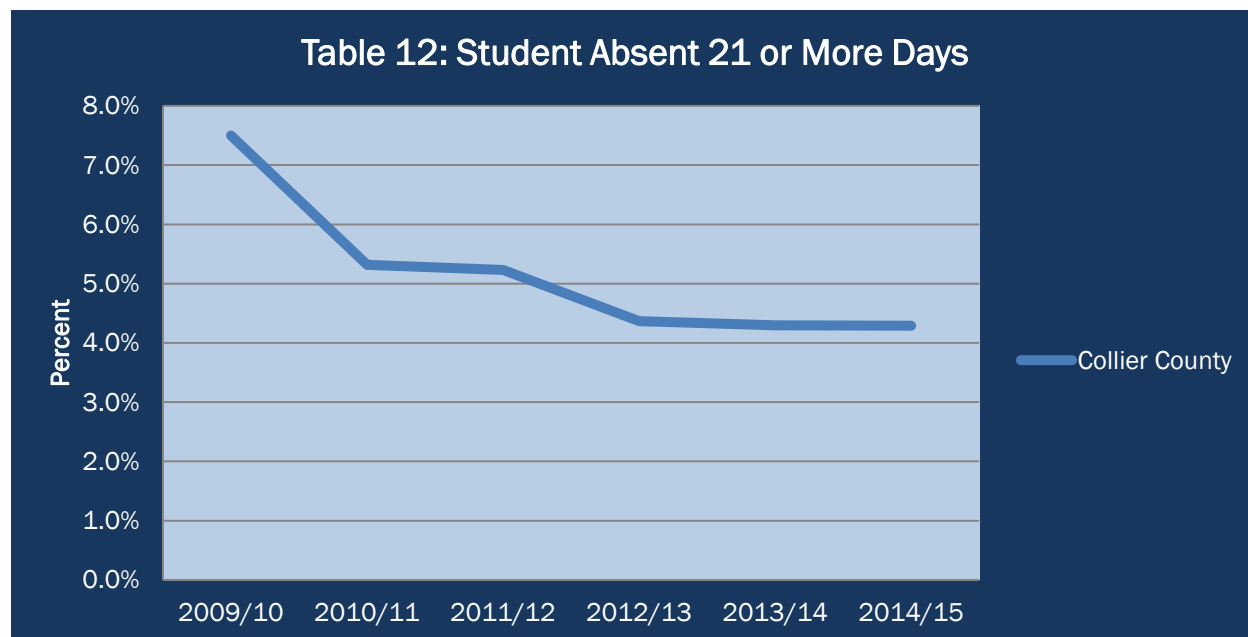
- The number of students in Collier County enrolled in exceptional education programs or services has consistently ranged between 19% and 20% since 2005.

### Exceptional Education



## Metric 6: School Absences

Since 2005, the average daily rate of student absences from school has shown a slight decrease of 3.2% and overall has been at relatively low rates.



**Source for 2017 Data:** Florida Department of Education: Archive. (n.d.). Retrieved October 14, 2017, from <http://www.fldoe.org/accountability/data-sys/edu-info-accountability-services/pk-12-public-school-data-pubs-reports/archive.shtml>

Over the past decade, education experts have increasingly recognized the significance of school attendance in the achievement of strongly positive student outcomes. Research consistently demonstrates a strong correlation between student attendance and the likelihood of attaining a range of significant academic milestones, including achieving reading mastery by third grade, receiving passing academic grades in middle school, graduating from high school, and attending college<sup>7</sup>. Furthermore, the correlation between attendance and positive student outcomes is true for all grade levels, from preschool to 12<sup>th</sup> grade, signaling this metric as a significant overall indicator of educational wellbeing in a specific locality such as Collier County.

Data obtained from the Florida Department of Education indicate that Collier County has not only consistently maintained low rates of absenteeism over the past decade but it has even been decreasing that already low rate over the past 10 years – all of which should be applauded. According to a rating scale developed by the nationally recognized initiative, Attendance Works, Collier County's 2009 daily average student absentee rate (5.54%) classifies as a “modest” rate of chronic absenteeism, while the most recently recorded

<sup>7</sup> Ginsburg, A., Jordan, P., & Chang, H. (2014, August). Absences Add Up (Rep.). Retrieved [http://www.attendanceworks.org/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2014/09/Absences-Add-Up\\_September-3rd-2014.pdf](http://www.attendanceworks.org/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2014/09/Absences-Add-Up_September-3rd-2014.pdf).

student absence rate of 4.22% (2015) is classified as “low” chronic absenteeism<sup>8</sup>. Thus, what may appear to be a slight decrease in actuality has meaningful and outsized, significant impact. Though it is difficult to discern from the quantitative data collected for this study to isolate what factor or factors led to the decrease, a number of experts interviewed for this study noted that community-based organizations serving children in poverty have an increased awareness of absenteeism and its impact.



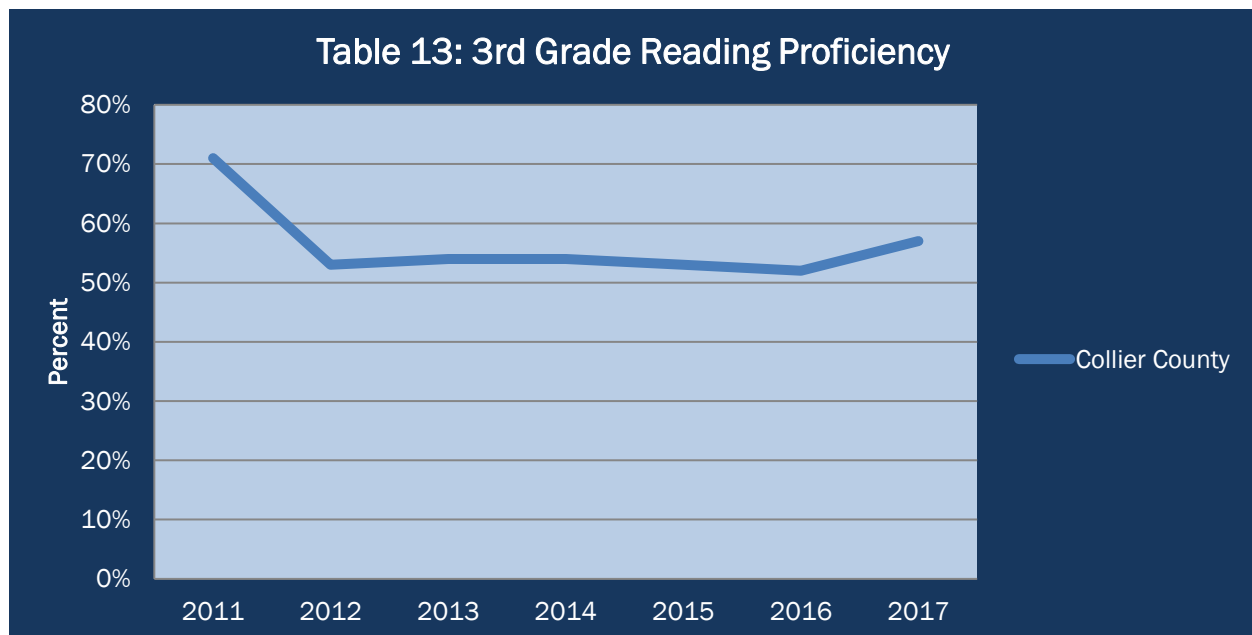
When reviewing student absenteeism, it is typical to examine connections between attendance rates and the mobility rate among families. In qualitative interviews, multiple thought leaders indicated that higher rates of family mobility (particularly among Collier County’s migrant worker population) have had an increasingly significant impact on the capacity of the public school system to provide high-quality service to Collier students. One expert on the local educational landscape identified the transiency of students as one of the greatest barriers to positive student outcomes that Collier public schools currently face. This expert further added that there is currently no system in place to effectively track and monitor the impact of this issue. In addition, national studies show that low-income students are more likely to experience chronic absenteeism, therefore there is a potential for rates to rise if the increase in poverty rates in Collier County continues.

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<sup>8</sup> Ginsburg, A., Jordan, P., & Chang, H. (2014, August). Absences Add Up (Rep.). Retrieved [http://www.attendanceworks.org/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2014/09/Absences-Add-Up\\_September-3rd-2014.pdf](http://www.attendanceworks.org/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2014/09/Absences-Add-Up_September-3rd-2014.pdf).

## Metric 7: 3<sup>rd</sup> Grade Students Scoring Proficient (Level III and Above) on the Standardized Florida Reading Test

The percentage of 3<sup>rd</sup> grade students scoring proficient (level III or above) on Florida's standardized reading test has dropped 14% since 2011. However, due to changes in testing protocols and a lack of comparable data over the past seven years, this trend should not be considered conclusive (see below for further detail).



**Source for 2017 Data:** FSA English Language Arts (ELA) | Florida Department of Education (n.d.). Retrieved October 14, 2017, from <https://edstats.fldoe.org/SASWebReportStudio/gotoReportPage.do?pageNumber=10&tocOpen=open>

**Note:** In the 2010 edition this data was drawn from Florida Department of Education. (2010). 2009-2010 FCAT Score Report. Tallahassee.

In rapidly increasing numbers, communities across the nation are adopting the number of students reading at proficient level or higher by third grade as a key indicator of early learning success. There are a number of studies indicating the criticality of early development and learning for future educational and life success. In the first eight years of life the vast majority of a child's brain and architecture is developed. It is also the point where a child begins the long journey to literacy, a critical skill for being able to access other subjects and accelerate learning. Current research conducted by the Annie E. Casey Foundation indicates that one in six children who is not reading proficiently in third grade does not graduate from high school on time. This number is four times greater than that for proficient readers.<sup>9</sup> Knowing the research, it is unsurprising that a study conducted by the U.S. Federal Reserve found that every \$1 invested in early learning provides \$7 in return on that investment. Though there are many ways to measure the strength of an early learning system, the number of students

<sup>9</sup> The Annie E. Casey Foundation. (2012). *Double Jeopardy: How 3<sup>rd</sup> Grade Reading Skills and Poverty Influence High School Graduation*. Baltimore, MD: Author. Retrieved from URL: <http://www.aecf.org/resources/double-jeopardy/>

reading proficiently or above by third grade provides a reflection of all the data points from prenatal to age eight, and hence its adoption for this study.

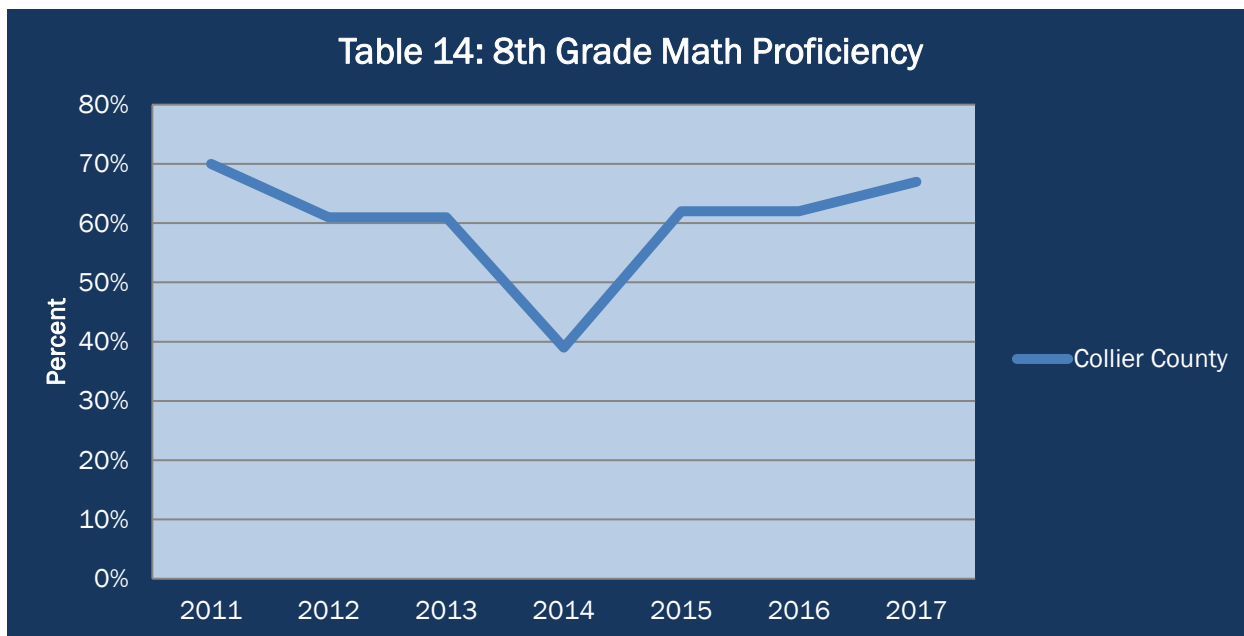
In July 2010, the state of Florida joined the national movement toward adoption of the Common Core standards as the cornerstone of statewide curriculum requirements. As part of the recalibration, Florida ceased use of the Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test (FCAT) as the state's required standardized test, in favor of the transitional FCAT 2.0, which was used from 2011 to 2014. In spring 2015, Florida fully adopted the newly developed Florida Standards Assessment (FSA) as the permanent standardized test catalog for grades 3-10 (English Language Arts) and 3-8 (Mathematics) statewide. Therefore, it is important to note that the dataset presented in Table 13 was collected using several assessments. Due to the unavailability of comparable data over the past seven years, it is difficult to present an accurate representation of the current trend in third grade reading proficiency in Collier County.

Even with this in mind, it is worth examining the data as shown in Table 13, as for recent years the number of students scoring proficient or above on third grade reading has been level. It is heartening to see that in the past year there has been a distinct uptick in the numbers.

It is too early to know if this trend will continue, however, by and large the participants in the interviews and surveys conducted for this study indicated optimism for continued gains and momentum in early learning. Two reasons were consistently cited for this early learning optimism. First, the countywide early learning collective-impact initiative has been helping to coordinate and focus investments in early learning for outsized impact on the lives of young children. Second, there has been a recent focus by NCEF and other student-serving organizations in Collier County on increased academic support services (particularly in after-school programs) for elementary-age students. Several stakeholders reported that this focus has resulted in a significant increase in both the quality and quantity of academic support services available for this age group, particularly in Immokalee. However, others stated that there are still pockets of the county where few supports are available, for example, North Naples.

### **Metric 8: 8th Grade Students Scoring Proficient (Level III and Above) on the Standardized Florida Mathematics Test**

The percentage of 8th grade students scoring proficient (level III or above) on Florida's standardized mathematics test has remained relatively stable since 2012, with an exception of an all-time low in 2014; however, due to changes in testing protocols and of a lack of comparable data over the past seven years, this trend should not be considered conclusive (see below for further detail).



**Source for 2017 Data:** FSA Mathematics | Florida Department of Education (n.d.). Retrieved October 14, 2017, from <https://edstats.fldoe.org/SASWebReportStudio/gotoReportPage.do?pageNumber=10&tocOpen=open>

**Note:** In the 2010 edition this data was drawn from Florida Department of Education. (2010). 2009-2010 FCAT Score Report. Tallahassee.

As with third grade reading proficiency, many experts cite eighth grade math proficiency (particularly mastery of the concepts traditionally covered in Algebra I coursework) as a key predictor of future academic and life success for three significant reasons. First and foremost, math is a cumulative subject so a student's standing in eighth grade affects which advanced courses, if any, he or she can take. This is particularly important considering the demand for mathematics-based jobs in the 21<sup>st</sup> century economy. This demand could mean that students with weak math backgrounds may be, *de facto*, shut out of many well-paying jobs. Secondly, math aptitude is crucial for acceptance and success in higher education, regardless of a student's course of study. Again, in the 21<sup>st</sup> century economy some form of higher education will be needed for most jobs providing a pathway out of poverty. Third, the state of Florida requires a passing grade in eighth grade algebra to continue onto high school thereby making this metric an early benchmark on the pathway to high school graduation.

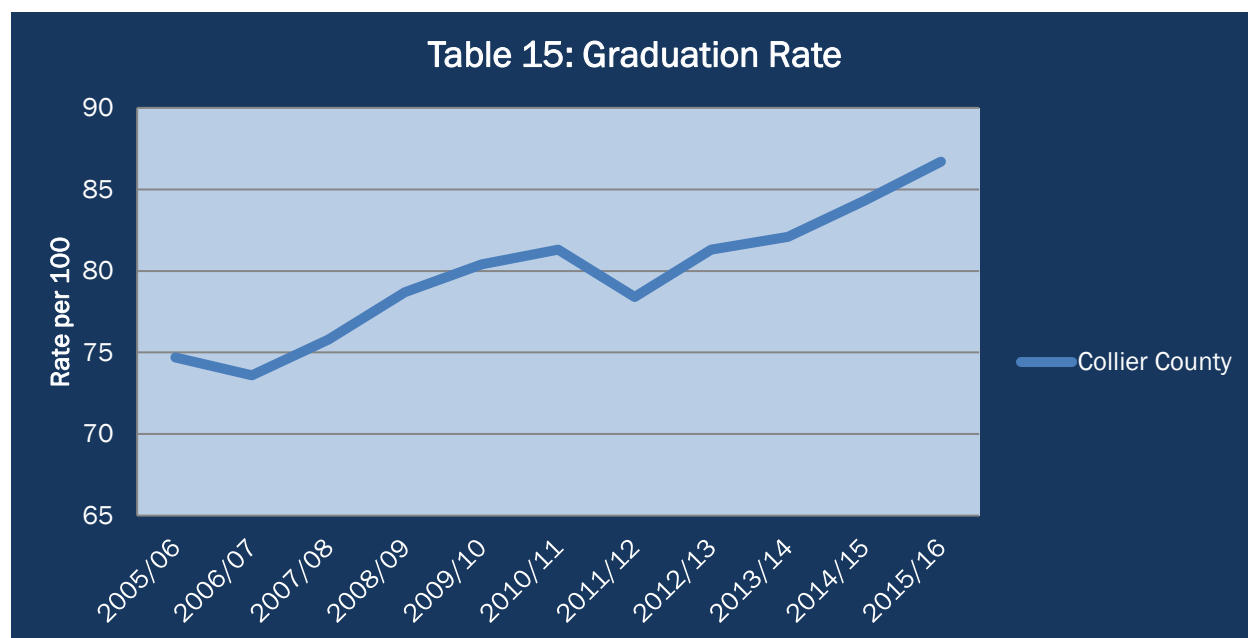
As represented in Table 14, currently available data show that in 2011, 70% of eighth graders in Collier County were scoring at proficient levels on the state standardized test (at that time, the FCAT 2.0; see Metric 7 for further details on the progression of tests used). From 2012 to 2017, the percentage has stayed within a six-percentage point range (67% in 2017), with the exception of 2014 (the final year in which FCAT 2.0 was in use). However, because of the unavailability of comparable data over the past seven years, this trend should not be viewed as conclusive, but rather as the beginning stage of an ongoing effort to evaluate Collier County's child wellbeing as it relates to student education.

Some interviewees noted that the increased availability of academic supports cited for elementary-age students has not carried over to middle school. One thought leader stated that most private funding from student-serving organizations in Collier County goes to serving

early childhood or high school aged students, leaving a gap in funding available for middle school programming. Another cited a gap in guidance counseling services for middle-school aged students, noting that many youths in Collier County have very little exposure to the world outside of their communities and are unaware of the quantity or variety of post-secondary opportunities available to them. This unawareness creates a very narrow view of the possibilities for the future.

### Metric 9: Graduation Rate in Collier County

The graduation rate in Collier County has been rising steadily for a decade. Data show a 14.5% increase between the 2005-06 and 2015-16 school years.



**Source for 2017 Data:** Graduation rate | KIDS COUNT Data Center. (n.d.). Retrieved October 14, 2017, from <http://datacenter.kidscount.org/data/tables/599-graduation-rate?loc=11&loct=5#detailed/5/1870,1907/false/952,824,750,466,465/any/11812>

High school graduation rate is universally recognized as a key benchmark in a community's educational effectiveness. Possession of a high school diploma has major implications for a student's access to continued education opportunities and subsequent earning potential in an increasingly competitive and specialized 21<sup>st</sup> century job market.

Laudably, as demonstrated in Table 15, the graduation rate in Collier County has been steadily rising over the past decade. Several stakeholders identified the high quality of out-of-school academic programming in Collier County, citing resources for high school students as being particularly strong. It is believed that the incorporation of academic supports in out-of-school time programs has essentially created a longer school day and, in turn, more time for learning.

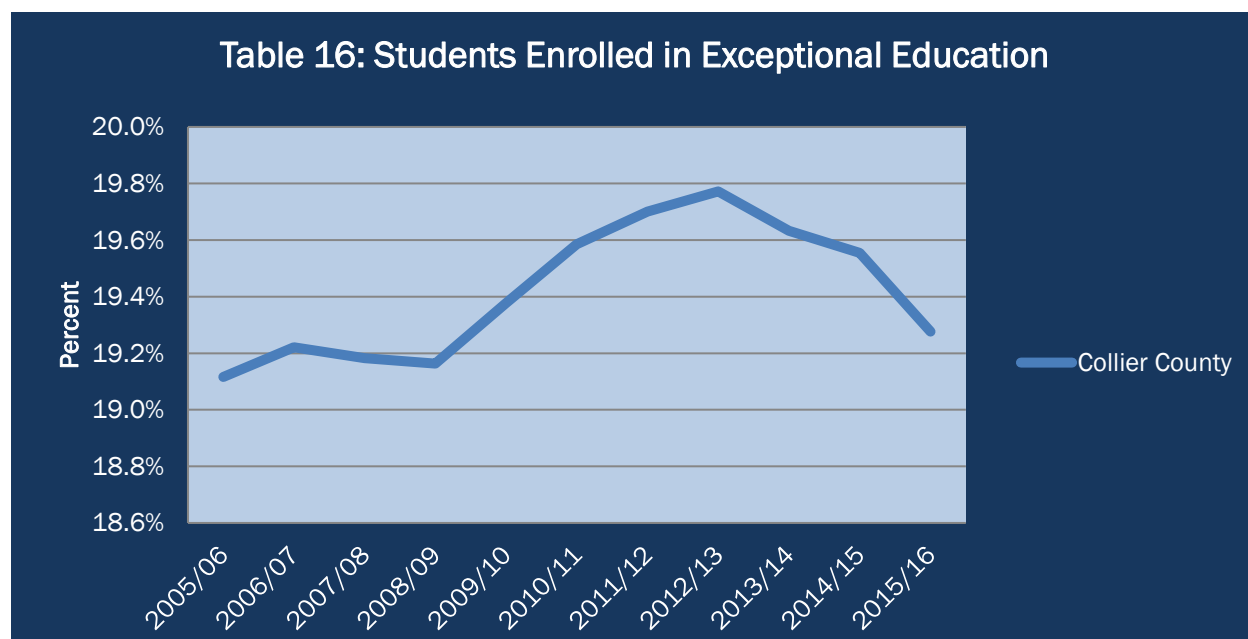
Other interviewees reported that while graduation rates are improving, there is still a need for continuing education opportunities for recent high school graduates who lack the marketable skills necessary for higher-paid employment. This was particularly clear in the case of academic certificates that could be earned in or after high school. Students' attainment of



these certificates significantly increased their chances of gaining employment. Several interviewees specifically cited a need for improved guidance services (particularly in the county's more isolated rural communities), to aid student awareness of and access to the educational and skilled training opportunities that currently exist.

### Metric 10: Students Enrolled in Exceptional Education Programs

The number of students in Collier County enrolled in exceptional education programs or services has consistently ranged between 19% and 20% since 2005.



**Source for 2017 Data:** Students enrolled in exceptional education programs | KIDS COUNT Data Center. (n.d.). Retrieved October 14, 2017, from <http://datacenter.kidscount.org/data/tables/5347-students-enrolled-in-exceptional-education-programs?loc=11&loct=5#detailed/5/1870,1907/false/1601,1526,1445,1250,1069/any/11870>

This metric examines the number of public school students enrolled in at least one exceptional student program, which includes both special and gifted education. (Note: students identified as having multiple exceptionalities may be enrolled in more than one exceptional education program but are only counted once for the collection of this data). Children needing exceptional education can be at particularly high risk of educational and developmental delays, dropout, low self-esteem, and disruptive behavior.

As presented in Table 16, the percentage of students who qualify for and receive exceptional education services in Collier County has been consistently between 19% and 20% since 2005 and in the most recent years is showing a decrease. Several local experts commented that significant progress has been made in the early diagnosis of student special needs, resulting in students receiving intervention services sooner and more consistently. However, others noted that although the process for identifying students with special needs early-on has greatly improved, there is still a large gap in service delivery due to a scarcity of highly qualified and available practitioners in Collier County, particularly in the field of applied behavior analysis. Children with autism spectrum disorders and other disabilities were reported as being particularly underserved. Stakeholders consistently lauded NCEF for its targeted



support of services for students with special needs. One practitioner stated that without NCEF, there would be almost no services for children with disabilities in Collier County.

## Section 4: Physical and Mental Health

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Metrics of physical and mental wellness are often considered the most compelling indicator of wellbeing at any stage of life. For children, research has consistently shown a direct correlation between the familial level of poverty and their overall health, both pre- and post-natally. The metrics included in this section are:

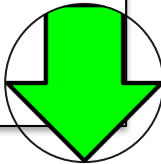
- Children Lacking Health Insurance.
- Low Birth Weight.
- Childhood Obesity.
- Involuntary Mental Health Examinations in Children and Adolescents.

Each of the identified metrics is represented in the tables following, with an accompanying descriptor of the metric's relevance.



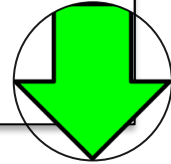
- The percentage of children lacking health insurance has steadily declined, currently down 11% since 2009.

#### Children Lacking Health Insurance



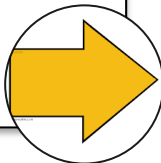
- The percentage of babies classified as 'low birth weight' is relatively low, and has remained stable since 2005.

#### Low Birth Weight



- While obesity rates for children under two and high school students have declined over the past decade, the middle school obesity rate has risen.

#### Childhood Obesity



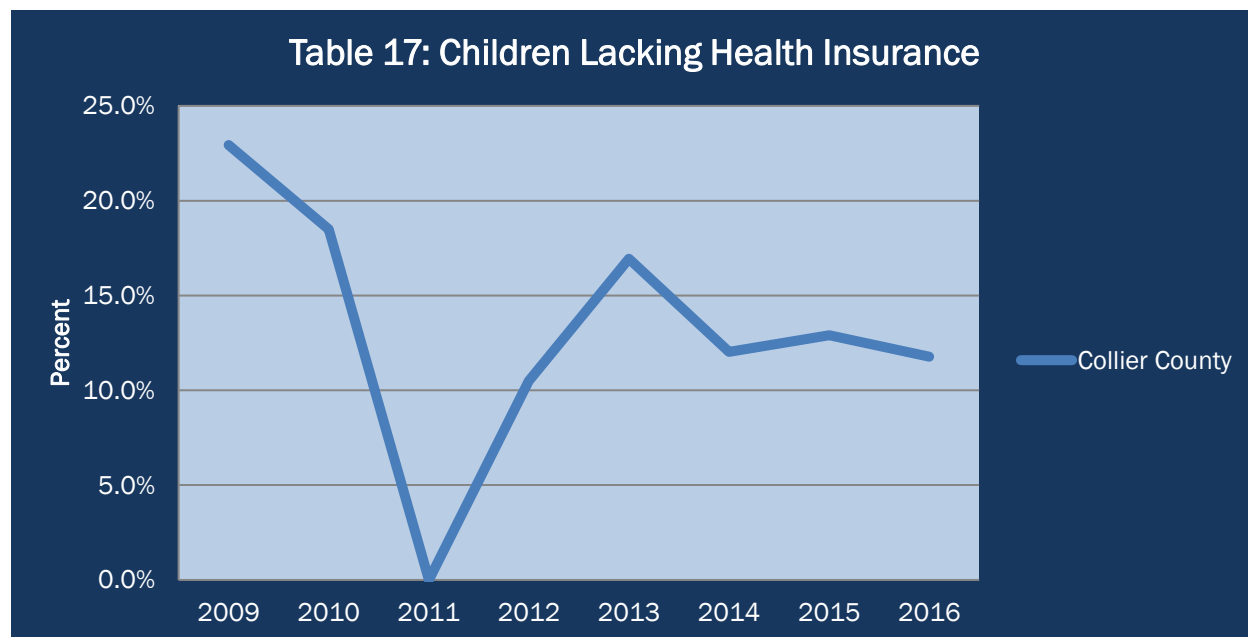
- The rate of children and adolescents (under age 18) receiving involuntary mental health examinations has increased over 8% since 2011.

#### Involuntary Mental Health Examinations in Youth



## Metric 11: Children Lacking Health Insurance

The percentage of children lacking health insurance has steadily declined, currently down 11% since 2009.



**Source for 2017 Data:** Data Access and Dissemination Systems (DADS). (2010, October 05). TYPES OF HEALTH INSURANCE COVERAGE BY AGE. Retrieved October 14, 2017, from [https://factfinder.census.gov/faces/tableservices/jsf/pages/productview.xhtml?pid=ACS\\_16\\_1YR\\_B27010&prodType=table](https://factfinder.census.gov/faces/tableservices/jsf/pages/productview.xhtml?pid=ACS_16_1YR_B27010&prodType=table)

**Note:** In the 2010 edition this data was drawn from UF Lastinger Center. (2010). Gainesville.

Access to high-quality and comprehensive health services strongly correlates with overall wellbeing in any community. As affordability is a driving determinant of accessibility, the percentage of children covered by health insurance is a potent metric for assessing a community's capacity to thrive. One of the most positive and impactful trends noted in this study is the significant decline in the numbers of children in Collier County lacking health insurance. The most recent data available from the U.S. Census highlight a 50% decrease from 2009 (22.9% of children without healthcare) to 2016 (down to 11.8%). The rise in health insurance in Collier County coincides with the national efforts to improve access for children. It is important to note, for reasons that are unclear, that 2011 data for Collier County were unavailable.

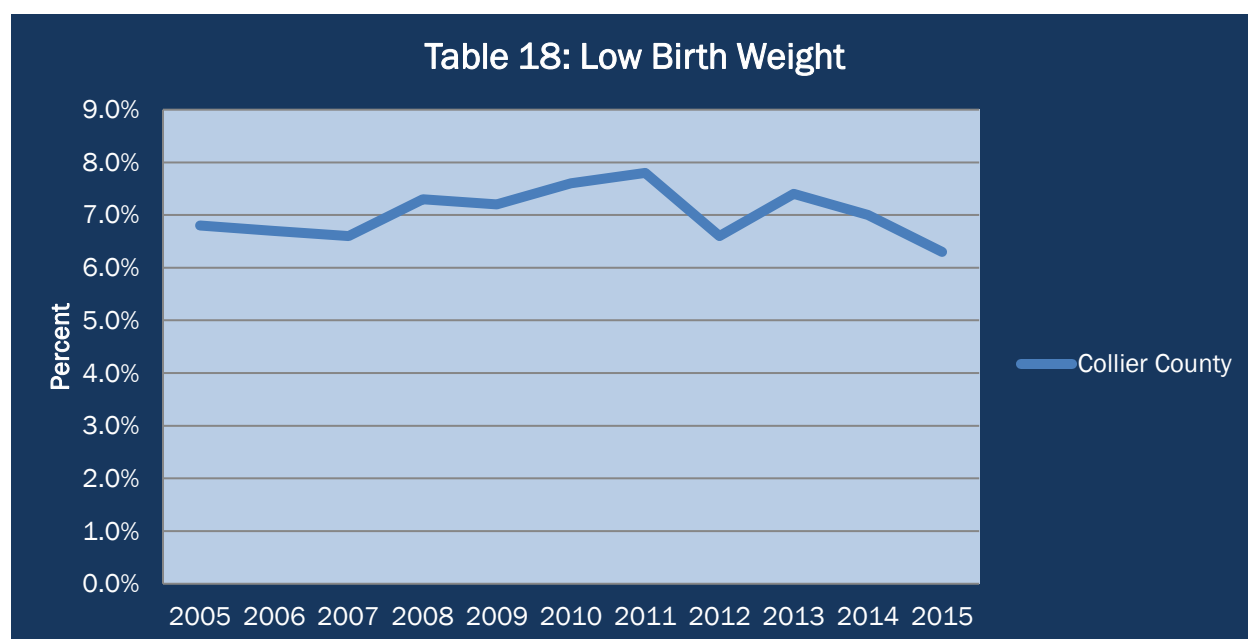
The other significant factor in health access is having quality services conveniently available. Stakeholders were adamant in their assertions of the highly impactful role NCEF has played in reducing or eliminating barriers to high-quality, comprehensive health services across Collier County. Several interviewees noted NCEF's facilitation of the renovation of the Isabel Collier Read Primary Care Clinic in Immokalee (one of the county's lowest-income communities) as the most positive advancement in children's health care to occur in the past decade. Other stakeholders remarked on NCEF's unprecedented success in significantly improving children's access to dental services. One interviewee who serves clients across Florida described the difference in children's dental health between Collier and neighboring

counties as “night and day” as a result of NCEF’s efforts. Another interviewee stated unequivocally that children’s dental services in Collier County are the best in Florida, and possibly in the southeast United States.

Despite the overall increase in access to affordable health services, the majority of stakeholders interviewed identified the availability of children’s mental health services as a significant and troubling gap in Collier County’s current health care system. This issue will be covered in greater detail under Metric 14, but bears mention here as an example of one arena in which the improvement in health insurance coverage has lagged.

## Metric 12: Low Birth Weight

The percentage of babies classified as ‘low birth weight’ is relatively low, and has remained stable since 2005.



**Source for 2017 Data:** Low birthweight births | KIDS COUNT Data Center. (n.d.). Retrieved October 14, 2017, from <http://datacenter.kidscount.org/data/tables/595-low-birthweight-births?loc=11&loct=5#detailed/5/1870/false/573,869,36,868,867/any/11987,1399>

The metric for low birth weight looks at the percentage of babies born weighing less than 2,500 grams (approximately 5 pounds, 8 ounces). It is a metric commonly used in health and wellness assessments, since low birth weight is associated with a host of infant, childhood, and adult medical problems, including diabetes, heart disease, cognitive and attentional difficulties, and arrested brain development.

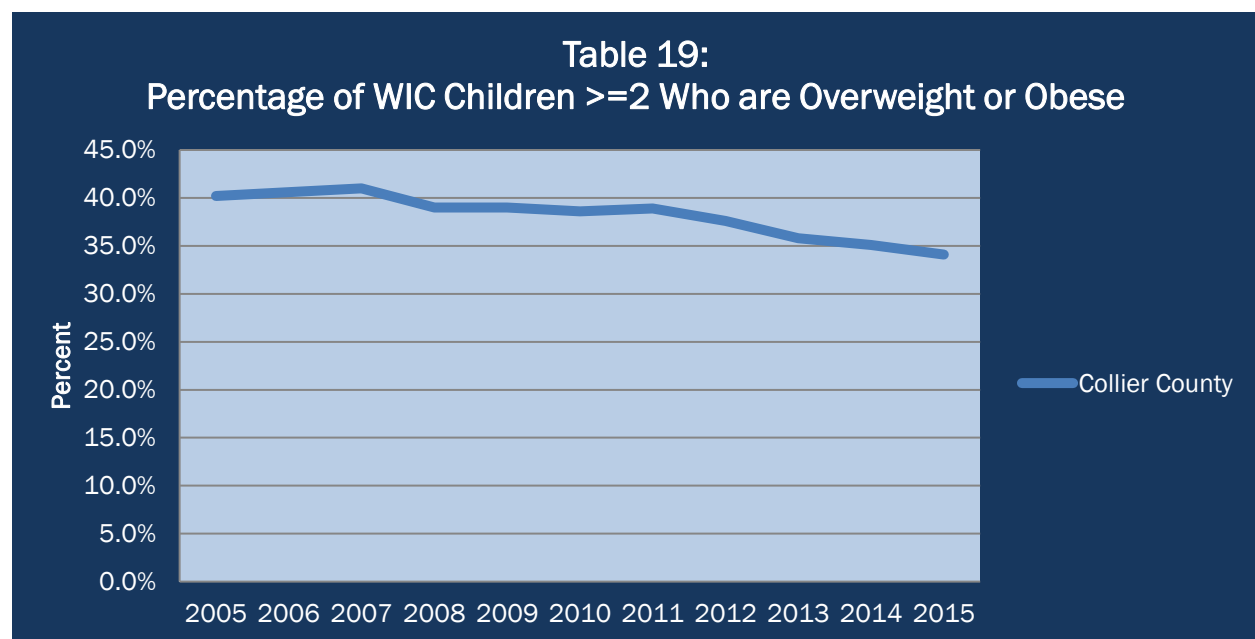
As shown in Table 18, the percentage of low birth weight babies born in Collier County has stayed relatively stable since 2005, ranging from a low of 6.6% (2007, 2012) to a high of 7.8% (2011) for an average of 7% in the 11-year span depicted. This number is slightly below

the national average of 8.07%, as reported by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.<sup>10</sup>

Overall, low birth weight was not specifically referenced as a primary concern in Collier County during the collection of qualitative data. However, low birth weight and the correlated health concerns were referenced as another observed impact of parental substance abuse. Other stakeholders reported that although there has been improvement, Collier County has a continuous gap in high-quality and easily accessible prenatal health services, a key component in reducing low birth weight rates.

### Metric 13: Childhood Obesity

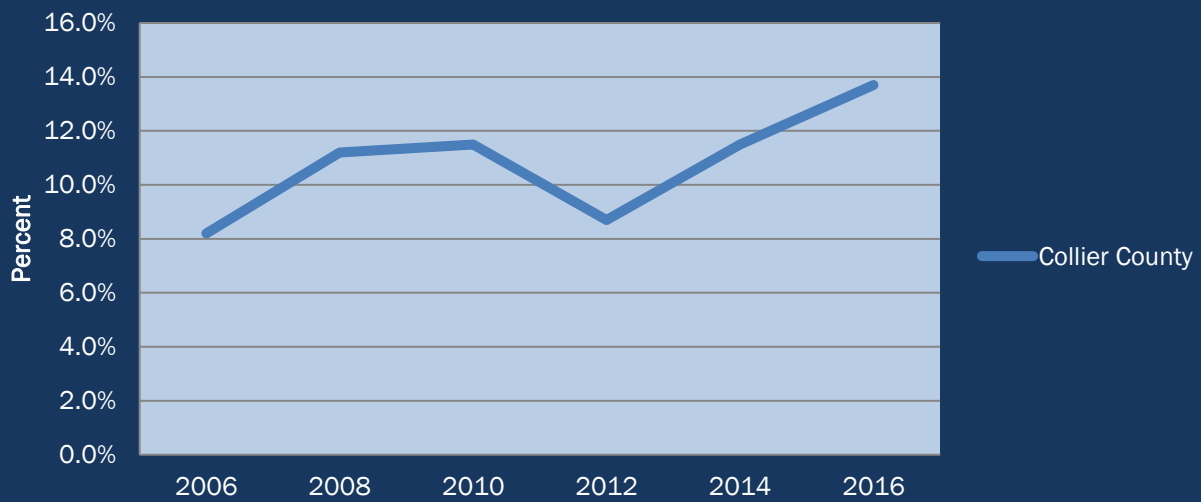
While obesity rates for children under two and high school students have declined over the past decade, the middle school obesity rate has risen.



**Source for 2017 Data:** WIC children >= 2 years who are overweight or obese | Florida Department of Health (n.d.). Retrieved October 14, 2017 from <http://www.flhealthcharts.com/charts/OtherIndicators/NonVitalIndRateOnlyDataViewer.aspx?cid=0679>

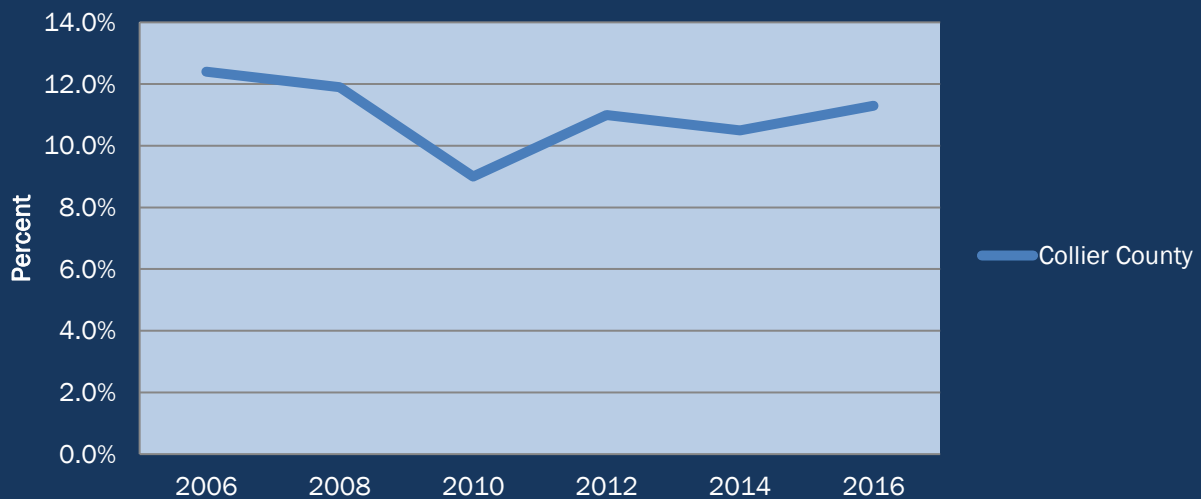
<sup>10</sup> United States, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, National Center for Health Statistics. (2017, March 31). *Birthweight and Gestation*. Retrieved from <https://www.cdc.gov/nchs/fastats/birthweight.htm>.

**Table 20: Percentage of Middle School Students with a BMI at or above 95th percentile**



**Source for 2017 Data:** Florida Youth Tobacco Survey (FYTS). (n.d.). Retrieved October 14, 2017, from <http://www.floridahealth.gov/statistics-and-data/survey-data/florida-youth-survey/florida-youth-tobacco-survey/index.html>

**Table 21: Percentage of High School Students with a BMI at or above 95th percentile**



**Source for 2017 Data:** Florida Youth Tobacco Survey (FYTS). (n.d.). Retrieved October 14, 2017, from <http://www.floridahealth.gov/statistics-and-data/survey-data/florida-youth-survey/florida-youth-tobacco-survey/index.html>

The impact of childhood obesity is both short and long term, thereby increasing the risk of a number of adverse conditions including heart disease, cancer, and diabetes. Recent studies have even shown it impairs economic success by showing an increased likelihood of not pursuing higher education or successfully competing in the workplace<sup>11</sup>. Accordingly, it is a strong measure of the near- and long-term health of children.

As demonstrated in Tables 19-21, the childhood obesity rate in Collier County varies in accordance with age group. The overweight/obesity rate in children under two years old who receive Women, Infants, and Children Food and Nutrition Service (WIC) has decreased by 6.1% since the first available dataset in 2005. Furthermore, the rate of obesity among high school students has declined by 1.1% since 2006. However, the obesity rate among middle school students in Collier County has risen 5.5% in the same timespan.

Several stakeholders spoke ardently on the impact of the obesity rate and all correlated health issues on child wellbeing in Collier County. While commending NCEF and community stakeholders for improving overall access to healthcare, respondents cited the need to further reduce rates of childhood obesity in order to improve the lives of Collier County's children and decrease health-system costs. Some stakeholders suggested scaling existing, local initiatives that have shown great promise for decreasing childhood obesity countywide. In addition, it was also suggested to initiate a communitywide campaign to reduce obesity and promote a healthier daily lifestyle as an urgently needed and highly beneficial initiative for improving the health of children in Collier County, as well as reducing system-level health costs.



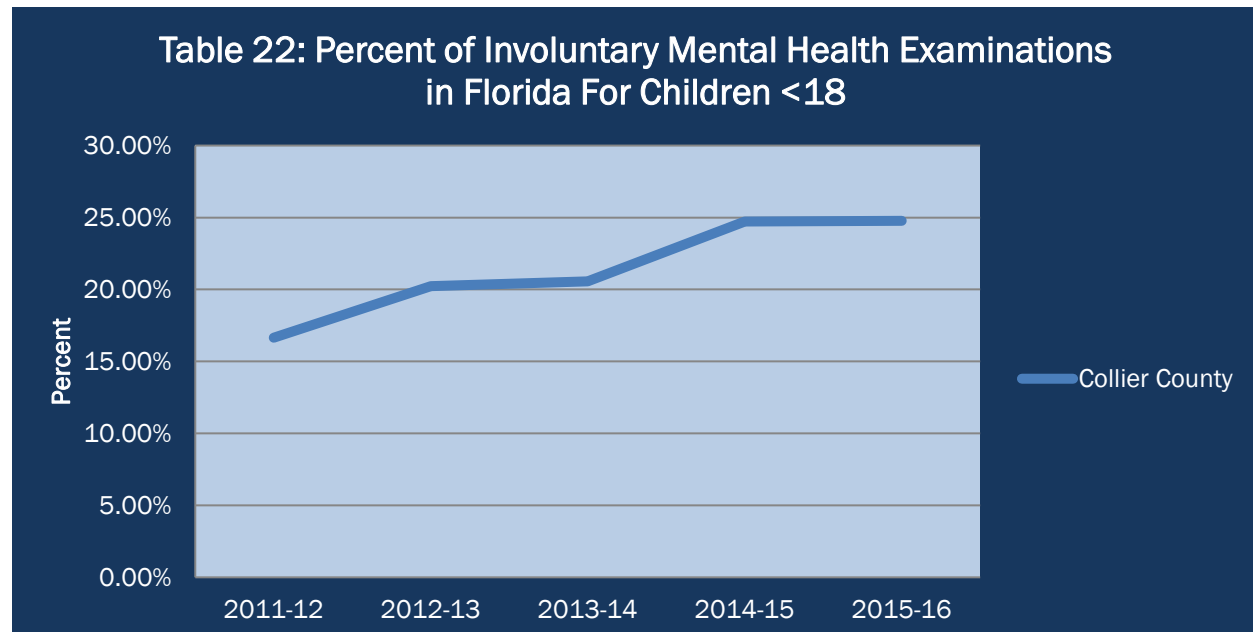
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<sup>11</sup> Neighmond, P. (Host). (2010, July 28). Impact of Childhood Obesity Goes Beyond Health [Radio broadcast episode]. <http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=128804121>.



## Metric 14: Involuntary Mental Health Examinations in Children and Adolescents

The rate of children and adolescents (under age 18) receiving involuntary mental health examinations has increased over 8% since 2011.



**Source for 2017 Data:** Christy, A., Guenther, C., Jenkins, K., Ringhoff, D., & Rhode, S. (2017, March). *The Baker Act: The Florida Mental Health Act Fiscal Year 2015/2016 Annual Report* (Rep.). Retrieved October 14, 2017, from Florida Department of Children and Families website.

Mental health includes myriad challenges, including anxiety, mood, psychotic, and personality disorders. Children suffering from mental health illness are at great risk of social isolation, low academic achievement and participation in post-secondary education, suicide, violence, and criminality. If mental health problems continue untreated in their adult years, today's children struggling with mental health illness may find it difficult to eliminate the psychological and environmental factors that, in turn, could lead to exasperated mental health issues in their own children.

It is challenging to identify datasets that accurately reflect the need for and current availability of mental health services in a specific locale. Much of the related data is neither tracked nor publicly available anywhere in the nation. However, both NCEF leadership and the subsequently interviewed stakeholders repeatedly cited mental and behavioral health supports as the largest gap in child wellbeing services in Collier County to date; thus, it is crucial to assess the current state as accurately as possible.

To provide a sense of the larger mental health need, this study utilized involuntary mental health examinations for children under 18 collected by the Florida Department of Children and Families (FDCF) and reported in *The Baker Act: The Florida Mental Health Act Fiscal Year 2015-16 Annual Report*. FDCF defines involuntary mental health examinations (allowable by law under Florida's Baker Act) as a period in which an individual is held involuntarily in a state facility to allow for an assessment of his or her mental state by a health practitioner.

Involuntary examinations are usually initiated by law enforcement or mental health professionals, with a justification that the individual is in danger of harming him/herself or others. For minor children, the length of the hold is no longer than 12 hours.<sup>12</sup> This is reflective of only a portion of the children suffering from mental illness in Collier County but is the best available dataset to begin to understand the magnitude of this challenge.

The data in Table 22 show that the percent of the total number of involuntary mental health examinations conducted in Florida for children under 18 increased 8.1% between the 2005-06 and 2011-12 fiscal years. This correlates to the statewide trend identified in the FDCF report: between FY 10/11 and FY 15/16, involuntary examinations for children increased 49.3%, even as the statewide population only grew 5.5% in the same time period.

While this dataset is limited to students referred for examinations and does not represent the full gamut of children in need of or currently receiving mental and/or behavioral health services, it does speak to how rapidly the need for expanded supports is growing, both in Collier County and across the state. Furthermore, it corroborates the intensity of the need for mental and behavioral health services indicated qualitatively in the interview and survey responses. Further, most of the experts engaged in this study acknowledged that significant progress has been made over the past decade, but that further expansion of mental health services is needed.

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<sup>12</sup> The Baker Act The Florida Mental Health Act (Rep.). (2017, March).  
Retrieved <http://www.dcf.state.fl.us/programs/samh/publications/OpenAttachment.pdf>

## Section 5: Substance Abuse and Crime

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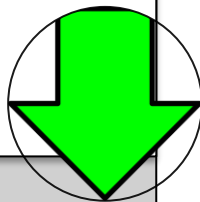
Substance abuse and crime are reflective of one extreme end of the continuum of child well-being but, as noted in preceding sections, often arise from challenges related to poverty, education, and health. The metrics included in this section are:

- Illicit Drug and Alcohol Use by Middle and High Schoolers.
- Referrals to the Juvenile Justice System.

Each of the identified metrics is represented in the tables following, with an accompanying descriptor of the metric's relevance.

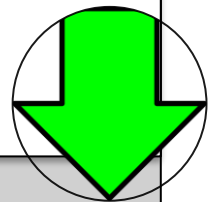
- The percentages of middle and high school students using illicit drugs and/or alcohol have shown a slight decrease since 2000.

**Illicit Drug and Alcohol Use in Youth**



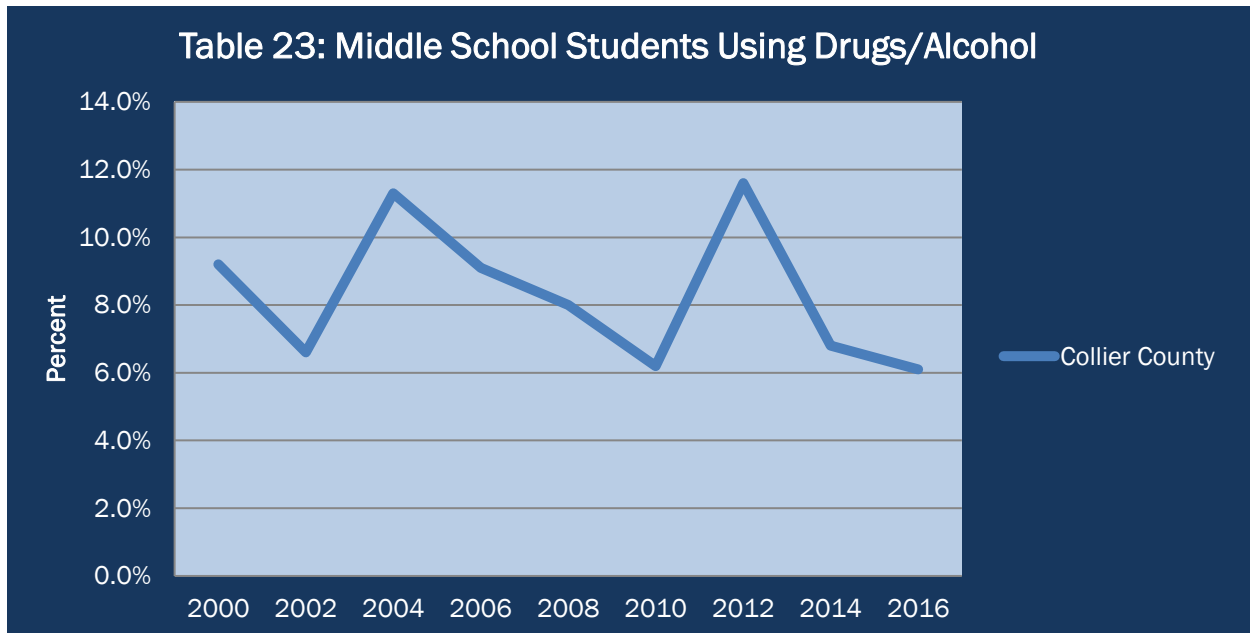
- The number of youth referred to the juvenile justice system has experienced a 53% decrease since 2005 when the first Child Wellbeing Study was conducted, and a 60% decrease since the decade high for referrals in 2006-07.

**Referrals to the Juvenile Justice System**



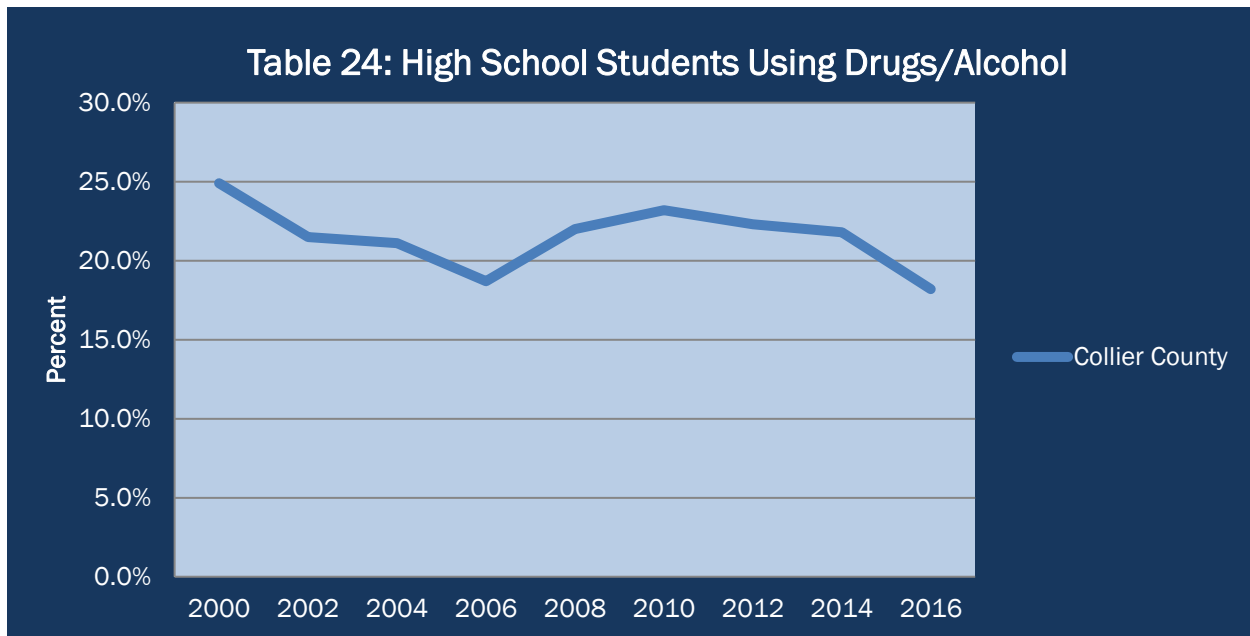
## Metric 15: Illicit Drug and Alcohol Use by Middle and High Schoolers

The percentages of middle and high school students using illicit drugs or alcohol have shown a slight decrease since 2000.



**Source for 2017 Data:** 2016 Florida Youth Substance Abuse Survey – Collier County Report. (2016). Tallahassee: Florida Department of Children and Families.

**Note:** In the 2010 edition this data was drawn from 2008 Florida Youth Substance Abuse Survey – Collier County Report. (2008). Tallahassee: Florida Department of Children and Families.



**Source for 2017 Data:** 2016 Florida Youth Substance Abuse Survey – Collier County Report. (2016). Tallahassee: Florida Department of Children and Families.

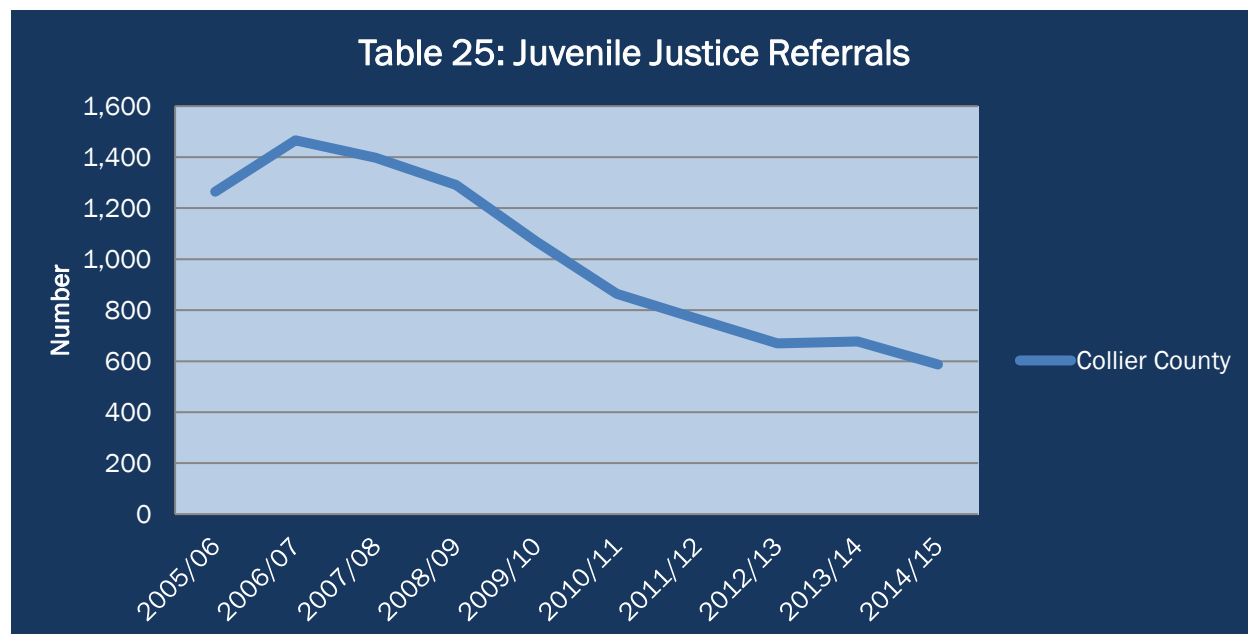
**Note:** In the 2010 edition this data was drawn from 2008 Florida Youth Substance Abuse Survey – Collier County Report. (2008). Tallahassee: Florida Department of Children and Families.

Teenage drug use is a crucial component of fully assessing wellbeing in children and adolescents. Research has consistently shown a correlation between early drug use and the development of serious health risks, including drug addiction, exposure to infectious diseases, incidences of risky behavior (such as unprotected sexual activity and driving under the influence), criminality, and mental impairment. This metric examines the percentage of grade 6-12 students in Collier County who self-reported using an illicit drug or alcohol in the 30 days prior to completing the survey. As self-reported data, there is a high likelihood that the levels of usage are underreported to some degree, but this still remains the best publicly available metric for analysis of this important indicator of child wellbeing.

As presented in Tables 23-24, the data indicate a trend toward middle and high schoolers abstaining from illicit drug use since approximately 2008-2010, when the highest rates of drug and alcohol use were reported. This is further evidenced by stakeholder reports. In general, interviewees and survey respondents did not identify teenage substance abuse as a primary concern. However, the majority of interviewees did identify parental substance abuse, and its correlational impact on children, as an acute challenge for Collier County. Across the board, thought leaders, representing a spectrum of service arenas, cited the negative effects of the opioid epidemic on the children they serve. The repercussions anecdotally reported include an increase in the number of babies born with substance addictions, an increase in the number of children in the foster care system, and increased rates of homelessness.

## Metric 16: Referrals to the Juvenile Justice System

The number of youth referred to the juvenile justice system has experienced a 53% decrease since 2005 when the first Child Wellbeing Study was conducted, and a 60% decrease since the decade high for referrals in 2006-07.



**Source for 2017 Data:** Youths referred for delinquency | KIDS COUNT Data Center. (n.d.). Retrieved October 14, 2017, from <http://datacenter.kidscount.org/data/tables/5310-youths-referred-for-delinquency?loc=11&loc=5#10-florida-kids-count>

On the most extreme end of child behavior, level of criminality can provide a sense of those children facing the greatest challenges now and, if unchecked, into their adulthood. Unsurprisingly, youth criminality has a high correlation with future drug use, dropout, employment and poverty, and incarceration. Referral rates of community youth to the local juvenile justice system is one of several metrics often used to identify trends in youth criminality. High criminality rates within the community have further negative implications, such as increased rates of drug abuse and gang activity, so it is an important community metric to monitor when assessing resident wellbeing.

As presented in Table 25, the number of referrals in FY 2014/15 (587) is a 53% decrease from the number commissioned 2005/06, (1,265), and a 60% decrease from the decade high of 1,466 referrals in FY 2006/07.

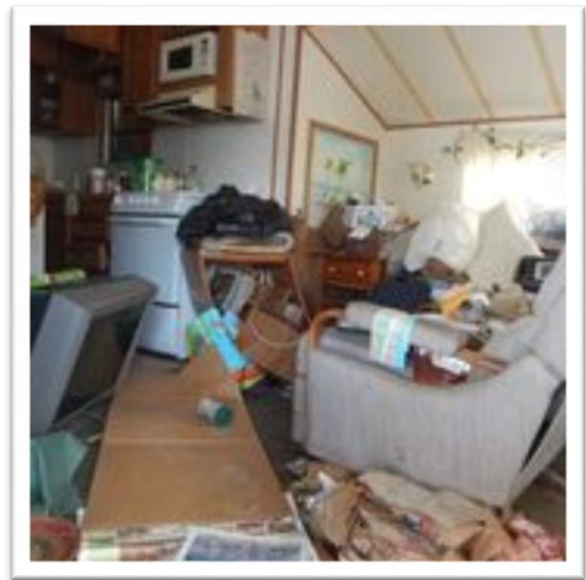
The decline in referrals may be attributable to a number of factors previously cited in the qualitative data, including the rising graduation rate and targeted efforts to improve the availability of quality programming for community youths during out-of-school times, such as after school, over the summer, and during school holidays. One interviewee referenced efforts by Collier County law enforcement to provide additional supports to first-time offenders as a means of reducing the criminality recidivism rate, which could be a contributing factor as well.

## Impact of Hurricane Irma

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Data collection for this study began in late August 2017. Collection efforts were interrupted on September 10, 2017 when Collier County and surrounding areas of Florida were hit by Hurricane Irma, the first major hurricane to make landfall in the state since 2004. Data collection continued after a post-storm pause, putting Civitas Strategies in the unique position of having collected anecdotal data both pre- and post-storm. Although long-term implications of the storm are unclear, we would be remiss in failing to include qualitative data on the short-term impacts of the storm, as reported by leaders in Collier County.

At the writing of this report, storm damage costs are estimated at \$320 million in Collier County alone, with much of the most catastrophic destruction occurring in some of the county's most impoverished communities, including Immokalee, Everglades City, East Naples, and North Naples. Accordingly, multiple stakeholders cited the significance of the storm's short-term impact on family poverty, for both families already struggling financially and those suffering the effects of situational poverty due to storm-related job loss. Experts across social service arenas stated that their organizations have already begun to see implications of this shift in regard to increased homelessness, an increase in students' geographic mobility, and an overall increase in need for support services for children as a whole. As one stakeholder remarked, "Parents can't focus on their children's individualized needs when all their energy is devoted to covering the basics of food, shelter, and medical care."





One area of particular concern to numerous stakeholders was the storm's impact on the availability of housing, especially in lower-income communities. Many contributors noted the immediate decrease in housing stock on account of storm damage along with the corollary rise in pricing for what is available. In addition to higher pricing, others stated that much of the transitory housing available exists primarily in the more isolated regions of the county, which are outside the range of standard commuter patterns with little access to public transportation. This dynamic could worsen situational poverty to an

even greater extent, as it widens the already existing geographic gap between Collier County's most impoverished communities and lucrative employment opportunities. Many interviewees expressed grave concern as to the economic and emotional pressure these shifts will put on families already struggling to make ends meet.

In the aftermath of Hurricane Irma many of the community-based agencies rapidly shifted missions to support children and families in poverty in new ways. As one community-based organization leader said, "Yesterday we were an educational organization and today we are a relief agency." This rapid shift has highlighted the ability of community-based organizational leadership to respond to new and unexpected challenges and has, by all accounts, been done admirably. It has also shown the extent and value of a child-services system that NCEF had a large part in developing. One outlier that became apparent was Everglades City. As community-based organizations responded to the immediate needs of their own communities, Everglades City remained largely unserved — illustrating the need for additional, local supports for this community in poverty.



As noted above, recovery efforts in Collier County are still in nascent stages, and the long-term impacts of the storm on the area's residents are yet to be determined. However, it is clear from all respondents that short-term impact to local public-serving organizations in their effort to provide relief is significant, and should be tracked and monitored for future wellbeing studies.



## Conclusion

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For over 12 years, NCEF has admirably taken on the challenge of tracking and interpreting child wellbeing to guide its investments and efforts, as well as those of Collier County as a whole. NCEF's willingness to pursue this endeavor should be commended and be continued into the future. Gains have been made for the benefit of Collier County's children in a number of areas, but additional gains will take time and perseverance. Though the additional recommendations for community effort and investment cited in this document are few, they will take great effort by the organization and leadership within Collier County to realize. It is the hope of the study team that they are taken for the benefit of Collier County's children now and into the future.

