

The State of Child Wellbeing in Collier County, Florida 2022



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Acknowledgements & Note from NCEF

The Naples Children & Education Foundation graciously thanks all the interviewees, focus group participants, 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.

It is also important to note that at the time this report was being finalized, the communities of Collier County were significantly impacted by Hurricane Ian. The data in this study report reflects data gathered and analyzed prior to the storm's landfall. To acknowledge this change in community circumstance and needs post-hurricane, a [report addendum](#) has been added that reflects NCEF's emergency response and recovery efforts.

We also want to thank the team at Luminary Evaluation Group for coordinating and participating on this project.

Introduction

The Naples Children & Education Foundation (NCEF) was established in 2000 with the vision of making a profound and sustaining difference in the lives of at-risk children in Collier County, Florida. Since its inception, NCEF has been committed to providing timely data on child wellbeing to measure movement toward this goal. In 2022, NCEF engaged Luminary Evaluation Group to provide a critical update to the Foundation's long-standing Child Wellbeing Study. The longitudinal study provides a comprehensive description of current conditions and needs of children in Collier County using the most up-to-date and relevant data.

NCEF's Child Wellbeing Study was developed under the guidance of the Foundation's trustees and staff to inform their ongoing efforts to provide impactful grant-making in support of local organizations improving the lives of children. The study 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. Consequently, this updated report examines the services and systems addressing the needs of Collier County's children in poverty and identifies opportunities that will improve the physical, emotional, and educational lives of the county's most vulnerable children and adolescents.

This 2022 publication builds on NCEF's ongoing effort towards timely and thorough data collection and analysis relating to child wellbeing in the county, following previously published NCEF child wellbeing studies in 2005, 2010, and 2017. This version offers an update to the key indicators of Collier County's child wellbeing, as well as to NCEF's mission and philanthropic interests. Additionally, the 2022 publication also accounts for the impact that the COVID-19 pandemic has had on children and youth, and how the Foundation's interventions and supports in response to these unprecedented circumstances have been experienced by the community.

For this updated study, data are presented back to the initial 2005 study where possible to provide a longitudinal perspective. Given NCEF's focus on data-driven, community-informed decision making, new measures have been added over the years to reflect changing external conditions and environmental factors. In addition to selected metrics, qualitative data collection via interviews and focus groups with carefully chosen local experts and community members adds important context, detail, and rich perspective to the report. The process is 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

NCEF and Luminary considered the previous editions of the Collier County Child Wellbeing Study, “best-practice” studies of child wellbeing from across the United States, the base of research associated with different data, and the severity of impact on the lives of child development from birth through adulthood. For example, in acknowledgement of the mental health crisis experienced by youth across the country, additional metrics related to youth mental health were added in the 2022 report. A summation of the metrics selected and the corresponding trend in data is presented in the Summary of Findings below.

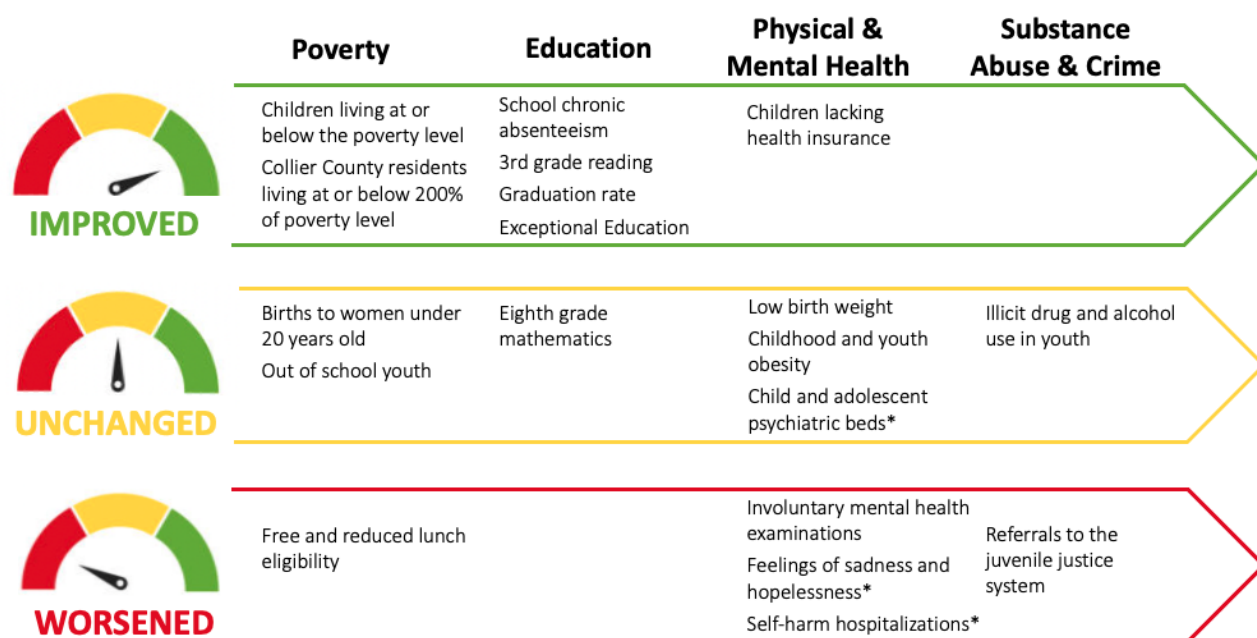
Study Overview

This 2022 study follows a similar structure to 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 incorporated into the report this year that examines the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and collective-impact initiatives. Recommendations based on all data follow in the final section.



Summary of Findings

Every updated Child Wellbeing Study has provided data trends over time to indicate recent changes or comparisons. The following figure summarizes the trend in each metric from 2017 to the most recent data available. Three new metrics were added for the 2022 report under Physical & Mental Health, noted below with an asterisk.



*New metric added since the 2017 Child Wellbeing Study

As illustrated, several areas indicate improvement and the data shows gains in at least one metric in each of the four key areas of poverty, education, physical and mental health, and substance abuse and crime. However, trends have been neutral or negative in nine metrics – indicating the effects of ever-changing external conditions, population increases, and the need for further efforts to support Collier County’s children. Trends for each metric are detailed in the corresponding section of the report, following the subsequent review of how the study’s data were collected and analyzed.

Methodology

Luminary collected both quantitative and qualitative data to inform this study. These data were analyzed by the Luminary 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

The Child Wellbeing study emphasizes publicly available datasets in collecting quantitative data. The rationale for this was twofold. First, publicly available data tend to have a higher level of credibility with community leaders and elected officials compared to 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 easily accessed and yields opportunity for more frequent and current comparisons and analysis of trends in Collier County.

The indicators included in this study were a result of a thorough review process for the 2017 report. The process included a literature review of child and adolescent-focused quantitative research, as well as conducting interviews with multiple stakeholders in the Collier County child services landscape. The included indicators were the most compelling and rigorously studied 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.

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

Documentary data was also utilized 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 provide a deeper understanding of the wellbeing of Collier County's children.

For example, reference was often made to publications, reports, and research from several Florida state agencies. At the county level, mental health data from the Florida Department of Health in Collier County, the 2020 Florida Youth Substance Abuse Survey, and early learning data from Future Ready Collier provided valuable information.

Analysis and Observations

In addition to publicly available quantitative data and existing documentary data, like previous iterations, this 2022 study is supplemented by qualitative data collection and analysis. Primarily, qualitative data fills in behavioral, perceptual, and other parts of the analysis that cannot easily, or in some cases at all, be quantitated. In other words, qualitative data provides rich and important detail that supports and provides context to quantitative findings. Furthermore, qualitative data provides a “real-time” perspective that augments quantitative and documentary measurements that, by their nature, provide a lagging indication. Qualitative data helps in understanding what is going on in the community that is affecting quantitative metrics and gives a sense of a future trend.

The current study relies on two important qualitative data sets. First, to illuminate and provide additional important detail to quantitative data, the Luminary team conducted in-depth interviews with community thought leaders who have expert-level knowledge on Collier County children and poverty. Participants included local leaders from health, education, community-based human services, child and youth services, domestic violence services, the academy, and philanthropy. These interviews were conducted over a 6-week period in mid-2022.

Second, the study team coordinated and conducted community focus groups whose participants were drawn from three stakeholder segments: education, community-based organizations, and families. Participants were selected and invited to these sessions to solicit further details and collective conversation around study topics. Sessions were hosted on a video platform to ensure inclusion.

As critical qualitative data sources, study interviews and focus groups allow expert local voices to add context, background, and perspective that supports and enhancing the understanding and analysis of quantitative data sets. Specifically, study interviews and focus groups 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 informing study findings, anonymous quotes from qualitative datasets are included in the narrative to further advance understanding of child wellbeing.

The Luminary team analyzed all the data collected, quantitative and qualitative, to identify trends over time and opportunities to improve the lives of Collier County's at-risk children. 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. Leveraging their collective wisdom from working in communities throughout the United States, the entire Luminary team participated in the analysis and considered the overall trends and potential negative or positive impact on the lives of children now and into adulthood.

Study Authors

The 2022 Study of Child Wellbeing in Collier County was conducted as a collaboration between the Naples Children & Education Foundation and Luminary Evaluation Group. Luminary Evaluation Group (www.luminaryeval.com) is a nationally recognized consultancy firm supporting public serving organizations across a variety of industries. Alison LaRocca, President and CEO of Luminary Evaluation Group, was the study director and a co-author. Shannon Stagner, Senior Associate for Luminary Evaluation Group, was the study's co-author.

Metrics of Child Wellbeing

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** – 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.

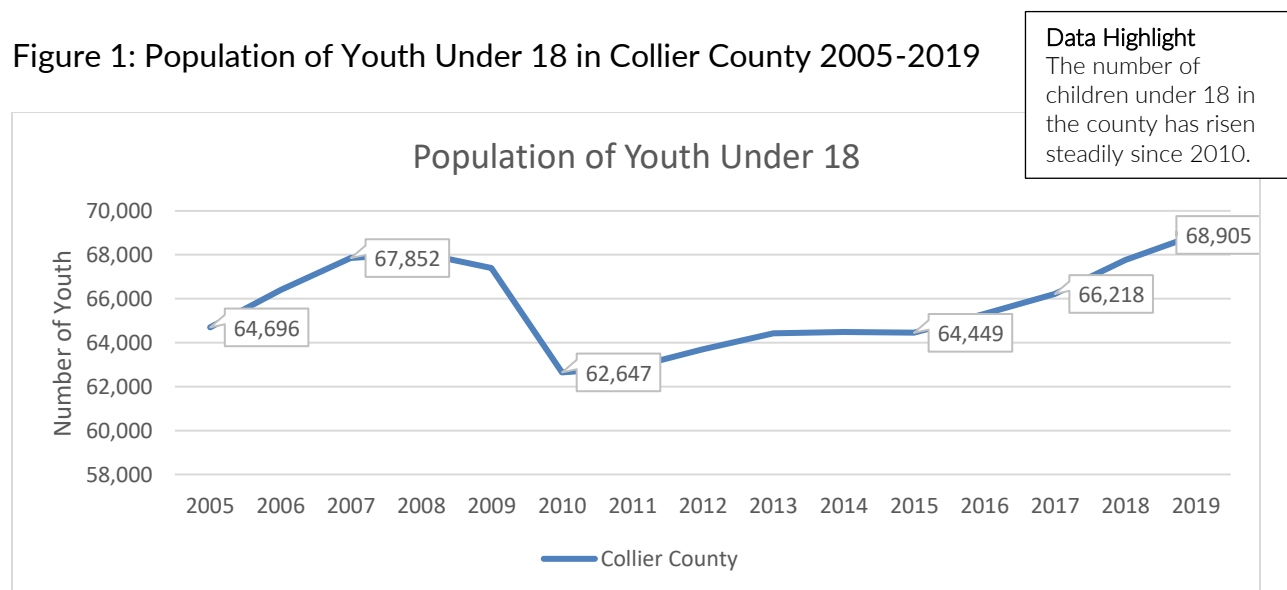


Section 1: Demographics

Collier County is a large Florida county with 375,752 residents, based on the United States Census of 2020—an estimated increase of over 70,000 residents since 2005.^{1,2} When compared to the rest of the United States, Collier County is diverse: as of 2019, 24.5% of residents were born outside of the United States compared to 13.7% for the rest of the country. Still, over 87% of the residents in the county are White (non-Hispanic and non-Latino).³ According to Census data, Collier County is larger than 73% of other counties in Florida and has experienced a greater increase of residents than 76% of Florida counties between 2010 and 2020. In fact, Collier County is now projected to grow to over 452,000 by 2030 when just five years ago it was projected to hit 435,000 by the same year.⁴

In terms of the population of children under the age of 18, Collier County has experienced some changes in both overall size and racial distribution. As noted in the previous report, the youth population dramatically decreased from 2009 to 2010 but it has steadily increased since then. In fact, the number of youth under 18 in 2019 matched the peak in 2008 (See Figure 1).⁵

Figure 1: Population of Youth Under 18 in Collier County 2005-2019



¹ Office of Economic & Demographic Research The Florida Legislature. (June 10, 2022). Retrieved June 28, 2022, from <http://edr.state.fl.us/Content/population-demographics/data/index-floridaproducts.cfm>

² Office of Economic & Demographic Research The Florida Legislature. (June 10, 2022). Retrieved June 28, 2022, from <http://edr.state.fl.us/Content/population-demographics/data/2000-2010RevisedIntercensal.pdf>

³ Deloitte, U. S. A. (2020). *Collier County, FL*. Data USA. Retrieved June 17, 2022, from <https://datausa.io/profile/geo/collier-county-fl>

⁴ Office of Economic & Demographic Research, The Florida Legislature. (2022). Retrieved June 17, 2022, from <http://edr.state.fl.us/Content/population-demographics/data/index-floridaproducts.cfm>

⁵ Population under age 18 | KIDS COUNT Data Center. (n.d.). Retrieved June 17, 2022, from <https://datacenter.kidscount.org/data/tables/584-population-under-age-18?loc=11&loct=5#detailed/5/1870/false/36,868,867,133,38,35,18,17,16/any/1377,15498>

Figure 2 illustrates that the size of each age cohort under 18 grows at relatively constant rates since 2010. But there is a noticeable increase in the number of young children between the ages of 0 and 4 from 2015 to 2019.⁶

Figure 2: Population of Youth Under 18 by Age Group from 2005-2019

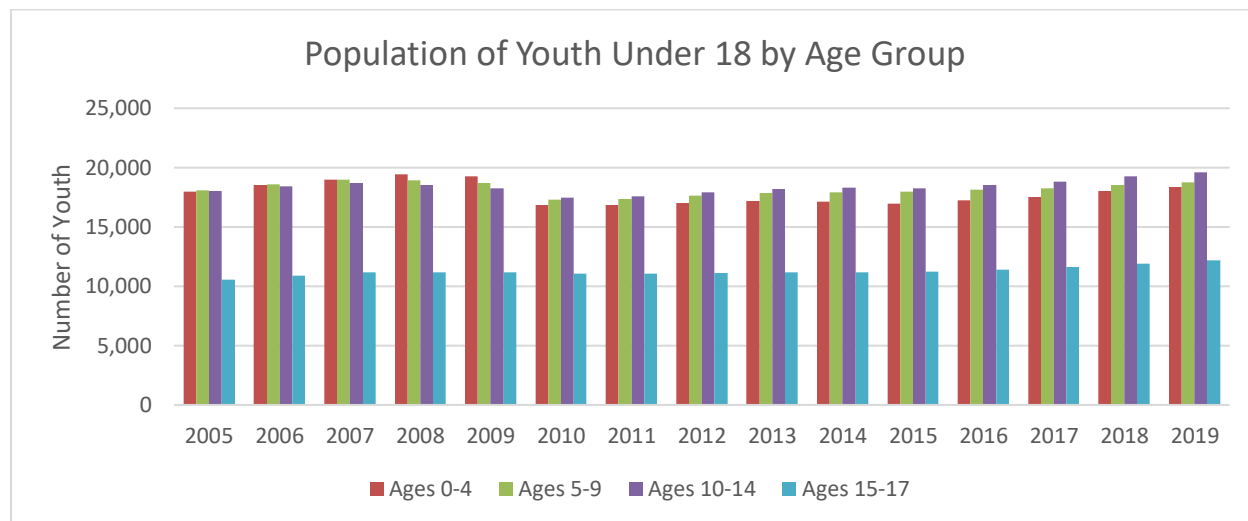
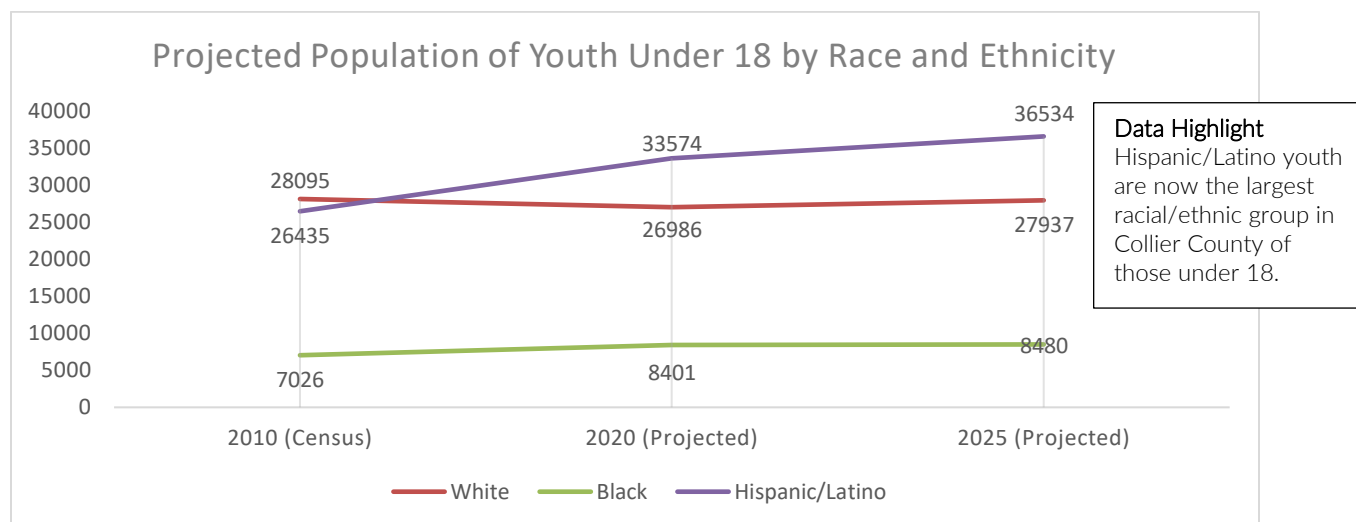


Figure 3 shows the projected population of youth under 18 disaggregated by race and ethnicity based on Census data from 2010. Evident in the graph below, the increase of youth is not evenly distributed across racial and ethnic groups. It shows that the Hispanic/Latino youth now make up the largest racial/ethnic group in Collier County.⁷

⁶ Population age 0 to 17 | KIDS COUNT Data Center. (n.d.). Retrieved June 17, 2022, from <https://datacenter.kidscount.org/data/tables/588-population-age-15-to-17?loc=11&loct=5#detailed/5/1870/false/36,868,867,133,38,35,18,17,16/any/1385>

⁷ Office of Economic & Demographic Research, The Florida Legislature. (2022). Retrieved June 17, 2022, from http://edr.state.fl.us/Content/population-demographics/data/Medium_Projections_ARSH.pdf

Figure 3: Projected Population of Youth Under 18 by Race and Ethnicity



Using 2010 Census data and projected Census data for 2020 and 2025, the number of White (non-Hispanic and non-Latino) youth is projected to have a 4% decrease from 2010 to 2020, while Black (non-Hispanic and non-Latino) and Hispanic or Latino (any race) groups are expected to experience a 20% and 27% increase, respectively (See Table 1).⁸

Table 1: Percent Change of Population of Youth Under 18 (Race/Ethnicity)

	Percent Change of Population of Youth Under 18 by Race and Ethnicity		
Timeframe	White (non-Hispanic and non-Latino)	Black or African American (non-Hispanic and non-Latino)	Hispanic or Latino (any race)
2010 - 2020	-3.95%	19.57%	27.01%
2020 - 2025	3.52%	0.94%	8.82%
2010 - 2025	-0.56%	20.69%	38.20%

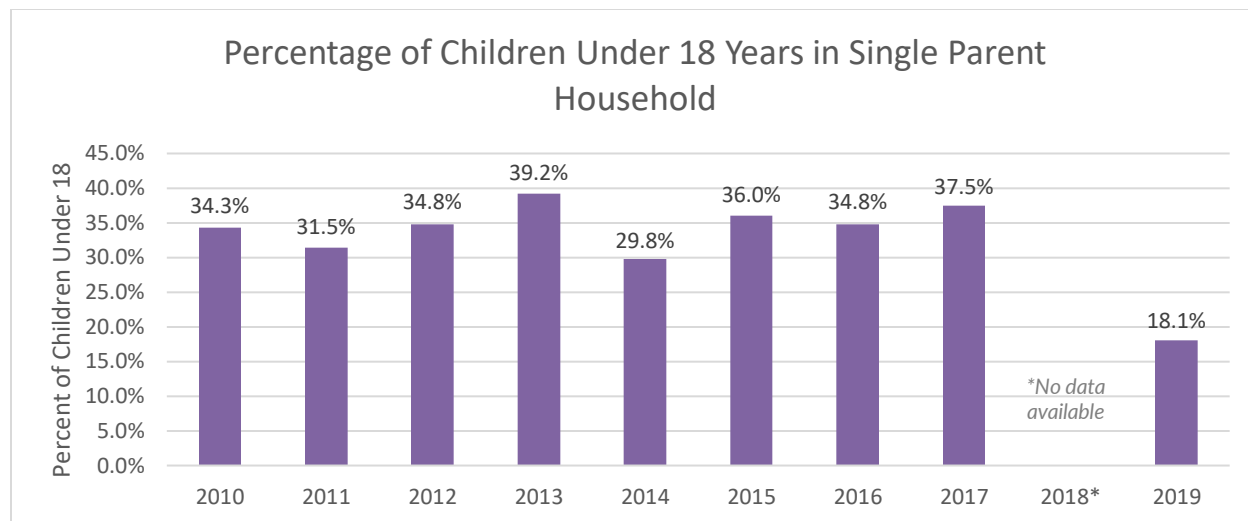
While the population of Collier County is still overwhelmingly comprised of Whites (non-Hispanic and non-Latino), these trends suggest that the influx in new residents, especially youth, is comprised of a significant proportion of non-White individuals. If these youth stay in the county, this can result in significant long term demographic changes.

Research has shown that single-parent households can experience additional stressors with, typically, fewer supports. Figure 4 presents the percentage of households in Collier County with only one parent present – this rate had been relatively consistent between

⁸ Ibid.

2010 and 2017 but then there was a significant decrease in 2019 to 18%. (No data was available for 2018.)

Figure 4: Percent of Children Under 18 Years in Single Parent Household



Overall, these data points outline a rapidly changing county, and the metrics examined in this study are impacted by these environmental factors. As such, the numbers provide important context to the wellbeing measures of Collier County children.

Section 2: Poverty

Poverty has a variety of definitions and depending on the source and the population being referred to, it describes much more than a lack of money. As such, its expansive scope makes it difficult to identify one single metric that fully encompasses the experience of poverty. In order to form a comprehensive picture of poverty rates in Collier County, Luminary and NCEF leadership selected four metrics that in combination best represent the current poverty landscape for area children:

- 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 births to women under 20 years old
- The percent of youth aged 16 through 19 who are neither enrolled in school nor employed
- The number of children in Collier County receiving free or reduced-cost school lunch⁹

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

POVERTY



CHILDREN IN POVERTY

The proportion of children living at or below 100% of the federal poverty level has decreased by 7.8% from 2017 to 2019 and has decreased by 16.7% from a 14 year high in 2011.



COLLIER COUNTY RESIDENTS IN POVERTY

The rate of Collier residents (of all ages) living at or below 200% of the federal poverty level has decreased by 3% from 2017 to 2020 and has returned to the same level in 2009.



BIRTHRATE

The birthrate among women under 20 years of age in 2020 was 0.5% lower than in 2017.



TEENAGERS NOT IN SCHOOL NOR EMPLOYED

The percentage of teenagers ages 16-19 not in school nor employed decreased marginally by 1.8% from 2017 to 2020.



FREE/REDUCED LUNCH

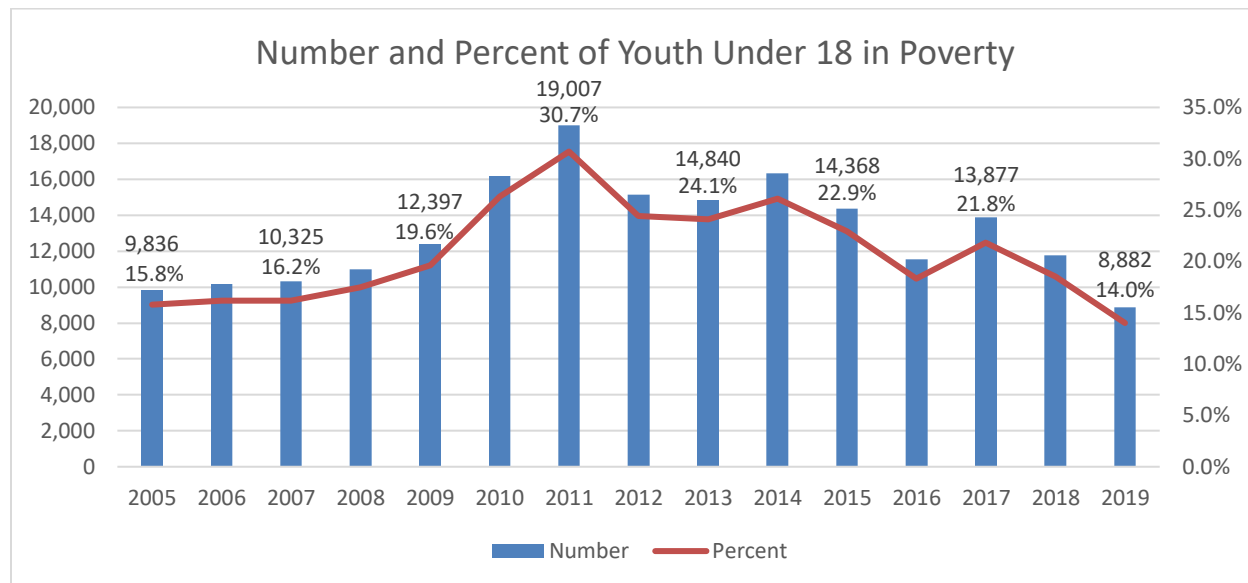
Elementary school children receiving free/reduced lunch has increased 2.3% from 2017 to 2021 and 14.1% since 2005.

⁹ Eligibility for free or reduced price school lunch is based on family income levels set by the US Department of Agriculture and is used as a common heuristic for families who are facing additional economic stress and scarcity.

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

Figure 5 shows the number and percentage of children in Collier County living at or below 100% of the Federal Poverty Level.¹⁰

Figure 5: Percentage of Children in Collier County Living in Poverty



The first metric examined is the number and 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 guideline for a family of four in 2019 was \$25,750. In 2022, the federal poverty levels were set for a single person at \$13,590 (in the continental U.S.). For each additional person in the household, the poverty level increased by \$4,720.

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.**¹¹ 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.

¹⁰ Children under age 18 in poverty | KIDS COUNT Data Center. (n.d.). Retrieved June 21, 2022, 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>

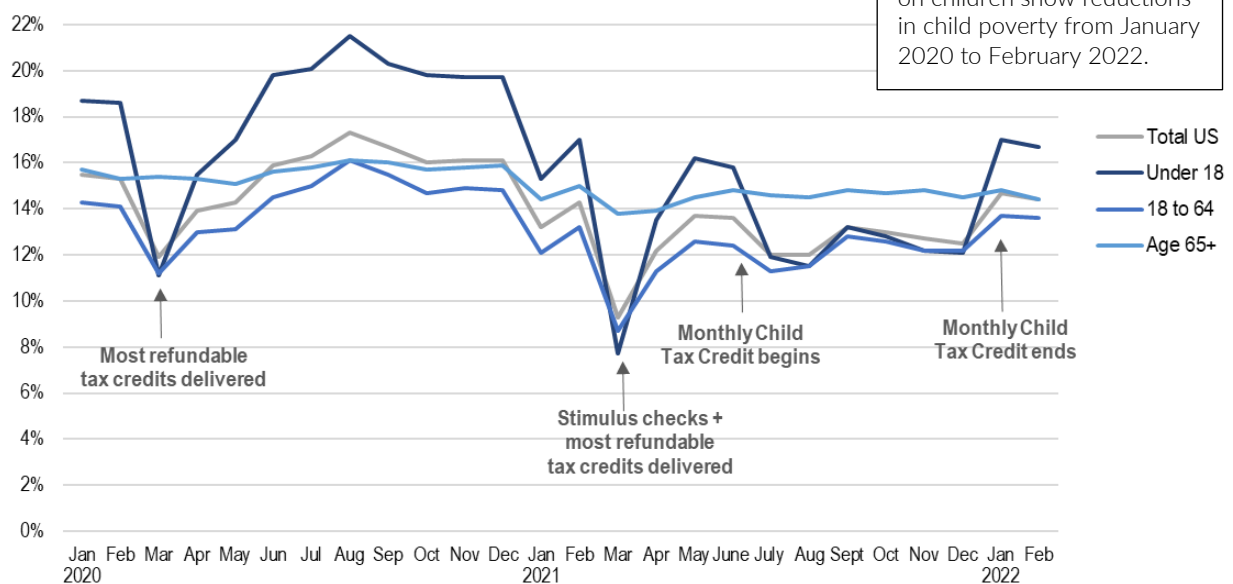
¹¹ Indicators of Child and Youth Well-Being (Rep.). (2016, December). Retrieved from https://www.childtrends.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/12/04_Poverty.pdf

As indicated in Figure 5, the rate of children living at or below 100% of the federal poverty level has generally decreased from a high of 30.7% in 2011 to 14% in 2019. This rate rose in 2020 to 14.9%.¹² Nationally, child poverty rates declined significantly in 2021 as a result of expansions to social safety funds such as stimulus checks and monthly Child Tax Credits during the COVID-19 pandemic.

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 at a young age.

Figure 6 shows the trends in monthly poverty, by age, from January 2020 through February 2022.¹³ As depicted below, the lack of additional safety net funding consistently led to significant increases in childhood poverty rates.

Figure 6: Trends in Monthly Poverty, by Age



¹² U.S. Census Bureau, Estimated Percent of People Age 0-17 in Poverty for Collier County, FL [PPU18FL12021A156NCEN], retrieved from FRED, Federal Reserve Bank of St. Louis; <https://fred.stlouisfed.org/series/PPU18FL12021A156NCEN>, June 29, 2022.

¹³ "Monthly Poverty in 2022 Remains Elevated in February" Poverty and Social Policy Brief (Vol. 6. No. 4), March 23, 2022. Retrieved June 21, 2022 from <https://static1.squarespace.com/static/610831a16c95260dbd68934a/t/623b3453e0ed764d39b715b4/1648047188230/Monthly-poverty-February-2022-CPSP.pdf>

Understanding why a family falls and remains below the federal poverty line is a complex issue. However, national data suggest that the loss of COVID-19 pandemic-related social safety funds and record inflation rates are significant contributing factors. Qualitative research conducted for this study indicates that the lack of affordable housing and increases in cost of living also had a significant impact. Certainly, those individuals and families that were on the financial edge before the pandemic were, and in many cases continue to be, more at risk economically and financially especially as our economy faces increasing inflationary pressures.

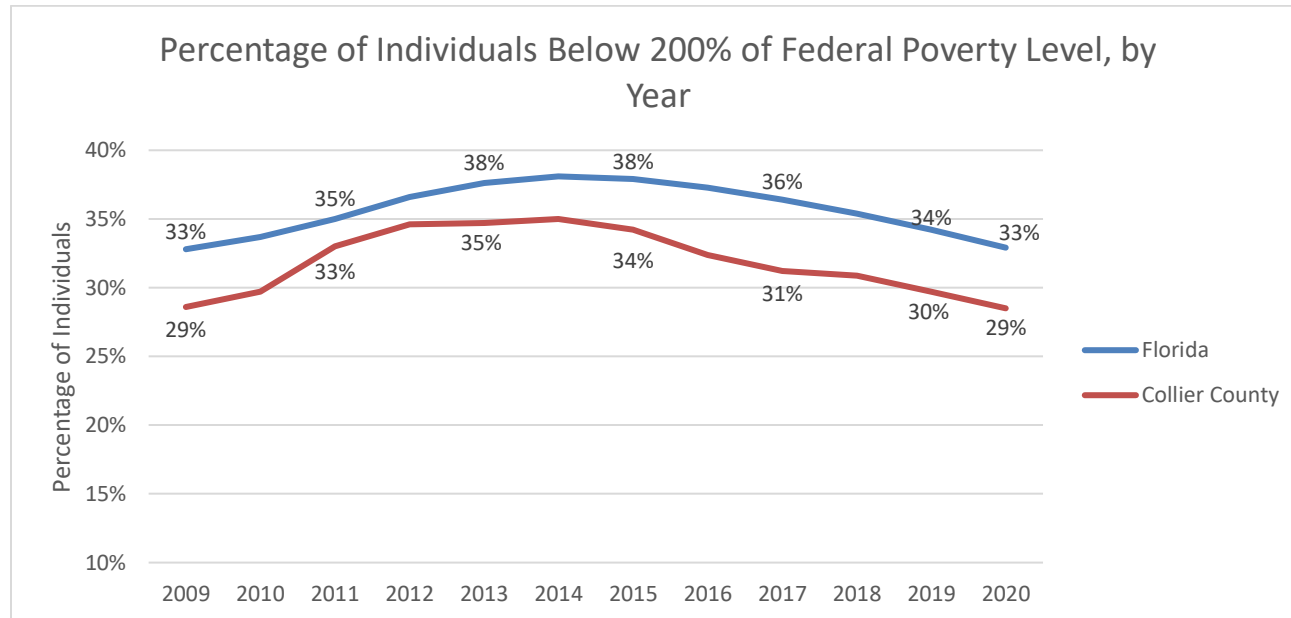
For instance, homelessness was brought up frequently in study interviews and focus groups. Not only is it increasing among the population served by interviewees, but it is also a population that has been disproportionately impacted by the effects of the pandemic. As one interviewee shared: “We have seen more families living in their cars. They don’t have access and they are scared to reach out for help for fear that their kids will be removed from their care.” Focus group participants shared similar observations: “One of the things that we’ve seen is those families who were on the cusp are now homeless. There are waitlists, and not enough places for them to go. The housing issue has been dramatic – for everyone – but especially for single parents.”

Metric 2: All persons living in Collier County at or below 200% of the Federal Poverty Level compared to the state Florida

Figure 7 shows the number and percent of all persons in Collier County and Florida who lived at or below 200% of the federal poverty level.¹⁴

¹⁴ Florida Department of Health. Division of Public Health Statistics and Performance Management. Retrieved June 21, 2022 from <https://www.flhealthcharts.gov/ChartsReports/rdPage.aspx?rdReport=NonVitalIndRateOnly.Dataviewer>

Figure 7: Percent of Collier County Residents Below 200% of the Federal Poverty Level

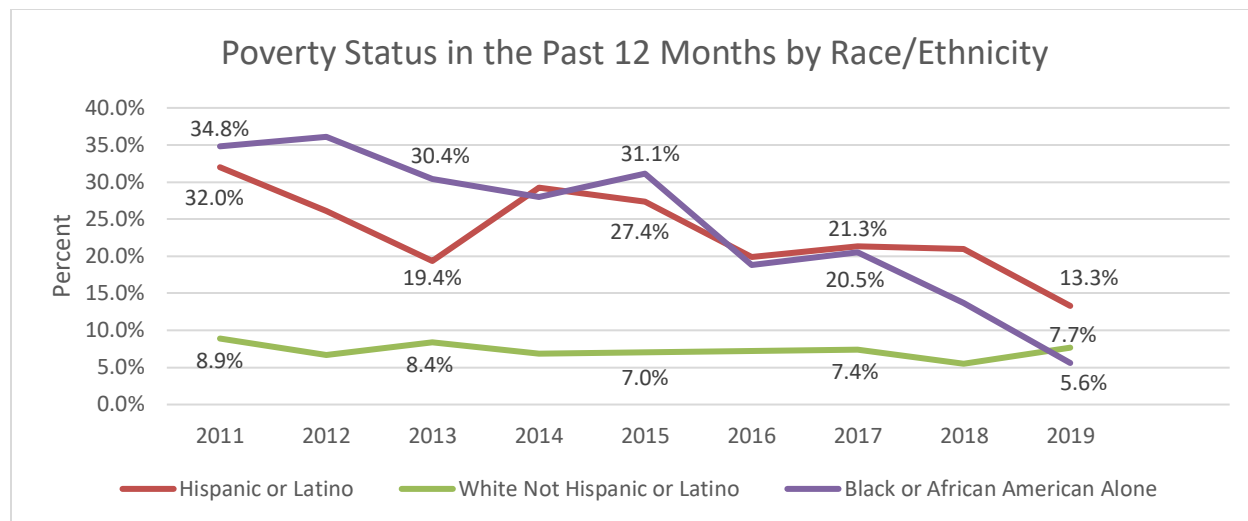


The measure of 200% of the federal poverty line is a metric often used to define a broader scope of poverty. It includes not only the most economically vulnerable families but also the “working poor;” that is, families with wage-earners working at least half time, but who still struggle to get by financially, and to provide adequately for the needs of their children. The 200% federal poverty threshold for a family of four in 2019 is \$51,500. 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.

Similar to the rate for families at the 100% poverty level, those at 200% were decreasing as a percentage of total residents since 2011. And while Collier County’s poverty rate is by no means low, it is worth noting that it has historically been lower than the rest of the state’s poverty rate.

Figure 8 shows the poverty status of all individuals in Collier County in the past 12 months disaggregated by race.¹⁵

Figure 8: Poverty Status in the Past 12 Months by Race/Ethnicity



The per capita rate for whites in Collier County who have experienced poverty in the past 12 months increased between 2018 and 2020, while the rate for other races has decreased during the same time frame.

There are many populations in the county that several interviewees noted remain hidden on the outskirts of the county, or invisible to services, and the “isolation as a result of the pandemic, sustained – or increased – the lack of visibility” for these groups. Overall, the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on families that live under, at, or slightly above the poverty levels has largely been hidden from view due to decreased access to support systems and wrap around services, such as educational institutions and early intervention mechanisms.

Families at this income level are also sensitive to economic pressures like inflation. With inflation rising at the time of this study, more support is needed not only in the community, but also amongst the staff of the agencies being interviewed and included in the study. Most of the organizations interviewed noted how difficult it is for the families they serve to bear the ballooning cost of living in the county. “As prices go up, many of the families we deal with are already stretched and low-income, so these things further impact their ability to have choice – like, do they put gas in their car or buy food.” This was reported not just for those individuals and families in the lowest income bracket, but

¹⁵ United States Census Bureau (n.d.) American Community Survey. Retrieved June 21, 2022, from <https://data.census.gov/cedsci/table?q=S1701%3A%20POVERTY%20STATUS%20IN%20THE%20PAST%2012%20MONTHS&g=0500000US12021&tid=ACST1Y2019.S1701>

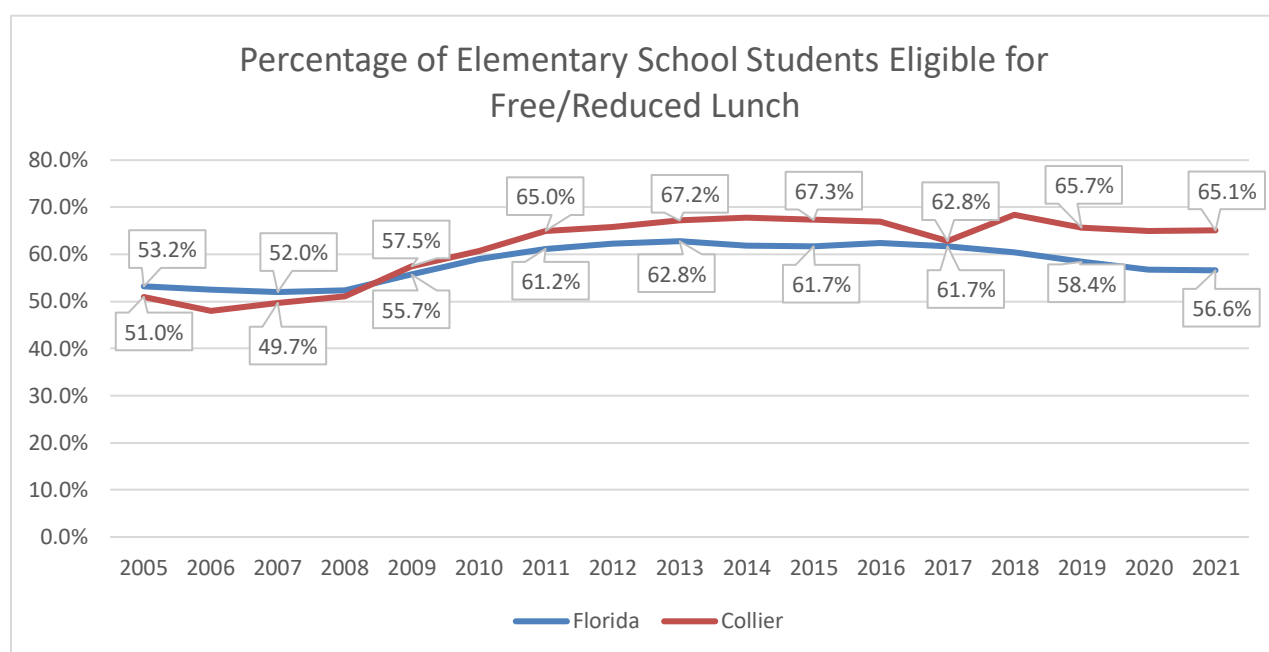
several interviewees reported seeing moderate-income families relying on emergency services.

Metric 3: Free/Reduced Lunch

Figure 9 shows that the percentage of elementary school children who are eligible to receive free or reduced lunch* in Collier County increased 14.1% from 2005 to 2021.¹⁶

*Eligibility for free or reduced-price school lunch is based on family income levels set by the US Department of Agriculture and is used as a common heuristic for families who are facing additional economic stress and scarcity.

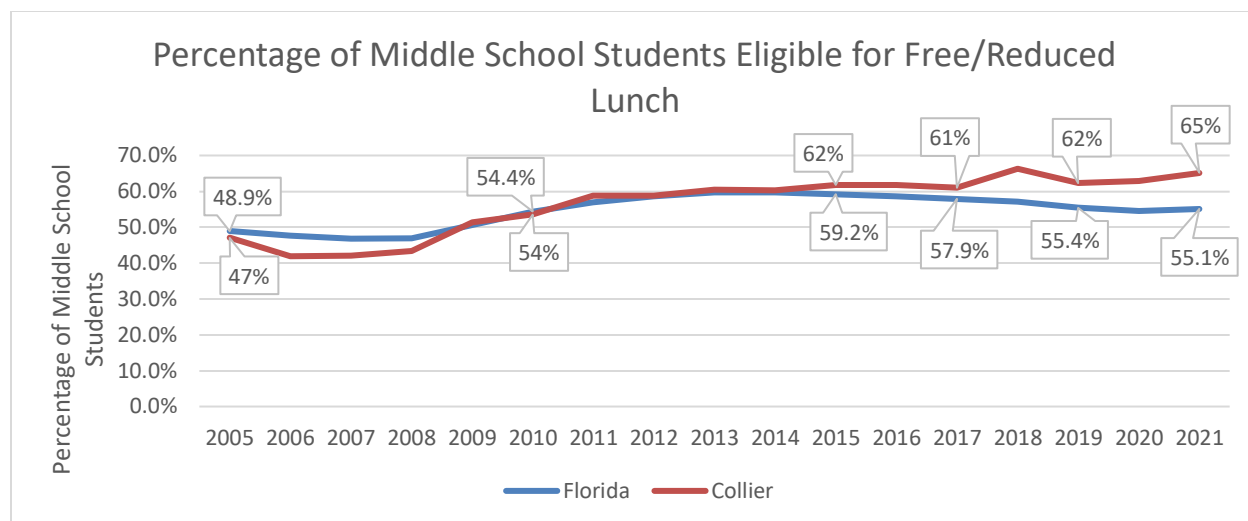
Figure 9: Elementary Students Eligible Free/Reduced Lunch



¹⁶ Florida Department of Health. Division of Public Health Statistics and Performance Management. Retrieved June 21, 2022 from <https://www.flhealthcharts.gov/ChartsReports/rdPage.aspx?rdReport=NonVitalIndNoGrp.DataViewer&cid=497>.

Figure 10 shows the percentage of middle school students who are eligible for free or reduced lunch in Collier County increased by 18.2% from 2005 to 2021.¹⁷

Figure 10: Middle Students Eligible for Free/Reduced Lunch



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 grades K-12 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 Figures 9 and 10 show, the percentage of students who qualify in Collier County has steadily risen since NCEF commissioned the first Study of Child Wellbeing in 2005. These data, combined with the statistics on Collier's increasing population (see Figure 1), indicate that there are currently a larger number of children just barely above poverty to serve throughout the county than ever before. It's worth noting that the proportion of elementary school children in Collier County who qualify for free or reduced lunch has been statistically significantly higher than the rest of the state since 2005. For middle school students, this has been true for the past seven consecutive years from 2015 to 2021.

¹⁷ Florida Department of Health. Division of Public Health Statistics and Performance Management. Retrieved June 21, 2022 from <https://www.flhealthcharts.gov/ChartsReports/rdPage.aspx?rdReport=NonVitalIndNoGrp.DataViewer&cid=497>

Hunger is an example of a trend that has been influenced drastically by the pandemic. Services were expanded greatly throughout the county to meet exploding need, primarily via mobile distribution sites and attention on increasing supply. Several organizations and funders came together to focus on food insecurity during the pandemic, because the need was so urgent, and the traditional avenues of support were closed to families and children. “Families benefited from getting those resources since they weren’t in school where they could get reliable meals. Any food these families got was a help. Even just temporarily providing food to allow them to meet other needs, it lessens the financial burden.”

In one interview, it was noted: “hunger is an economic issue – children experience hunger because of an economic issue with the parents or caregivers.” **According to the Harry Chapin Food Bank, the quantity of food distributed to working families with children went from half a million pounds a week to a pandemic high of 1.4 million pounds a week.** The food bank serves as the “backbone of hunger relief” in Southwest Florida, and they have seen an immense growth in activities and distributions. Collectively, their network has “gotten more active and resourceful about getting food.” **They have shifted to mobile pantries and hyper-local distribution to “dramatically increase the number of people served.”** In addition, interviewees note that these adjusted models, though more flexible and responsive to immediate needs, are more resource intensive. That organization’s “work is logistical at the end of the day, and that’s the biggest challenge – the right quantity in the right form at a convenient place and time. It has to be convenient for families and parents to get there and get what they need.”



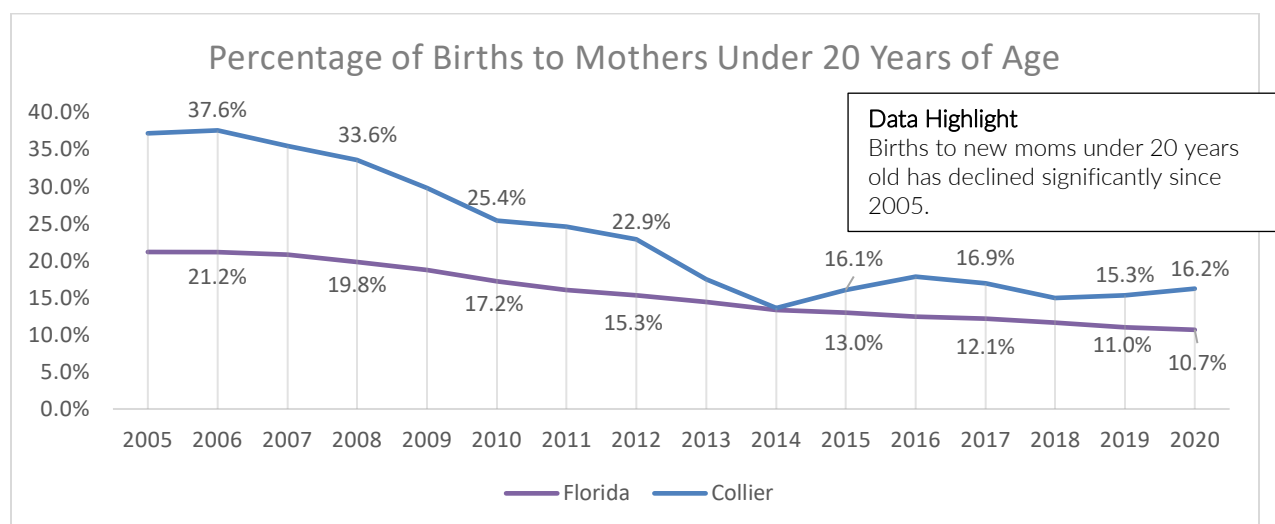
While demand for food distributions has decreased overall since a pandemic high, it has not returned to pre-pandemic levels according to the Harry Chapin Food Bank. Several interviewees noted it’s not likely to any time soon due to inflationary and economic pressures. In other words, as one shared “it’s all economics for these families.” Community leaders interviewed are aware that prevalence of food insecurity is merely a symptom of larger economic forces that are putting pressures on working families and others who live close to poverty levels.

“Hunger is an economic issue – children experience hunger because of an economic issue with the parents or caregivers.” – *Community expert, Study interviewee*

Metric 4: Births to Women Under 20

The percentage of new mothers in Collier County under 20 has decreased significantly from a study high in 2006, 37.6% in 2006 to 16.2% in 2020. However, 2020 data shows a slight increase from the prior year, and Collier County numbers remain higher than the state.

Figure 11: Births to Mothers Under 20 Years of Age¹⁸



“The more we can build capacity with the parents, the better outcomes we will see for their children.” – *Study Focus Group participant*

The birth rate among women under 20 years old 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 is correlated with an increased likelihood of living in poverty and not being able to get out of it.

¹⁸ Florida Department of Health. Bureau of Community Health Assessment. Retrieved June 21, 2022, from <https://www.flhealthcharts.gov/ChartsDashboards/rdPage.aspx?rdReport=Birth.DataViewer&cid=0425>,

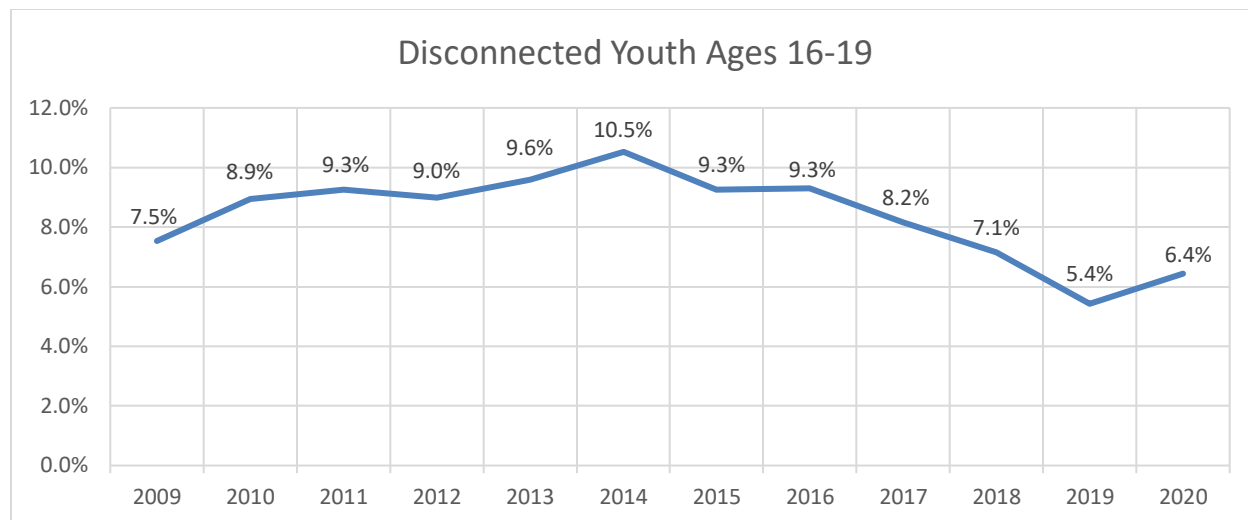
It is encouraging that the percentage of new mothers in Collier County under 20 has decreased significantly, from 37.2% in 2005 to 16.2% in 2020. This rate appears to be plateauing between 2014 and 2020, even while the county population increased. Also in that time frame, the birth rate among women across Florida continues to steadily decline, albeit incrementally.

For parents, the pandemic has exacerbated strains on the family systems, and as qualitative data analysis suggests, children who present serious issues (mental health, behavioral, lack of basic needs, and abuse, as examples) very often have parents and families with unmet needs. Previous emphasis by NCEF and other community organizations on connecting parents and families to provide education, resources, and connection was mentioned several times during interviews for this study. Most of the community organizations interviewed concentrate their programs and activities on children, but as one focus group participant expressed, “the more we can build capacity with the parents, the better outcomes we will see for their children.”

Community leaders who participated in study interviews discussed an increase in demand not just for their services, but also a demand for additional support, stress-relief and coping, wrap-around services, and access to basic needs for families. When families experience stress, children often suffer, and during the pandemic abuse was largely hidden from view. In turn, as the pandemic circumstances change, there is tension in how these issues are made visible. As one interviewee described, “While kids were out of school, there wasn’t a primary mandatory reporter, so while our numbers are down, it’s not because things are better, it’s because only the most serious cases that were intervened by police officer were reported.... And no one wants to see those numbers go back up.”

Metric 5: Out of School Youth¹⁹

Figure 12: Youth Aged 16 Through 19 Who Are Neither Enrolled in School Nor Employed



The percent of youth aged 16 through 19 who are neither enrolled in school nor employed decreased from a high of 10.5% in 2014 to 5.4% in 2019.

However, there was a slight increase in 2020 to 6.4%²⁰ largely attributed to public health measures related to the pandemic. Worth noting is that the proportion of disconnected youth is disproportionately experienced along racial and ethnic identities. For Black youth across Florida, this rate is 16.9%, for 12.1% for Latinos, and 10.2% for White youth in 2020.²¹



¹⁹ United States Census Bureau. Disconnected Youth (5-year estimate) for Collier County, FL [B14005DCYACS012021]. Retrieved June 21, 2022, from <https://fred.stlouisfed.org/series/B14005DCYACS012021>.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Youth Disconnection. Measure of America. Retrieved June 21, 2022, from <https://www.measureofamerica.org/DYinteractive/#State>.

Section 3: Education

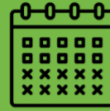
Access to high-quality education is often referred to as the great equalizer for children, particularly those at a lower income level or who are born into vulnerable communities. The following section examines trends in the Collier County public school system's capacity for achieving positive student outcomes, as measured by a set of nationally recognized metrics for assessing school success, specifically:

- The number of school absences
- 3rd Grade Students Scoring Proficient (Level III and Above) on the Florida Standards Assessment (FSA) Reading 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
- 8th Grade Students Scoring Proficient (Level III and Above) on the Florida Standards Assessment (FSA) Mathematics Test

Qualitative data collection for this study indicated that, for schools and educators, the story of child wellbeing in Collier County cannot be fully told without measuring the significant impact of COVID-19. From social isolation, to technology, to family support services, to staffing shortages and limited resources, the pandemic has forced schools to adjust in how they meet the ongoing needs of children.

EDUCATION

SCHOOL ABSENCES



The percentage of chronically absent students decreased by 2.6% from the 2018 academic year to 2021.

3RD GRADE READING



The number of third grade students scoring proficient (level III or above) on Florida's standardized reading test is 2% higher than in 2017.

GRADUATION RATE



The graduation rate in Collier County continued to rise to an all-time high of 92.6% in the 2020-2021 academic year.

EXCEPTIONAL EDUCATION



The number of students in Collier County enrolled in exceptional education programs or services has increased by 8% since 2017.

8TH GRADE MATHEMATICS



The percentage of 8th grade students scoring proficient (level III or above) on Florida's standardized mathematics test has not changed since 2017.

According to interviewees and focus group participants, **the pandemic has affected school-age children in ways that are only just now emerging.** Isolation and mandatory virtual learning meant that social emotional development, interpersonal skills, peer learning, and systemic support suffered greatly in recent years. This downward slide has been most prevalent for the youngest students, including preschoolers. It is likely that indicators included in this study will be lagging over time given measurement timelines and chosen metrics. As one focus group participant expressed, “there is no escape from the trauma resulting from what the pandemic has brought, and it is difficult to provide any consistency now that COVID has gotten them off track and more support is needed.”

Metric 6: Number of Students Absent from School 10% or More

The metric in the previous Wellbeing Study looked at the percentage of students who were absent 21 or more days in school. The metric for this report, which was not available at the time when the 2017 report was written, includes the percentage of students who were chronically absent, meaning that that they were absent 10% or more of their enrolled days in the school year. Chronic absenteeism is highly correlated with students’ academic success and promotion and graduation to the following school grade. Rates from 2018 through 2020 have seen a slight decrease between the last two school years.

Table 2: Percentage of Chronically Absent Students in Collier County²²

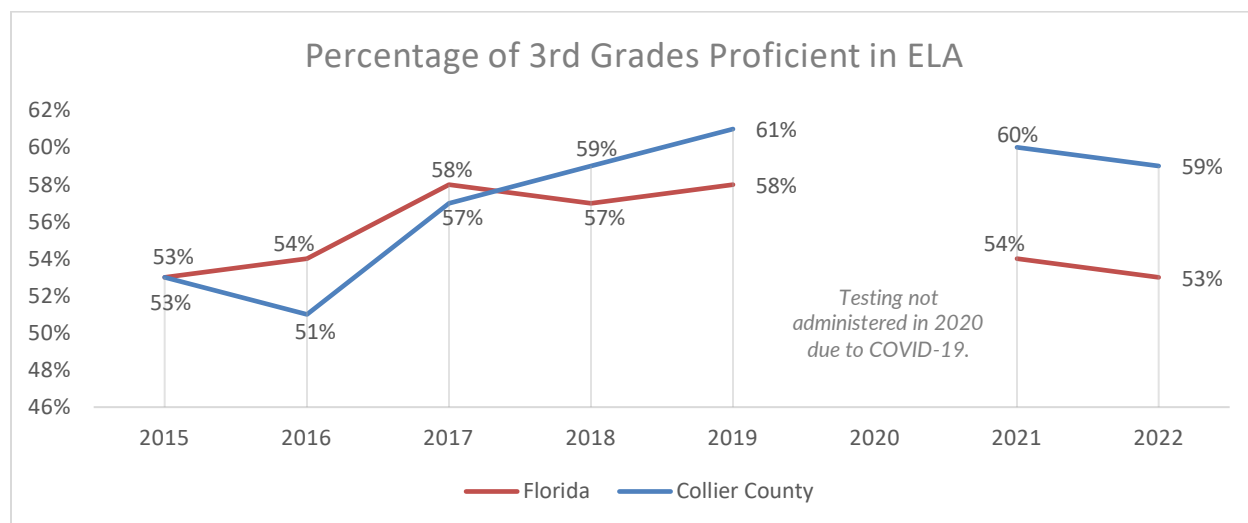
School year	Percentage of students who were absent 10% or more
2019-2020	9.2%
2018-2019	11.9%
2017-2018	11.8%

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

The percentage of 3rd grade students in Collier County scoring proficient (level III or above) on Florida’s standardized reading test had improved by 8% from 2015 (a total of 1,870 out of 3,489 student) to 2019 (2,141 out of 3,555 students). Testing was not administered in 2020 due to COVID-19. When testing resumed, data show the proficiency rate has decreased marginally by 2% in the subsequent 2 years.

²² Florida Department of Education. Attendance. Retrieved June 21, 2022, from <https://www.fldoe.org/accountability/data-sys/edu-info-accountability-services/pk-12-public-school-data-pubs-reports/students.shtml>.

Figure 13: 3rd grade ELA proficiency for Collier County and Florida²³



It is common for communities across the nation to adopt the number of students reading at proficient level or higher by third grade as a key indicator of early learning success. Research conducted by the Annie E. Casey Foundation indicates that one in six children who are not reading proficiently in third grade do not graduate from high school on time. This number is four times greater than that for proficient readers. Knowing the research, it is unsurprising that a study conducted by Dr. James Heckman found that every \$1 invested in early learning provides \$13 in return on that investment.²⁴ Though there are many ways to measure the strength of an early learning system, the number of students 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. Young students, preschool to third grade, have struggled disproportionately during the height of the pandemic. As such, over the next 1-3 years we will likely see dips or fluctuations in this important education metric.

Like other metrics in this study, education has been affected by economic stresses resulting from the pandemic. As one local expert shared: “You cannot teach students if their basic needs aren’t met.” In turn, students are “falling through the cracks; how can we ensure everyone knows about available resources and programs?”

²³ Florida Department of Education (n.d.). % of Students at Achievement. Retrieved June 21, 2022, from https://knowyourdatafl.org/views/PK12-Assessments/ASSESSMENTMAP?%3AshowAppBanner=false&%3Adisplay_count=n&%3AshowVizHome=n&%3Aorigin=viz_share_link&%3AisGuestRedirectFromVizportal=y&%3Aembed=y.

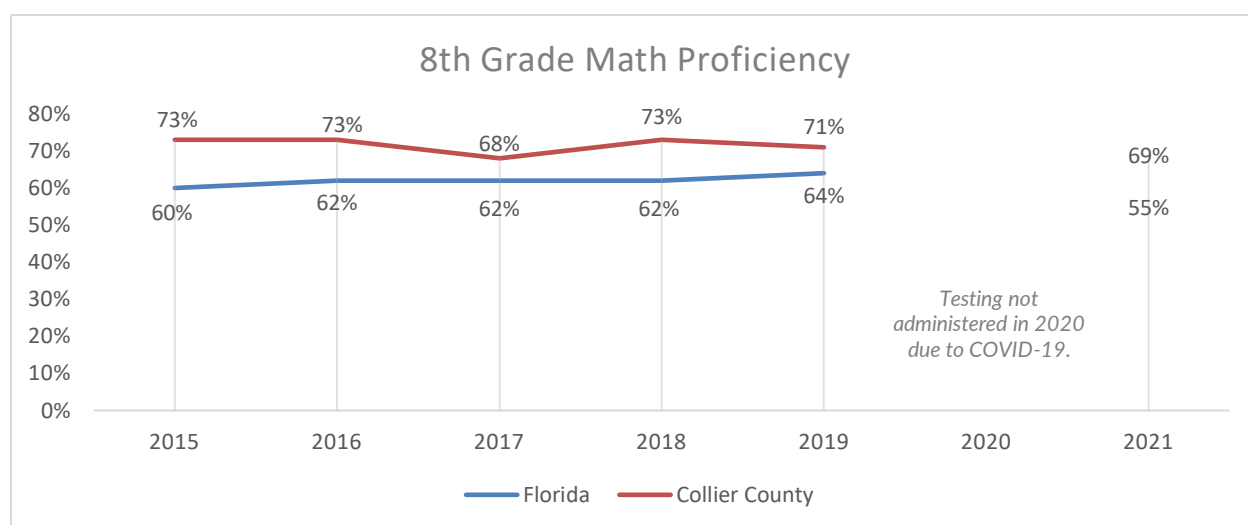
²⁴ *Quantifying the Life-cycle Benefits of a Prototypical Early Childhood Program*. Retrieved on 6/30/2022 from <https://heckmanequation.org/resource/13-roi-toolbox/>

While Florida had participated in the national Common Core standards, it has recently made the decision to eliminate the use of end-of-year Common Core assessments and will, instead, implement a progress monitoring system starting in the 2022-2023 academic year.²⁵ Progress Monitoring will minimize the stress of testing and change to three much shorter tests in the Fall, Winter and Spring. One possible consequence of this shift is that future data may not be comparable to the data referenced in this report.

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

The percentage of 8th grade students in Collier County scoring proficient (level III or above) on Florida's standardized mathematics test has remained relatively stable since 2015. It's interesting to note that the proficiency rate for Florida statewide experienced a steep decline in 2021 that was even lower than pre-pandemic rates but the rate for Collier County only decreased by 2%.

Figure 14: 8th grade math proficiency in Collier County and Florida²⁶



Both 3rd grade reading proficiency and 8th grade math proficiency are considered key indicators of early learning and academic success. Again, numerous studies indicate the importance of early development and learning for future educational and life success. Literacy and math competency are critical skills to accelerate learning, graduate on time, and achieve post-secondary educational success.

²⁵ Florida Department of Education. "Florida's Assessment of Student Thinking." Retrieved on 6/30/2022 from <https://www.fldoe.org/fast/>.

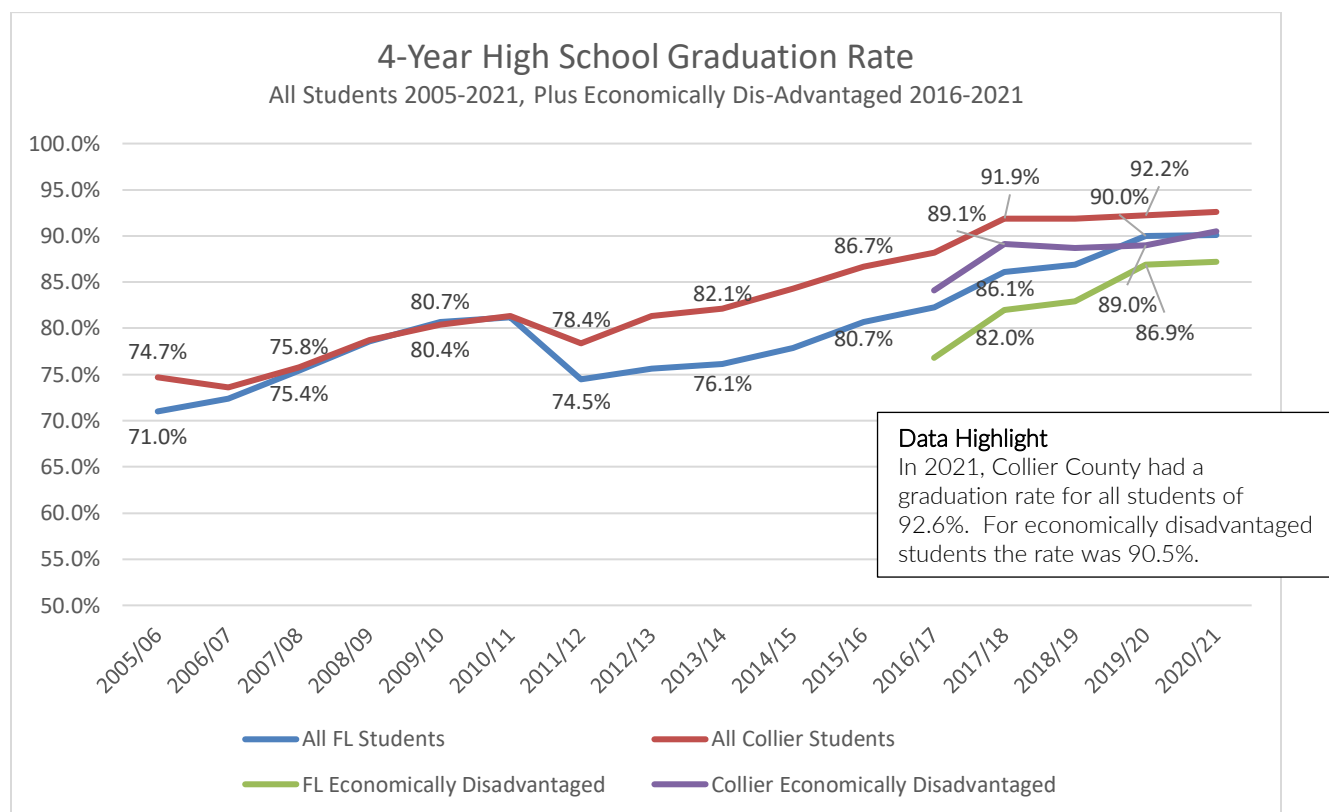
²⁶ Florida Department of Education (n.d.). % of Students at Achievement. Retrieved June 21, 2022, from https://knowyourdatafl.org/views/PK12-Assessments/ASSESSMENTMAP?%3AshowAppBanner=false&%3Adisplay_count=n&%3AshowVizHome=n&%3Aorigin=viz_share_link&%3AisGuestRedirectFromVizportal=y&%3Aembed=y.

As mentioned previously, Florida will be replacing the Common Core academic standards which may impact future comparisons with data in this report.

Metric 9: Graduation Rate in Collier County

The 4-year high school graduation rate for students in Collier County generally follows the trend of the rest of the state, while having slightly higher rates. This is capped off with a high of 92.6% of all students (in 2021) for Collier County compared to 90.1% for the state. Similarly, the graduation rate of students defined as economically disadvantaged by the Florida Department of Education also steadily rises over the last five years of data, again with Collier County at a higher rate for these students. (The Florida Department of Education defines economic disadvantaged as those students determined to be eligible for free and reduced lunch.)

Figure 15: 4-Year High School Graduation Rate²⁷



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

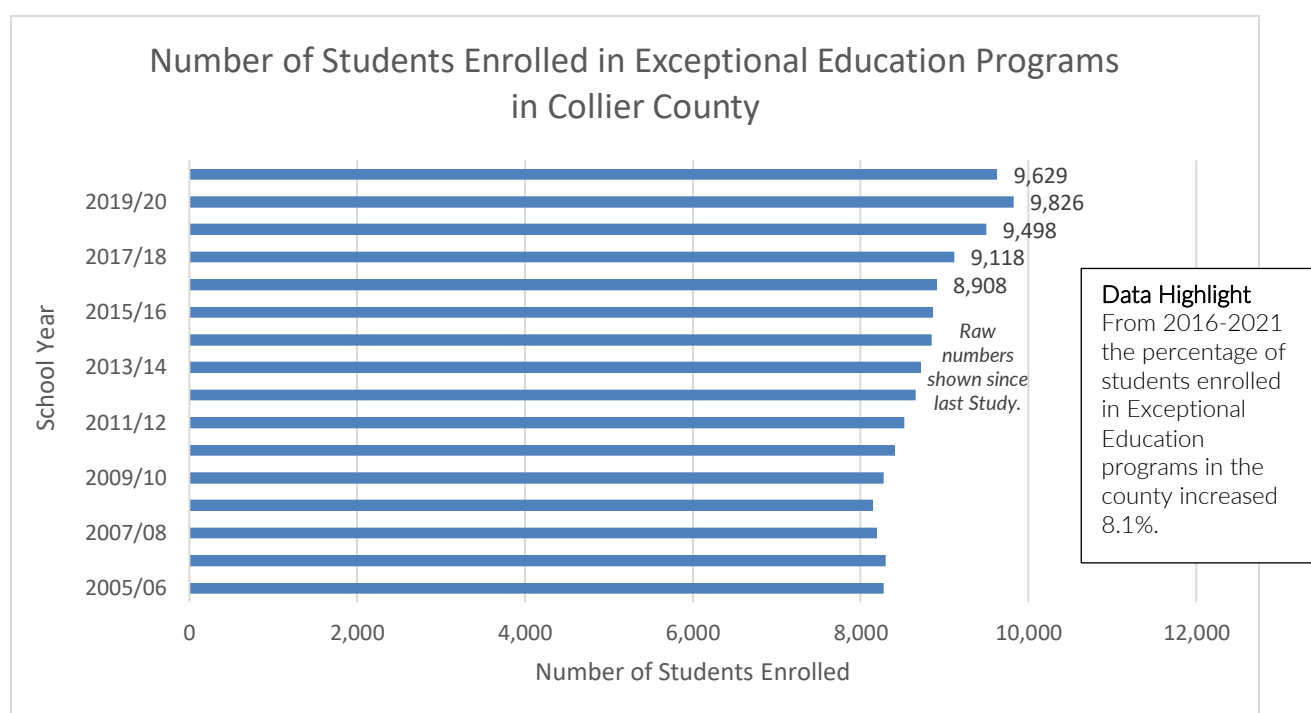
²⁷ Graduation rate | KIDS COUNT Data Center. (n.d.). Retrieved June 21, 2022, from <http://datacenter.kidscount.org/data/tables/599-graduationrate?loc=11&loct=5#detailed/5/1870,1907/false/952,824,750,466,465/any/11812>

earning potential in an increasingly competitive and specialized 21st century job market. The graduation rate in Collier County has been slowly rising over the past decade and is 8% higher in 2021 than in 2017.

Metric 10: Students Enrolled in Exceptional Education Programs

The number of students who have been enrolled in exceptional programs in Collier County had grown steadily between 2005 and 2017 but then rose rapidly for the following three school years with a high of over 9,800 students in 2019/2020 academic year.

Figure 16: Number of Students Enrolled in Exceptional Education Programs in Collier County²⁸



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.

²⁸ Students enrolled in exceptional education programs | KIDS COUNT Data Center. (n.d.). Retrieved June 21, 2022, from <http://datacenter.kidscount.org/data/tables/5347-students-enrolled-in-exceptionaleducation-programs?loc=11&loct=5#detailed/5/1870,1907/false/1601,1526,1445,1250,1069/any/11870>

As presented in Figure 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. In schools, COVID-19 has disrupted the way early identification functions for the youngest children who face delays, and without these interventions, there are increased costs to schools and families and greater service needs as these children get older. “That should happen early,” as one focus group participant noted, “but those children who were three in 2020 are just now in kindergarten and those delays are more pronounced and just now being noticed. **It’s two years of full-time intervention they’ve missed out on.**”

One local expert interviewed shared their perspective of meeting the needs of these children over the past two years: “It’s clear there was a real lack of access to services during the pandemic. However, we saw some good things as a result of virtual options expanding, such as more people at the table, and more windows into families and homes. Parents let down their guard and we created some good relationships. For children with special needs, it’s not the perfect delivery model.” In other words, it’s beneficial for parents, but more difficult for the children.

The demand for services is disproportionately high for children with more severe medical needs and/or intellectual disabilities. They need in-home therapy and support, right from the very earliest intervention. As their children reach young adulthood, these families need facilities, programs, and support for when their children “age out” of the system.

Students with Disabilities After School Programs Partnered with NCEF

There are excellent, but small, programs being offered to children with disabilities during out of school time. However, as one focus group participant noted, “established programs exist only for elementary age children, and that has a big impact on working parents of older children.” The limited services available means gaps exist and there are outsized expectations on the few organizations that serve these children and families to stretch their programs to fill the gaps.

Interviewees reported that services are less common or non-existent for those children with more significant needs. There is greater availability of services for higher functioning children, and less access for children who have more medical needs. According to one, “There is nothing in the community for those with the very exceptional needs, and by not addressing this population that is severely in need of services, we limit those families from working, and otherwise doing what they need to do.”

Adding programs and activities presents additional challenges to the organizations serving children with disabilities and their families. Internally, they report difficulty finding trained staff who can work with children during out of school hours. Leadership at those organizations emphasized resource constraints with the staff they currently

employ, and after school hours adds a particular hurdle to filling those additional positions. They also voiced that families have transportation limitations and other barriers around work flexibility, limiting their ability to access these services.

As one interviewee recognized: working with children who have exceptional developmental needs is similar to working with children who have serious mental health needs, in that it requires trained professionals; staff that have the experience and expertise, training that ensure quality program to program, and a pipeline of qualified staff to meet ongoing needs. “This could be part of a more robust workforce readiness piece,” a local expert shared. **“Across the board everyone is struggling with staff, so there is a significant need to build the capacity.”**

Section 4: Physical and Mental Health

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 postnatally.

The metrics included in this section are:

- Children Lacking Health Insurance
- Low Birth Weight
- Childhood Obesity
- Child and Adolescent Psychiatric Beds*
- Involuntary Mental Health Examinations in Children and Adolescents
- Feelings of Sadness and Hopelessness*
- Rate of Self Harm Injuries That Lead to Hospitalizations*

*Added since the 2017 Child Wellbeing Study

Three metrics were added to this section for the 2022 report: Child and Adolescent Psychiatric Beds, Feelings of Hopelessness and Sadness, and Rate of Self Harm Injuries That Lead to Hospitalizations. Each of the identified metrics is represented in the following tables with an accompanying descriptor of the metric's relevance.

PHYSICAL AND MENTAL HEALTH



HEALTH INSURANCE

The percentage of individuals under 19 years of age lacking health insurance has decreased slightly by 3% since 2017.



BIRTH WEIGHT

The percentage of babies classified as "low birth weight" is relatively low, and continues to remain stable since the last report in 2017, and since 2005 overall.



OBESITY RATE

The obesity rates for children, middle school, and high school students has largely remained unchanged since 2017.



CHILD AND ADOLESCENT PSYCHIATRIC BEDS

Available "in-person" psychiatric care for youth under age 18 in the county remains unchanged since the 2017 study.



INVOLUNTARY MENTAL HEALTH EXAMINATIONS

The proportion of children and adolescents receiving involuntary mental health examinations has increased slightly by 1.9% since 2017.



FEELINGS OF SADNESS AND HOPELESSNESS

The percentage of students with these feelings increased in Collier County and statewide since 2017.



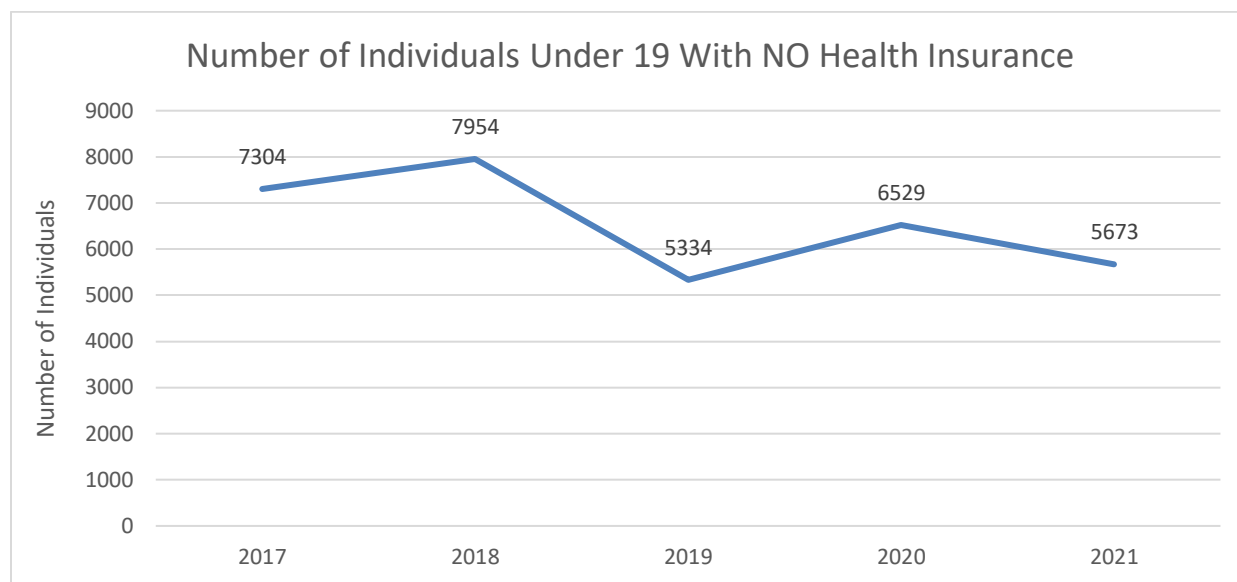
SELF-HARM LEADING TO HOSPITALIZATIONS

The rate of hospitalizations in 15-19 year olds due to self-harm has increased since 2017.

Metric 11: Children Lacking Health Insurance

In 2017, the number of individuals under 19 years of age in Collier County without any health insurance was 7,304. By 2021, that number had decreased to 5,673.²⁹

Figure 17: Number of Individuals with No Health Insurance



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 3% decrease from 2017 to 2019. It is important to note that data prior to 2017 reported the number of individuals under 18 years of age. This difference in reporting makes the data from 2017 incomparable to prior years.

Affordability and prevalence of health services was among the most often mentioned concern brought up by study interviewees and focus group participants. They shared that capacity is urgently needed, as it is directly affected by changing demographics and external circumstances. In general, the pandemic truly highlighted the integrations of the social determinants of health, i.e., **“when parents are out of work, they can’t buy food or pay rent, much less seek medical care for their children.”**

Affordability challenges and barriers to access particularly affects populations who are underserved or not served for health care, and qualitative data shows that this extends

²⁹ United States Census Bureau. Types of Health Insurance Coverage by Age. Retrieved December 15, 2022, from <https://data.census.gov/table?q=B27010:TYPE+OF+HEALTH+INSURANCE+COVERAGE+BY+AGE&g=0500000US12021&tid=ACSDT1Y2021.B27010>.

to prenatal care for expectant mothers, basic primary care, and preventative care. Issues of affordability and access affect low-to-moderate income people the most, as those who have the resources or are well-insured can find alternative resources in the area. **Despite the efforts in recent years to bring high-quality pediatric services to the area, “it has not been enough; there are not enough appointments.”**

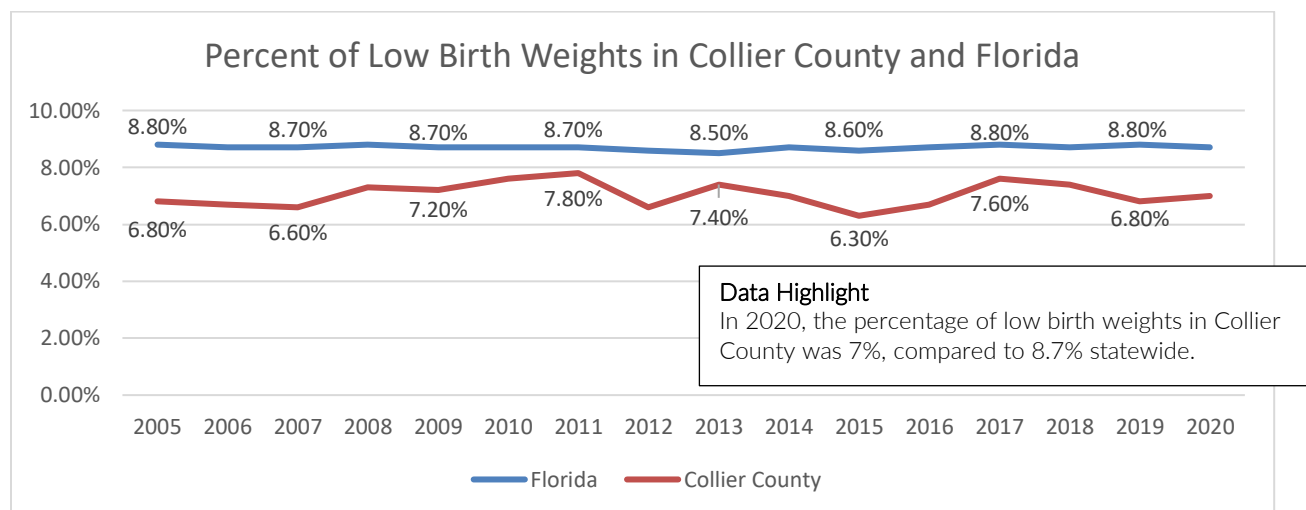
Since the last study, health care access particularly affected populations who are underserved or not served for health care, and qualitative data shows that this extends to prenatal care for expectant mothers, basic primary care, and preventative care.

Cases are ending up in the emergency room that would not have prior to the pandemic, and community service providers report having to look further out of the county – often out of state – to access the necessary resources a case demands. **One agency leader shared: “Honestly, if we must send a child to Miami or out of state, it is hard to say that our system is working. It’s a matter of funding but also to recognize that there’s a problem here – that kids are in trouble, or have serious psychological needs, or have been traumatized.”**

Metric 12: Low Birth Weight

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

Figure 18: Percent of Low Birth Weights in Collier County and Florida³⁰



³⁰ Low birthweight births | KIDS COUNT Data Center. (n.d.). Retrieved June , 2017, from <http://datacenter.kidscount.org/data/tables/595-low-birthweightbirths?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.

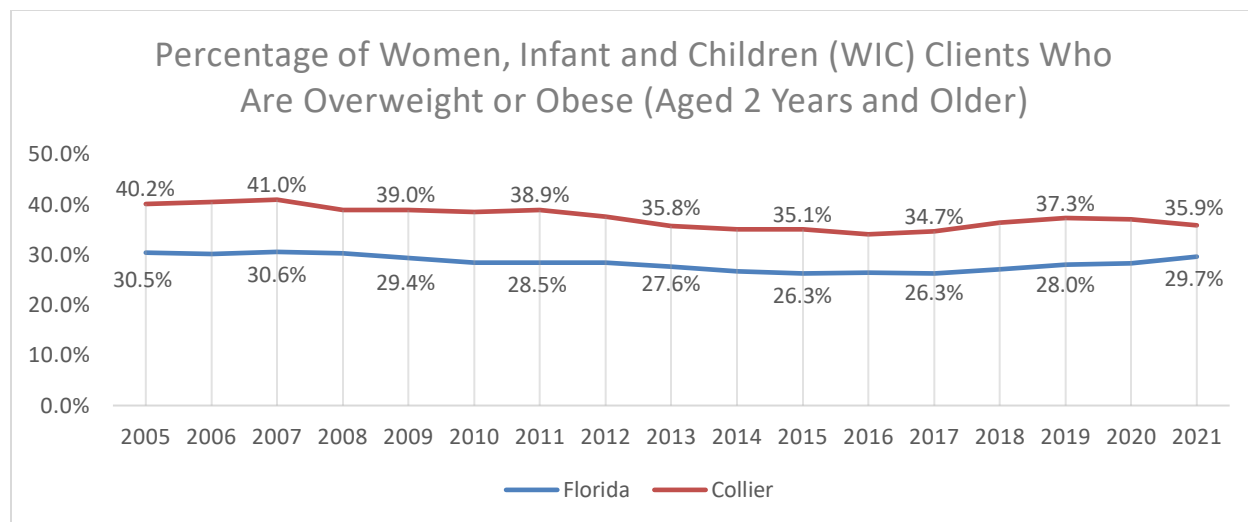
As shown in Figure 18, the percentage of low-birth-weight babies born in Collier County has stayed relatively stable since 2005, ranging from a low of 6.3% (2015) to a high of 7.8% (2011) for an average of 7.05% in the 15-year span depicted.



Metric 13: Childhood Obesity

Generally, overweight and obesity rates for young children and middle school students have declined over the past decade. The rate of high school students overweight or obese has increased slightly over that time. This aligns with a national trend that was exacerbated by the pandemic due to lifestyle adjustments and public health restrictions.³¹

Figure 19: Percentage of WIC Children Age 2 or Over Who are Overweight or Obese³²



³¹ "Child Obesity Grew During the Pandemic," by Arianna Prothero; Education Week, February 1, 2022 (<https://www.edweek.org/leadership/child-obesity-grew-during-the-pandemic-how-schools-can-help-reverse-the-trend/2022/02>)

³² WIC children >= 2 years who are overweight or obese | Florida Department of Health (n.d.).

Retrieved July 1, 2022 from

<https://www.flhealthcharts.gov/ChartsReports/rdPage.aspx?rdReport=NonVitalIndRateOnly.Dataviewer>

Figure 20: Percentage of Middle School Students Who are Overweight or Obese³³

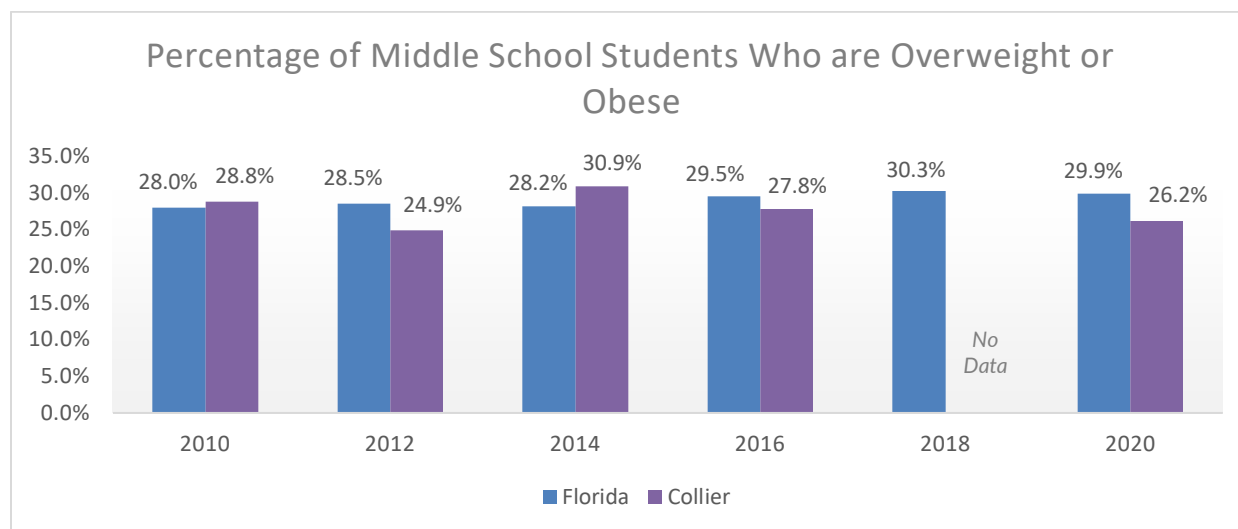
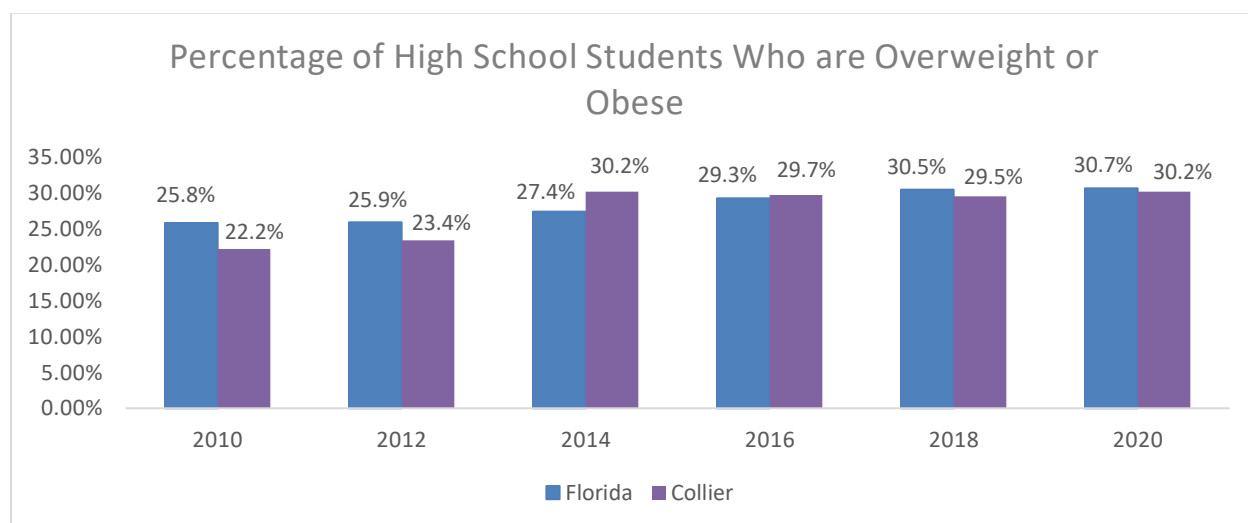


Figure 21: Percentage of High School Students Who are Overweight or Obese³⁴



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.³⁵ Accordingly, it is a strong measure of the near- and long-term health of children. As part

³³ Florida Youth Tobacco Survey (FYTS). (n.d.). Retrieved July 1, 2022, from <https://www.flhealthcharts.gov/ChartsReports/rdPage.aspx?rdReport=YouthTobaccoCounty.Dataviewer>

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ 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>.

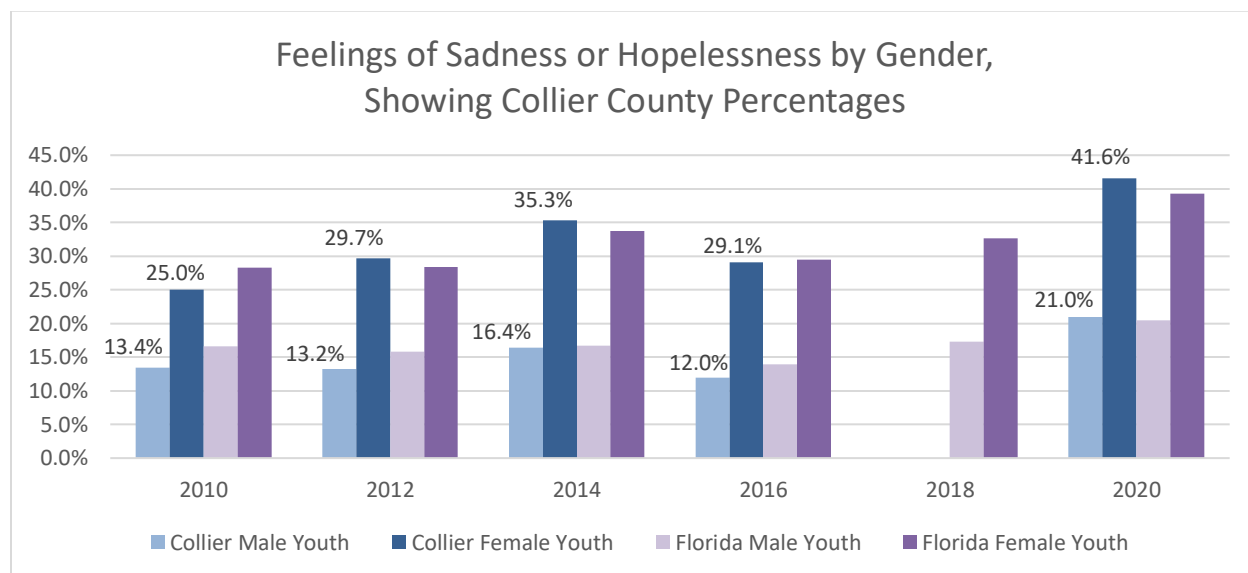
of data collection, stakeholders connected youth obesity in the community with the access to healthy food. Obesity rates persist despite community hunger initiatives and increased food distribution networks.

As demonstrated in Figures 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 fluctuated recently and is on a slight downward trend in the past three years whereas the rates for the state of Florida are on an upwards trend. Furthermore, the obesity rate among middle school students in Collier County has basically been unchanged since 2010. However, the rate of obesity among high school students has increased by 8% since 2010, closely following the trend for the state.



Metric 14: Feelings of Sadness and Hopelessness

Figure 22: Percent of Students, Ages 11-17, Who in the Past Year, Felt Sad or Hopeless for Two or More Weeks in a Row and Stopped Doing Usual Activities³⁶



³⁶ Percent of students who, in the past year, felt sad or hopeless for two or more weeks in a row and stopped doing usual activities | Florida Department of Health (n.d.). Retrieved June 21, 2022 from <https://www.flhealthcharts.gov/ChartsReports/rdPage.aspx?rdReport=YouthTobaccoCounty.Dataviewer>.

Mental health includes myriad challenges, including anxiety, mood, and psychotic and personality disorders. Every local expert interviewed for this study mentioned its increasing effect on children and youth. Combined with a lack of access to mental health providers, it is presenting as a “mental health epidemic” for the children of Collier County, cutting across ages, race and ethnicity, and family circumstance. Organizational leaders interviewed noted that the community is experiencing younger children affected with more serious conditions. As one local expert shared in their interview, “we are seeing children as young as six or seven displaying alarming behavior, and this is new for us.” In teens, they reported “true psychosis in adolescents; nothing like prior to the pandemic.”

Community leaders who were interviewed reported need amongst their clients that far outstrips the availability of services and providers. “We just had someone who was in crisis and the first appointment they could get was in 2 months.” With an increased severity of cases, there are more young patients in need of hospitalization or crisis support. One interviewee shared that for 25 years the region lacked facilities for children that would meet these needs: hospitals that are forced to act as “holding facilities” but lack psychiatric services, and crisis centers that have “no beds for children or are plagued by staffing issues.” Those in the community closest to this issue note that beyond general access to good doctors, additional training and support for all is needed.

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.

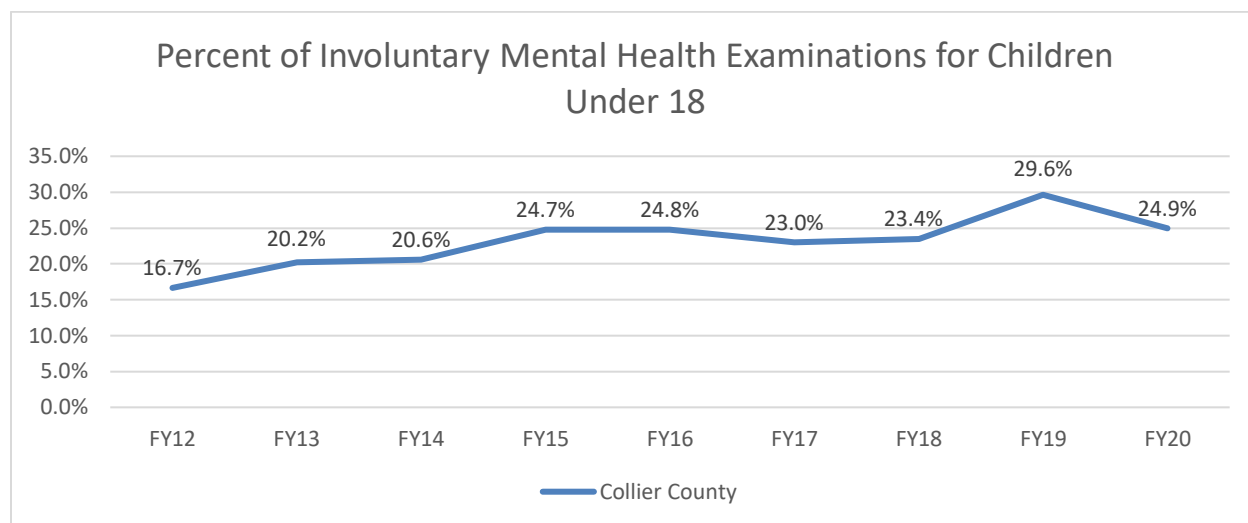
To provide a sense of the larger mental health need, this updated study added several new indicators to highlight some of the needs and gaps in available services. One indicator that shows an overall sense of mental health is the percentage of youth who reported since it can be an indicator of current or pending clinical depression, suicide, or similar issues. In the past year, youth having felt sad or hopeless for two or more weeks in a row and stopped doing usual activities. An important effect of poor mental health is when a person is unable to participate in their usual activities for long stretches of time. The middle and high school youth in Collier County reported feeling sad or hopeless at similar rates as those across Florida. All reported race groups also experienced similar trends over time with disparities remaining relatively consistent with Hispanics reporting the highest levels of sadness and hopelessness (~35% in 2020) and Whites reporting the least (~28% in 2020).³⁷ However, as illustrated in Figure 22, there is a significant gender difference with female youth being twice as likely to report feelings of sadness.

³⁷ Ibid.

Metric 15: Involuntary Mental Health Examinations

The proportion of involuntary mental health examination for children and adolescents under the age of 18 increased marginally by 1.9% points from FY17 to FY20.³⁸

Figure 23: Percent of Involuntary Mental Health Examinations



An indicator that was used in the 2017 report was the proportion of involuntary mental health examinations for children and adolescents under the age of 18 collected by the Florida Department of Children and Families (FDCF). 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.³⁹

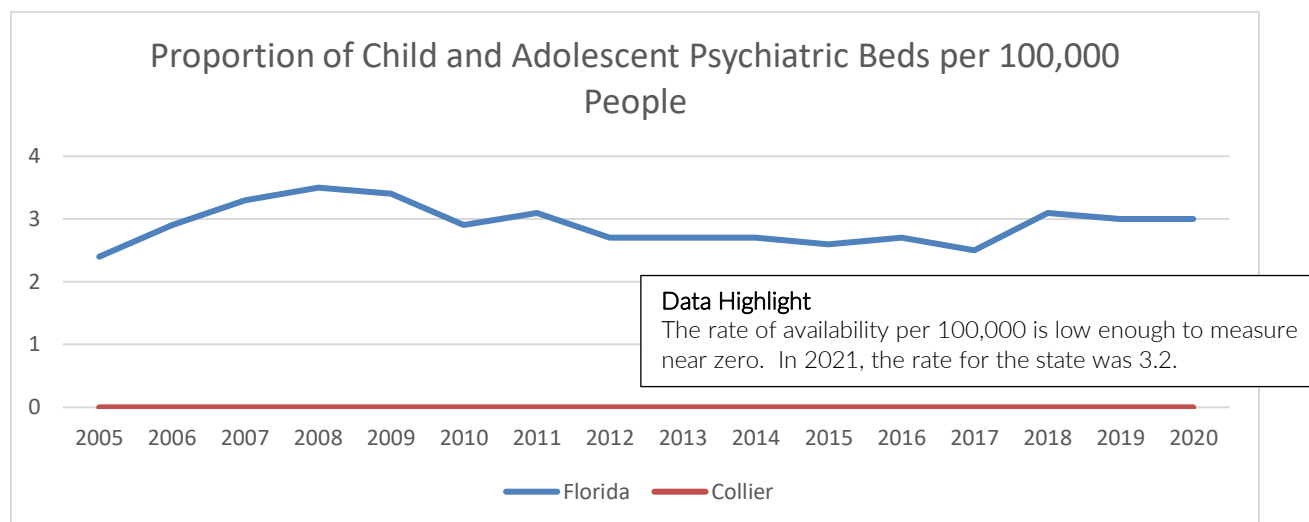
Metric 16: Child and Adolescent Psychiatric Beds

According to the Florida Department of Health, there is a very low rate of “in-person” psychiatric care for children and adolescents under age 18, as measured by availability per 100,000 people.

³⁸ Christy, A., Rhode, S., Jenkins, K., and Dion, C. (2022). *Baker Act Reporting Center Fiscal Year 2019-2020 Report*. Tampa, FL: University of South Florida, Department of Mental Health Law and Policy, Baker Act Reporting Center.

³⁹ The Baker Act The Florida Mental Health Act (Rep.). (2017, March). Retrieved <http://www.dcf.state.fl.us/programs/samh/publications/OpenAttachment.pdf>

Figure 24: Child and Adolescent Psychiatric Beds, Rate Per 100,000 People⁴⁰



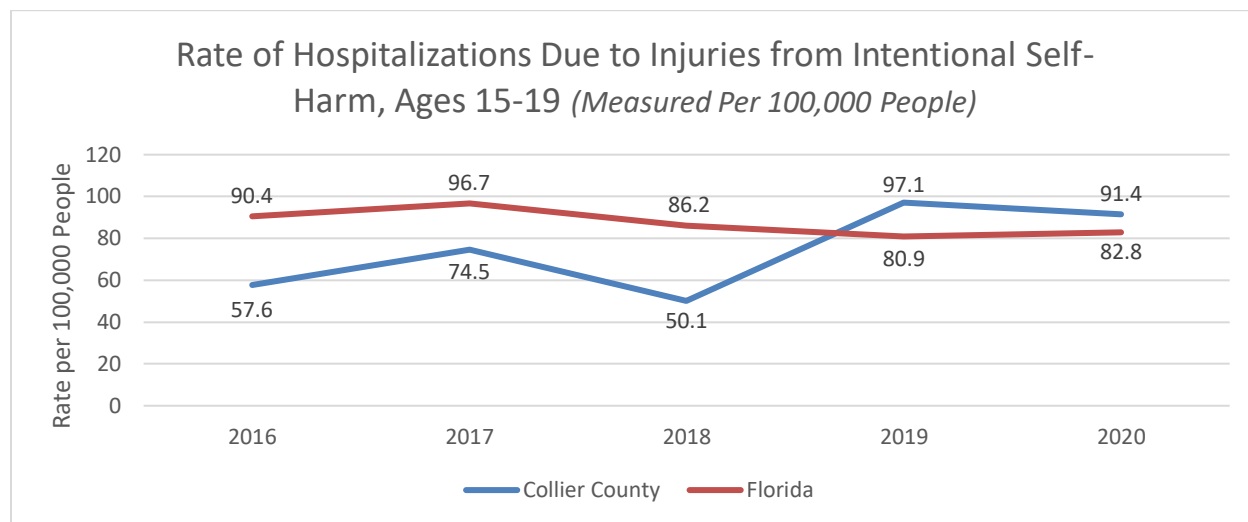
This measurement has been reported by the Florida Department of Health since at least 2005. Given that there are community organizations that work with children and adolescents with psychiatric needs and often in crisis, there are likely limited resources available to families depending on their situation. However, analysis indicates that often children experiencing behavioral health emergencies do not have access to appropriate facilities and services within the community and must seek help beyond it.

Metric 17: Rate of Self Harm Injuries That Lead to Hospitalizations

One local leader interviewed specifically noted the increase their organization is seeing around “deaths of despair” or suicide attempts. “In general, we hear that kids experience despair from uncertainty – hopelessness, pessimism, helplessness. Locally, we have seen an increase in emergency room visits for mental health crises. There’s a lot of media attention statewide and nationally – we haven’t escaped those trends.”

⁴⁰ Child and Adolescent Psychiatric Beds | Florida Department of Health (n.d.). Retrieved June 21, 2022 from <https://www.flhealthcharts.gov/ChartsReports/rdPage.aspx?rdReport=NonVitalIndNoGrp.Dataviewer>.

Figure 25: Injury Hospitalizations, Intentional Self-Harm Injury, Ages 15-19, Rate Per 100,000 Population⁴¹



Self-harming behaviors are a harmful way to cope with emotional pain, intense anger, and frustration. While the intention may not be to end one's life by completing suicide, the behaviors may lead to more serious and aggressive actions that may be fatal.⁴²

NCEF's Promising Health Care Interventions and Emerging Programs

While the current dataset is limited and does not represent the full gamut of children in need of or currently receiving mental and/or behavioral health services, both qualitative and quantitative analysis speaks to how rapidly the need for expanded supports is growing, both in Collier County and across the state. Several promising interventions and solutions are emerging to meet this looming issue:

- Several study interviewees discussed needed partnerships and service delivery alongside the school district. Building on previous success with navigators in the community, they suggested Mental Health navigators in schools, specializing in how issues present with children, focusing on high risk or high-need areas based on demographics and socioeconomic status.
- During the pandemic, telehealth infrastructure and expanded remote treatment options have broadened access, particularly for mental health services. Several agencies have focused on mobile outreach to serve remote areas and those who are unable to travel. Expanding or supporting these efforts can increase access to services across the county. "Being able to deploy more widely services by

⁴¹ Injury Hospitalizations, Intentional Self-Harm Injury, Ages 15-19, Rate Per 100,000 Population | Florida Department of Health (n.d.). Retrieved July 1, 2022 from <https://www.flhealthcharts.gov/ChartsReports/rdPage.aspx?rdReport=InjuryViewer.InjuryDashboard&rdRequestForwarding=Form>

⁴² Mayo Clinic. "Self-injury/cutting". Retrieved June 21, 2022 from <https://www.mayoclinic.org/diseases-conditions/self-injury/symptoms-causes/syc-20350950>.

telehealth is a good step – not the only delivery, kids do still need to be seen in person, but virtual appointments help overcome some barriers and reach those we might not have been able to previously.”

- Also related to alternative service delivery that expands access, mobile care and response has proved effective for other avenues, such as vaccines. It could be expanded to risk assessments or emergency crisis management.
- Several interview participants also discussed the Healthcare Network (HCN) – providers that are dispersed in the community, delivering medical services to individuals and families of all ages. This is a well-respected resource with existing access and integrated services that has helped reach populations not otherwise served. For example, “What the HCN did was that you can take a child in for a physical exam or physical, and they do psychological assessments and referrals right there as part of the visit. They do both of the same time – it’s brilliant.”
- Finally, several interviewees pointed to the success of the community navigators that NCEF has recently created. It has streamlined referrals and interagency communications in a way that directly benefits community members. However, individuals face long wait lists to access those services. “In 3 emails, I can have an optometrist here to evaluate a child here, but at the end of the day you need to have the providers to do those appointments.”

Section 5: Substance Misuse and Crime

Substance abuse and crime are reflective of one extreme end of the continuum of child wellbeing but, as noted in preceding sections, often arise from challenges related to poverty, education, and health. Similar to mental and behavioral health crises in the pandemic, experts interviewed for this study who are familiar with this issue reported they are currently seeing earlier and more serious referrals for children.

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.

SUBSTANCE MISUSE AND CRIME



DRUG/ALCOHOL USE (HIGH SCHOOL)

The percentage of high school students who have used illicit drugs/alcohol has decreased by 5.1% points since 2016.



DRUG/ALCOHOL USE (MIDDLE SCHOOL)

The percentage of middle school students who have used illicit drugs and/or alcohol has increased slightly by 2.1% points since 2016.



JUVENILE JUSTICE SYSTEM

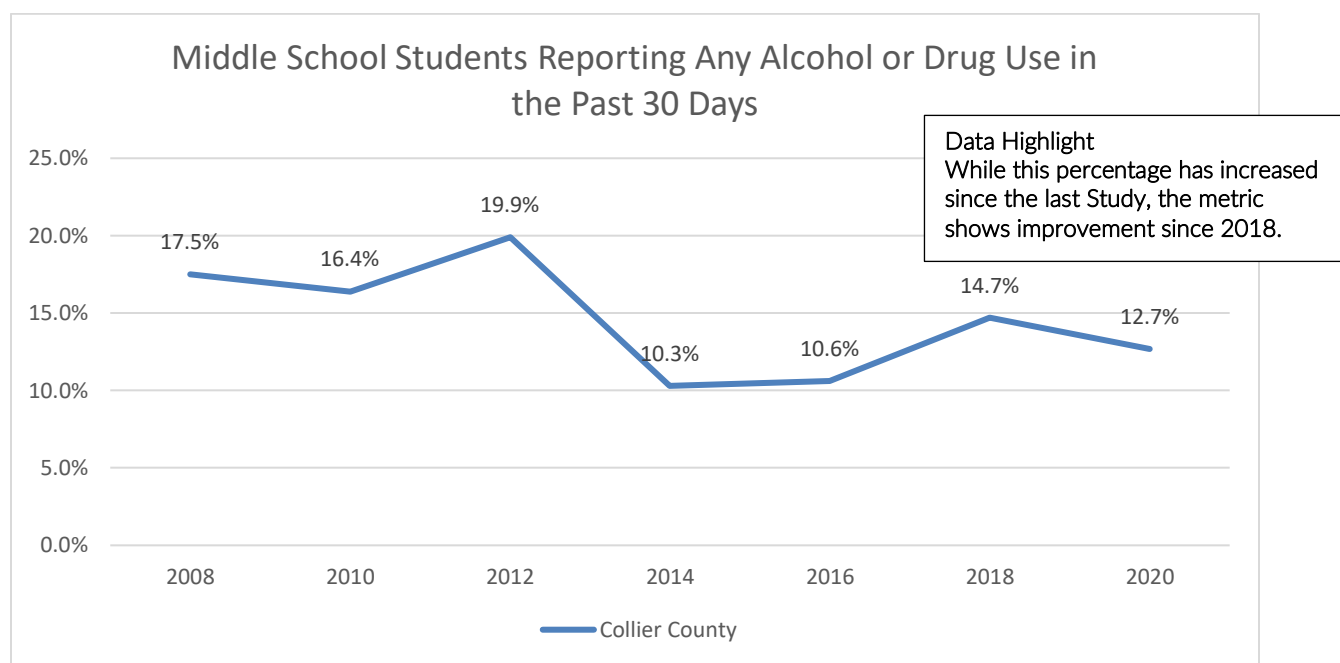
While the number of youth referred to the juvenile justice system has gone down since 2005, it has increased by 8.5% from 2016/2017 (503 referred) to 2018/2019 (546 referred).

Metric 18: Illicit Drug and Alcohol Use by Middle and High Schoolers

The percentages of high school students using illicit drugs or alcohol in the past 30 days shows a decrease overall since 2008, though it rose slightly from 2018-2020.

Percentages for middle school students also trends downward since 2018, though with additional fluctuations in between. Since the last Study, the percentage of middle school students reporting drug or alcohol use in the past 30 days has increased from 10.6% (2016) to 12.7% (2020), there is a decline from 14.7% in 2018.

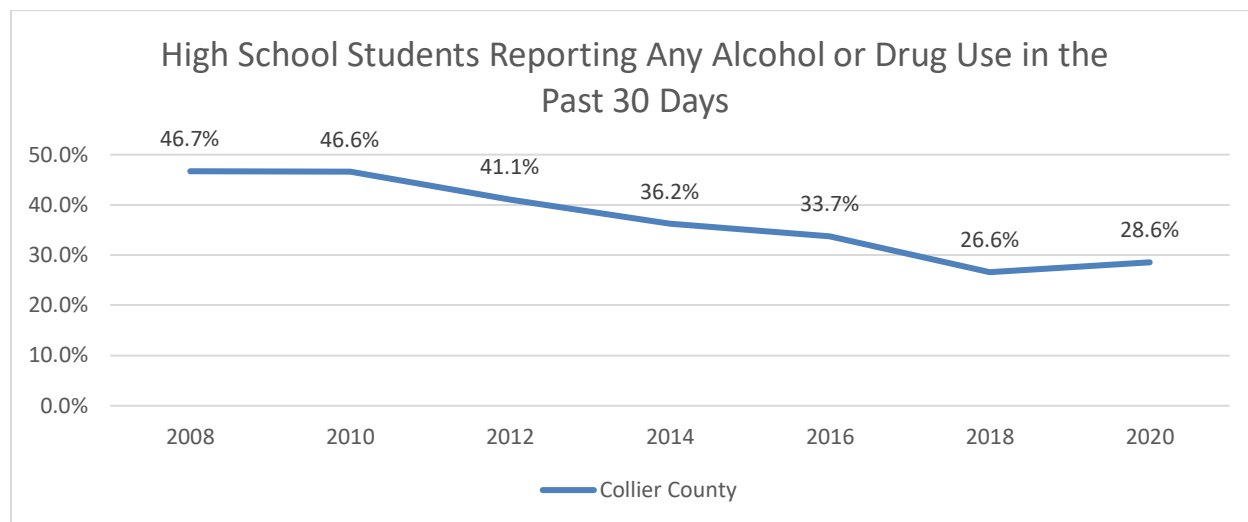
Figure 26: Middle School Students Reporting Any Alcohol or Illicit Drug Use in the Past 30 Days in Collier County.^{43/44}



⁴³ Florida Department of Children and Families. 2018 Florida Youth Substance Abuse Survey: Collier Data Tables. Retrieved July 6, 2022 from <https://www.myflfamilies.com/service-programs/samh/prevention/fysas/2018/docs/county-tables/Collier.pdf>.

⁴⁴ Florida Department of Children and Families. 2020 Florida Youth Substance Abuse Survey: State Report. Retrieved July 6, 2022 from <https://www.myflfamilies.com/service-programs/samh/prevention/fysas/2020/docs/2020%20Statewide%20FYSAS%20Report%20per%20Section%20C2-2.3.pdf>.

Figure 27: High School Students Reporting Any Alcohol or Illicit Drug Use in the Past 30 Days in Collier County.^{45/46}



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 Figures 26 and 27, there is a general downward trend of the proportion of high school students who report having consumed any alcohol or used any illicit drug in the past 30 days. Though it is worth noting that there was a slight increase in 2020 compared to 2018. The proportion of middle school students, however, increased in 2016 and 2018 from a low in 2014.

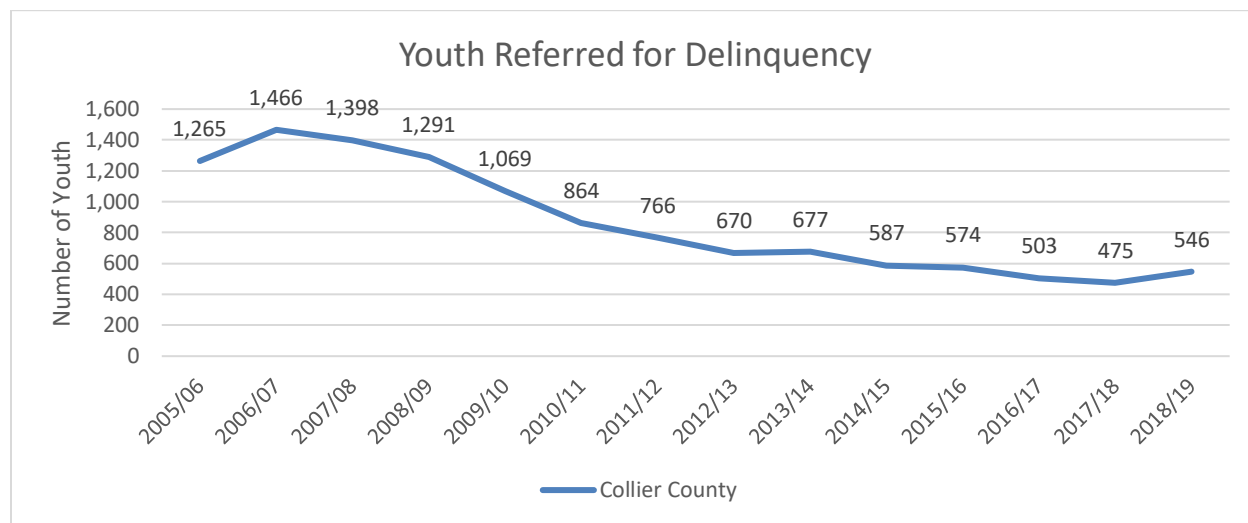
⁴⁵ Florida Department of Children and Families. 2018 Florida Youth Substance Abuse Survey: Collier Data Tables. Retrieved July 6, 2022 from <https://www.myflfamilies.com/service-programs/samh/prevention/fysas/2018/docs/county-tables/Collier.pdf>.

⁴⁶ Florida Department of Children and Families. 2020 Florida Youth Substance Abuse Survey: State Report. Retrieved July 6, 2022 from <https://www.myflfamilies.com/service-programs/samh/prevention/fysas/2020/docs/2020%20Statewide%20FYSAS%20Report%20per%20Section%20C2-2.3.pdf>.

Metric 19: Referrals to the Juvenile Justice System

The number of youth referred to the juvenile justice system has experienced a 57% decrease since 2005 when the first Child Wellbeing Study was conducted, and a 63% decrease since the decade high for referrals in 2006-07.⁴⁷

Figure 28: Youth Referred for Delinquency



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.

In general, study interviewees report that the pandemic caused an increase in the need for crisis-stabilization activities. Pandemic isolation and the economy put tension on family stress and strife, "increasing aggression and depression in children and adults alike – more family disharmony that requires more intervention."

⁴⁷ Youths referred for delinquency in Collier | KIDS COUNT Data Center. (n.d.). Retrieved July 1, 2022, from <https://datacenter.kidscount.org/data/tables/5310-youths-referred-for-delinquency?loc=11&loct=5#detailed/5/1870/false/1750,1686,1654,1601,1526,1445,1250,1069,952,824/any/118>

Impact of COVID-19 Pandemic and NCEF Response

Like other disasters, the pandemic has presented many communities like Collier County with lingering challenges, exhibiting across the board, in all issue areas. In many respects, full effects of the pandemic continue to emerge and be understood.

Across all metrics, leaders in the community shared that severity and number of cases has increased. “During COVID because everything went remote, abusers were able to hide, and moms/kids couldn’t leave.” Data analysis shows that the pandemic has affected populations differently. As one interviewee noted: “Without a doubt the hourly employees have been hugely impacted, especially down here where our economy is based on seasonal cycles, tourism. All that was cut back due to the pandemic. A lot of our families are struggling to afford everything – especially daycare and child care.”



In addition to the pandemic putting a strain on many individuals and families, it also has affected the organizations in the community that serve those in need. “These are really tough times,” one interviewee described. “My budget for next year is worse than any point in the pandemic.” It presents a tension for community-focused organizations and institutions: the demand for services is increasing, but they are not immune from financial and external pressure.

In responding to the pandemic in Collier County, NCEF has been intentionally proactive rather than reactive, open to hearing the needs from the community and providers. More than once this key organizational value was acknowledged in interview and focus group conversations as being true for NCEF prior to the pandemic as well. NCEF has been remarkable in investing in the youngest children, for those earliest interventions, and these have helped support families down the line.

Throughout the pandemic, NCEF has maintained best practices for funders as they prioritized checking in with community partners and remaining flexible. An interviewee reported that “they’ve constantly checked in to see what we need. They’ve been flexible with reporting and outcomes to account for closures in daycare, for example.” Their flexibility was key for community partners to adapt quickly and adjust to the challenges presented by the pandemic. According to interviewees, these behaviors set NCEF apart: “Other funders were not as generous. NCEF has been a fabulous partner. We solve

problems together, with our communication and how we work together. They hold us accountable, and they are there. They are a real model for this work.”

Participating interviewees and focus group contributors also noted NCEF’s role as a community convener during the pandemic. “It’s been helpful to have an entity like NCEF to bring people together that might otherwise work in siloes,” one articulated. Another shared: “NCEF does a great job of pulling everyone together and leveraging the strengths of orgs to address the needs of the community.” Overall, this facilitates an environment of mutual support as well, which is particularly critical during uncertain times like the COVID-19 pandemic.

Recommendations for Investments and Interventions

Data collection and analysis in this updated Child Wellbeing Study illustrates the challenges facing children in Collier County are interrelated and multifaceted. Consequently, additional investments and future interventions to advance child outcomes will need to be informed, collaborative, and strategic. These efforts should also be cross-sector, including not only NCEF and philanthropic efforts, but also community-based organizations, health and educational institutions, government, business, and committed individuals.

The Luminary team collected a set of recommendations and actions that emerged out of the qualitative and quantitative data collection activities of this study. These build on current successes, and with additional investments they are likely to significantly improve the wellbeing and future of children in Collier County. In addition, these recommendations are assessed through the collective experience of Luminary, and research conducted from other communities, but remain its own recommendations (and not those of NCEF).

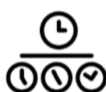
Summary of Recommendations



Support Community Coalitions and Formal and Informal Collaborations



Continue Leadership Development and Capacity-Building



Anticipate and Adapt to Ever-Shifting Circumstances



Track Emerging Issues and Needs

Support Community Coalitions and Formal and Informal Collaborations

Participants in the interviews and focus groups for this study noted that “most of the nonprofits in this area work together to serve as a team.” Organizations have strong partnerships, facilitated in part by the space and ability afforded to them by NCEF’s support. “There is already a strong culture of working together, it could be expanded upon,” particularly for organizations and leaders who work with similar populations or

services. In other words, the more integrated services can become, “the better we’re able to meet the need. So, we can make sure the right interventions are there for those who need it, at the right time, at the optimal cost.”

In addition, investing in systems or tools such as referral systems or common communication or data platforms would advance information sharing, further supporting community-based and wrap around services for families in the region. Similarly, supporting collective data sharing and inter-organizational communication around metrics, performance, and activities would enhance structured collaboration within NCEF’s priority issues. This would ensure that partners clearly understand how each other serves the community, and what resources are available to families.

Continue Leadership Development and Capacity-Building

Several study participants noted that NCEF’s prior efforts bringing local organizations together for training and connection was appreciated. They spoke about the training and skill-building, but also about the intentional time and space that’s created for community leaders to come together and share solutions, ideas, and support. Some described the benefit that results: increased connection, collaboration, and problem solving. “When we’re connected, the continuum of care is seamless,” one interview said.

Anticipate and Adapt to Ever-Shifting Circumstances

As this report shows, the outcomes of Collier County children are affected significantly by external and environmental factors like changing demographics and public health crises. As the county continues to change, NCEF and other area funders should continue to be thoughtful and strategic about how child wellbeing and services vary across the county. While similar issues present universally, Collier County includes geographic areas with drastically different family circumstances and available resources to meet the need. Study interview participants shared that “NCEF has done a great job pulling together the key stakeholders and building a responsive system of care for kids. There are several things that work well, and layering support in terms of navigation and linking to care has been enhanced. There is just more to be done so we can magnify the impact.”

As they look ahead, many local leaders interviewed alluded to a post-pandemic fiscal cliff, where relief funding and supplemental government funding is phased out, and community issues remain. As one put it, “current inflation has created a different set of economic stressors for our community, and the huge impact on the cost of living will continue.” While community leaders work daily to meet community needs, they are also concerned about the workforce issues they face as an organization: resignations, competition, turnovers. One shared, “We have a shortage of workers when we really need to be expanding. And we’ll be reeling from that for some time.” In the future, NCEF has an opportunity to work with partners to support their workforce, addressing training, infrastructure, and the pipeline.

Similarly, “really shoring up this workforce” means “considering things like rent or affordable housing, cost of living, and wage pressures.” As another interviewee shared, “We’re just serving the tip of the iceberg as far as needs right now. We need licensed professionals as we’re underrepresented as far as national ratios for a community of our size. The more we understand what needs there are and how they present for children, the more we will need as far as staffing.”

Track Emerging Issues and Needs

Across data collection activities for this report, housing presented as a serious emerging issue for Collier County. Comments from interviewees and focus groups centered on affordability and access: “We keep connections on the other services, and affordable housing is a major, major issue. A lot of our families are telling us they need to move out of the area.” Lack of affordable housing creates other financial constraints on families that have additional needs, including medical care, mental health support, even child care or youth enrichment or development programs.

Lack of housing access leads to temporary or extended homelessness. In extreme cases, recent and ongoing economic pressures causes families to be homeless. Housing and homelessness is a particular issue where institutions from multiple sectors – healthcare, veterans services, behavioral and mental health, workforce supports – can come together to increase success and impact.

Many interviewees noted that philanthropy alone, even in partnership with the private sector, cannot address the needs discussed in this report. Engaging in advocacy can support other public investments by raising awareness of the need and how it affects families day-to-day. For several study topics, such as mental health, a regional approach to data gathering and collaboration would be beneficial, given that patients and affected families don’t follow county lines.

As one focus group pointed out, NCEF is “so well connected; they can bring even more resources to the table by leveraging their voice, their relationships, to get more engagement” around the continuum of care for children. Another voice echoed, “they have amazing reach and influence, so when they get involved in something it creates transformational change.” Raising awareness about key community issues would not just influence policy and decision makers, it also ensures that families know where to go for the services and resources they need for their care.

Conclusion

The effort by NCEF to take on the challenge of tracking and interpreting child wellbeing in Collier County should be commended and continued in the future. Building on previous iterations, findings from this current version of the Child Wellbeing Study will inform NCEF's investments and priorities, and support decision-making and knowledge building throughout the county. In addition, the data collection and analysis from this study informs community organizations and leaders, providing important context and direction for their work as well.

Findings from this 2022 study also illuminate how interconnected social conditions are with quality-of-life outcomes for families and children. Children whose parents and caregivers are struggling due to changes in the local economy, employment shifts, a lack of affordable child care, or with no place to live will continue to face inequities in wellbeing and future attainment. As many study interviewees pointed out, the coordinated pandemic response has illustrated how valuable it is when healthcare and medical services work alongside and communicate with social services and community-based nonprofit organizations. For over 20 years, NCEF has taken a leadership role in connecting community leaders across various sectors to share information and problem-solve together.

Relationship building, strong collaboration, and effective systems will help the community to not only continue recovery from the long-term impacts of the pandemic, but to also be prepared when the next crisis emerges. Across the board, NCEF was praised for the leadership exhibited and the partnership provided. Current gains have been made for the benefit of Collier County's children in a number of areas, but additional advancement will take time, concentrated resources, 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.



Report Addendum: Hurricane Ian Update

A Message From NCEF

December 2022

Hurricane Ian made landfall in Southwest Florida on September 28th as a strong Category 4 storm causing devastating damage and destruction in its wake throughout the community. Drawing on the community triage that we applied during previous emergencies, the Naples Children & Education Foundation has been helping our beneficiaries, community partners, teachers and individual families to recover from Ian's destruction. As a result of this comprehensive work, hundreds of children and families received the help they needed in less time, while dozens of nonprofits were able to keep their doors open and to expedite emergency services to the hardest-hit communities that we serve.

NCEF also helped coordinate all-day special programming for the children of teachers and school workers who live in neighboring Lee County but work in Collier County, freeing the teachers and staff to return to work. Through our combined efforts and the resilience of teachers, staff and students, Collier County Public Schools reopened on Thursday, October 6th, just eight days after Ian made landfall in Lee County.

With NCEF now serving as a clearinghouse to coordinate the distribution of items such as bedding, mattresses, household supplies, clothing, fruits and vegetables, and more, we are currently focusing our efforts on:

- Helping children and families of some 150-200 displaced teachers whose homes were lost or severely damaged
- Assisting with needs in hard-hit pockets of East Naples, Davis Triangle, Marco Island and Everglades City where children of several families are still sleeping on cots and air mattresses
- Working with healthcare services to identify areas in need of their support
- Coordinating efforts with outside foundations to help provide temporary and possibly permanent new facilities for centers that were damaged
- Providing one-on-one support to NCEF beneficiaries as they work with their staff and the children and families who are in their centers due to hurricane-related losses

Immediately after the storm passed, NCEF led the effort assessing needs of the community along with the Collier Community Foundation, the Richard M. Schulze Family Foundation and United Way of Collier and the Keys. The results allowed us to better gauge everyone's status and needs in order to help our community move forward. The results from more than 100 nonprofits, including 45 of which are NCEF beneficiaries,

showed that thankfully over half of the organizations did not experience structural damage to their facility, allowing 85% of them to be operational just days after the storm. Unfortunately, 35% face structural damage from flooding and roof problems that have hampered or delayed their return to providing services.

To date a few of our accomplishments have included:

- Increasing the amount of food being distributed in areas where food was not accessible, through a combination of hot meals and nonperishable items (over 2 million pounds of food and thousands of hot meals)
- Working at a regional level by linking nonprofit groups to better assist with donated supplies and needed assistance to help the severely affected in Lee County
- Arranging for new clothes to be distributed in the hardest-hit areas of Southwest Florida
- Sourcing transportation for beneficiaries to increase their efficiency in providing supplies throughout the community
- Leveraging resources to resolve unique issues such as a need for mobile laundry services
- Connecting outside foundations, volunteers and others to help clean up and repair NCEF beneficiary buildings
- Linking nonprofit groups to better assist with donations of supplies
- Hiring a Community Resource Navigator to help assess and coordinate relief efforts at a regional level

Since its founding in 2000, NCEF has invested in dozens of nonprofits that have developed systems of care and a web of services. The coalitions that we helped develop to this day work together to leverage each other's resources, build capacity and meet the needs of children and their families, both on an ongoing basis and when a crisis strikes.

For example, our responses in the aftermath of Hurricane Irma (2017) and during the COVID-19 pandemic helped us develop an effective crisis-response toolkit that also served the community effectively.

The lessons learned, the trust and teamwork that developed and the elimination/reduction of duplication that have evolved over the past 20-plus years have now guided our unified and efficient response to Ian and will be key in the recovery efforts in the coming weeks and months.

It will be a long road to recovery for many, but we have felt the immense strength of this community in the past and know we can come out of this stronger than ever.

About Luminary Evaluation Group

Luminary Evaluation Group is a program evaluation firm that helps nonprofits and funders identify what is working, what is not working, and what options exist to enhance programming. At the core of our collaborative process is deep contextual exploration, anchored by qualitative data collection and analysis. We listen, observe, and build reciprocal relationships with our clients, and facilitate sharing and exploration between stakeholders. Our deep contextual knowledge of nonprofit programs, challenges, and goals allows us to work with stakeholders to identify useful questions for the base of the evaluation protocol, and to understand the issues and contexts of a given evaluation project. This enables us to develop an appropriate evaluation plan to reflect the reality of a program, capture existing knowledge, and produce essential new insights. Our clients report being able to clearly see actionable next steps from evaluation findings.

SERVICES

Program Evaluation

We help nonprofits assess their impact and make data-driven decisions based on findings and recommendations.

Evaluation Capacity Building

Organizations often conduct data collection and assessment with their own staff. We help them build evaluation plans and ongoing practices that they can implement.

Logic Models

A solid logic model is the foundation impact. We help organizations build and refine logic models.

Model Capture

Good programs need good materials. We help organizations codify and articulate their program models by designing user-friendly and attractive written manuals and guides.

Surveys, Interviews, and Focus Groups

As part of Luminary's commitment to equity and culturally responsive practices, surveys are available in all languages. We also offer focus groups and qualitative interview services in both English and Spanish.

TEAM

Alison LaRocca, President & CEO

Alison has spent her career working at the intersection of nonprofit research, senior level advisement, and strategy. Alison is the Managing Director of Luminary Evaluation Group. Luminary's mission is to improve the lives of children and families by conducting high-quality, participatory research for funders and nonprofit organizations of every size, capacity, and budget who are interested in understanding, articulating, and growing their

impact. In this role, Alison brings her particular expertise in participatory evaluation and human centered design, instrument development, data collection, and quantitative and qualitative data analysis. As an evaluator, Alison helps clients communicate research effectively to key stakeholders and other broad audiences. Specifically, she supports organization leaders as they work to use data effectively, incorporate evidence-based practices into programs and policies, assess effectiveness, and improve outcomes. Alison is a graduate of Williams College and holds a Master's in Elementary Education from Merrimack College.

Alexandra Kirade, Associate Director

Alexandra Kirade is an Associate Director at Luminary. She delivers high-quality, actionable strategy and support to organizations through a social justice lens and feminist approach. Alexandra is adept at working across organizations and communities to create shared vision and drive results. Assuming a leadership role in community mental health at the height of Manchester, NH's opioid crisis, Alexandra contributed to several leading-edge, federally funded initiatives. Alexandra graduated magna cum laude from Stonehill College with Bachelor of Arts degrees in Psychology and Gender & Sexuality Studies. She holds a Master of Public Administration and a Master of Arts in Community Development Policy & Practice from the University of New Hampshire. Alexandra's research has explored how policy, power, and privilege intersect to contribute to disparities in health and well-being, education, and employment.

Liane Cassavoy, Senior Associate

Liane Cassavoy is a Senior Associate at Luminary Evaluation Group. She has more than 20 years of experience as a communications professional, working in both nonprofit and for-profit settings. Before joining Luminary, Liane was the Outreach Coordinator for the Melrose Alliance Against Violence, a nationally recognized domestic violence agency. She oversaw the agency's communications strategy, supervised the planning and execution of major fundraising events, and led trainings on teen dating violence, healthy relationships, and bullying prevention with middle school and high school students. Liane began her career as a journalist, writing about technology and business topics for a variety of national and local publications, including PCWorld, Entrepreneur Magazine, and Macworld, among others. She also is the author of two business start-up guidebooks, which were published by Entrepreneur Press. Liane holds a master's degree in Journalism from Boston University and a bachelor's degree in English from Boston College.

Shannon Stagner, Senior Associate

Shannon Stagner is a Senior Associate at Luminary. Prior to joining Luminary in 2021, Shannon served as an advisor and consultant for the United Way in her native Texas, spearheading statewide initiatives, collective impact efforts, communications, and local best practice sharing. During her tenure, the network advanced outcomes across communities around education, financial stability, and health for children and families, and embarked on a comprehensive data project examining trends in the states' nonprofit sector. Consequently, she understands the importance of capacity-building and

organizational management that increases sustainability and innovation. When the world shut down in 2020, Shannon transferred her expertise to the virtual setting, designing and managing professional development training curriculum for nonprofit professionals across the country. She began her career in philanthropy and stakeholder engagement at educational institutions, where she built foundational expertise in resource development, messaging and branding, and advocacy. Shannon earned her bachelor's degree at Vassar College, studying Political Science and Geography, and has a master's degree in Public Administration from Troy University.

Jennifer Vail, Senior Associate

Jennifer Vail is a Senior Associate at Luminary. With 25 years of professional experience in project management, executive support, and customer engagement, Jennifer provides Luminary with essential operations and project support. Prior to joining the Luminary team, Jennifer served as a Systems Administrator for Tri-Supreme Optical, a wholesale manufacturing company. Her responsibilities included assisting the General Manager with complex organizational planning, maintaining the laboratory operating system, and managing the human resource and benefit responsibilities for a team of over 100 employees. For the preceding 25 years, Jennifer was an Account Manager for both ABB Optical and Essilor of America, where she managed multi-million-dollar territories serving the Metro NY optical community. Her success in Account Management was fueled by her desire to improve the lives of optical patients while acting as a valued advisor for the business owners throughout her territories. Her skillset and passion brought her to her current position with Civitas Strategies where she is fulfilling her goal of serving mission-driven organizations as a valued member of the team. Jennifer holds a Bachelor of Fine Arts degree with a concentration in photography from Arizona State University. She is also a Board-Certified Optician with the American Board of Opticianry.