

## **Marin Voice: Children's scorecard identifies needed funding, action across the county**

By **MARIA NIGGLE** / March 15, 2023

Data can be tricky to understand in Marin – in part because well-resourced communities and families can hide the reality faced by many. Ask any parent, teacher or child care provider. They can tell you that children are struggling, from our youngest children to our teens, and have been during the past few years.

The initial COVID-19 pandemic emergency may be over, but the impacts remain and continue to evolve. A community that stays vigilant and informed can help determine how best to move forward, keeping the needs of our most vulnerable children and families at the center.

So, how are the children?

The “2023 California County Scorecard of Children’s Well-Being” is produced by Children Now. It is an online tool that we can use to examine statistics county-by-county and statewide. There are indicators for health, education, child welfare and early childhood. The tool can be viewed and adjusted by year and ethnicity.

As you might imagine, Marin scores high in many areas, thanks to the efforts of dedicated public and community-based organizations. For example, 95% of newborns born in Marin fall within a healthy birth weight. We can also celebrate that 91% of low-income children who qualify for CalFresh (California’s Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, aka food stamps) receive it.

But impressive results can fall short in many critical areas. For example, having 53% of Marin’s low-income children visiting the dentist gives us the top ranking in the state for dental visits, it means 47% of kids have not been to the dentist. That’s concerning.

The scorecard also shows that less than half of the families that need child care in Marin have a space available for them. This should have all of us up in arms. How can families go back to work if they don’t have child care? How can we work to better understand the root causes of this breakdown?

As many workplaces transition from remote back to in-person workspaces, how can Marin’s families adapt without well-resourced public goods like child care?

The county rankings also show that Marin kids are struggling in several notable areas. Areas of concern include kindergarteners with up-to-date immunizations (Marin ranks 31st out of

58 counties), children with Medi-Cal health coverage who had an annual checkup (47th in the state) and English language learners who achieved fluency in their school careers (40th).

Marin has almost 70,000 children and young adults – about 45,600 17 years old and younger, with about 21,350 ages 18 to 25. Here is the racial breakdown: 61% are White, 24% are Latino, 6% are Asian, 3% are Black and 6% are other. Almost 1,500 youth are experiencing homelessness or are “precariously housed.”

With just 70,000 young people to be responsible for and care for in our county, we need 70,000 commitments to children and youth for improved health, better education and optimal results in life.

Using the scorecard, we can review critical data points for Marin County kids — and use that data for education, advocacy, programmatic planning, budgetary decisions and changes in our systems of care. This is an invaluable tool. We can also delve into local educational data by exploring the Marin Promise Partnership website at [MarinPromisePartnership.org](http://MarinPromisePartnership.org)

If you want to learn more about the “2023 California County Scorecard of Children’s Well-Being,” you are invited to a free online presentation by Children Now on Friday at 10 a.m. The event is hosted by the Marin Communications Forum and sponsored by First 5 Marin. To register, email [Michelle@First5Marin.org](mailto:Michelle@First5Marin.org).

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