

2023 UPDATE

EARLY CHILDHOOD

BLUE RIBBONS Early childhood as community priority · Adoption of Conscious Discipline methods · Legislative support for funding

RED FLAGS Economic disparities · Child abuse and neglect · Lack of support to mitigate post-trauma mental health effects



PHOTO COURTESY OF COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIP OF THE OZARKS

Children play at the Community Wide Play Day, a free event by Community Partnership of the Ozarks, on April 28, 2023, at Fasnacht Park.

Despite state and local intervention, economic burdens still hinder families

Early childhood care and education continue to receive attention in our community, with **renewed interest at the state and local levels** to address Red Flags. State and federal legislators and agencies are working to find ways to make care, education, and high-quality home-visiting services available and affordable for families.

Missouri Gov. Mike Parson has proposed changes that would allow more children to receive free or low-cost child care or preschool, tax credits that would encourage businesses to contribute to the provision of early care options, and other legislative and budget proposals that support children and families.

Locally, the Workforce Development committee of the Early Care and

Education Collaborative is surveying parents in and outside the workforce to determine their needs. These results will help families **struggling economically** and inform businesses of their employees' needs related to child care, and will hopefully discover new and innovative strategies to partner with others in solving the child care shortage.

New data show **economic disparities** remain a persistent Red Flag. The Mayor's Commission for Children released its Kindergarten Readiness Survey for 2022 and showed:

- A higher proportion of students eligible for free/reduced lunch were described by their teachers as not prepared for kindergarten, and a higher proportion of students paying regular lunch prices

RECENT SUCCESS STORY

In July 2022, KYTV and the Springfield Daily Citizen partnered on a series of stories to highlight the current child care crisis, and how the shortage of child care availability causes families to struggle and exacerbates the workforce shortage in our community.

After the series, KYTV and Springfield Daily Citizen partnered with Community Partnership of the Ozarks to host a forum titled "Child Care and Your Bottom Line," which examined how businesses were being impacted by the child care crisis.

The Developmental Center of the Ozarks' Early Childhood Center used the attention from the forum to educate and engage their board of directors. Low wages had caused the center to lose seasoned staff to higher-wage jobs outside the field, and the center, with the board of directors' guidance, made adjustments to its child-care budget to increase staff wages, a boost that attracted new teachers and brought back workers who had left.

The Workforce Development committee also partnered with the Springfield Area Chamber of Commerce in August 2023 to engage the governor's office and our local business community in learning more about the needs of local business owners and child care providers.

Community Partnership of the Ozarks is working with KidsWin Missouri on Child Care and Early Education Community Planning Grants. This project will focus on a landscape analysis, fiscal mapping and cost modeling of child care in the Springfield area, and by May 2024, it will develop a plan of action to address our child care and early education gaps.

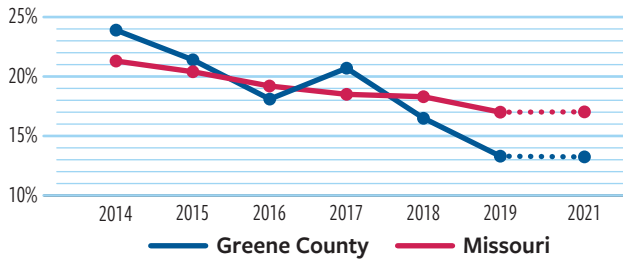
were described as well prepared for kindergarten.

- Students who did not attend a formal preschool program were disproportionately not prepared for kindergarten.
- More children are attending preschool and pre-K programs in Springfield.
- Pre-K is important for preparing children for kindergarten, but it is especially important for low-income students.

Ratings of kindergarten readiness

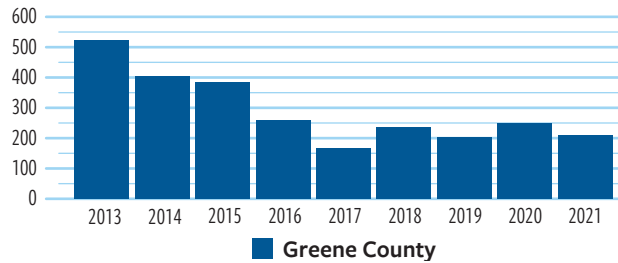
KEY METRICS

Child (Under 18) Poverty Rate



SOURCE: MISSOURI KIDS COUNT

Substantiated Cases of Child Abuse and Neglect



SOURCE: MISSOURI KIDS COUNT

and DECA (Deveraux Early Childhood Assessment) scores are comparable to data from previous study years. It is possible that the pandemic did not have the same impact on this kindergarten cohort as it had on older student cohorts.

Younger children born around the time of the pandemic are believed to be affected, as reported anecdotally by several teachers, directors and parent educators. Classrooms of toddlers and 2-year-olds are behind developmentally, as a group. Language, motor skills and social skills have all been impacted. This will have ramifications for at least three to five years, the estimated time it will take for them to catch up.

According to the Child Abuse & Neglect – Annual Statistical Report published by the Greene County Juvenile Office in 2022, 448 referrals were made, with a peak of referrals being received in July. 2022 referral numbers remained steady from the previous year.

Among the referral count, 303 were White and 106 were Black, 16 were Hispanic, four were American Indian/

Alaskan Native, and four were Asian/Pacific Islander. This means the number of referrals for Black/African American youth is disproportionate to Greene County’s population of Black/African American children — 24.48% compared to 6.72% of Greene County’s population.

The report also indicated that one of every two children referred was under the age of four in Greene County, having lasting impacts on our children’s development and ability to feel safe in their homes.

The report showed 198 youth were reunified with families after spending a median of 1.47 years in their respective placement while 143 youth in Greene County were adopted and 59 youth were placed in guardianship through the Family Court.

The Early Childhood 2023 Update was produced by Dana Carroll of Community Partnership of the Ozarks with input from Amanda Coleman, Jennifer Crouch, Christy Davis, Laura Farmer, Nicole Piper, Kimberly Shinn Brown and Stephanie Smallwood.

ABOUT THE 2023 UPDATE

This interim update reviews current data for the Blue Ribbons and Red Flags from the 2021 report. The 20th anniversary report, to be released in 2024, will develop an updated list of Blue Ribbons and Red Flags.