

CHS in the News



Florida's kids – and future – are counting on you | Opinion

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Graduation rates are up, teen births are on the decline and fewer children are living in poverty – all, at face value, indicate Florida is moving in the right direction.

Yet while some numbers in the recently released 2019 Annie E. Casey Foundation Kids Count Report show a slight improvement in a few areas, we have substantial work to do. Florida still lags behind much of the nation, ranking 37th in child well-being – a three-point drop in just one year.

This should matter to every Floridian; the factors affecting child health, safety and well-being today drive the societal and economic consequences tomorrow.

Today, one out of every five Florida children lives in poverty – a mere 3% improvement since 2010. We must do better. Not only because it's the right thing to do for children, but also because it's the best thing for our economy.

Children in poverty are three times more likely to be abused and seven times more likely to endure neglect. When these threats to safety and well-being trigger involvement in the foster care system, the outcomes for kids immediately plummet.

No matter how positive their experience in foster care may be, the simple fact that they have been removed from their families and placed into care lowers their chances for success. And for those who, sadly, grow up in foster care and exit the system without a family, the future is bleak.

Twenty percent will become homeless. Only 50% will be employed by age 24. They're 10 times more likely to commit a crime. And they are 75% more likely to rely on the government just to meet their basic needs, perpetuating the cycle of dependence on public welfare funding.

That's a price we all pay. And it doesn't end there.

Children in poverty are also five times more likely to drop out of high school. Immediately, Florida suffers a loss in the talent pool and, more than likely, guarantees another cycle of poverty. And those who drop out are 63 times more likely to spend time behind bars as an adult.

The cost to society – over and above lost potential: \$292,000 per dropout.

That's why we at Children's Home Society of Florida remain passionate about delivering the right solutions to change the circumstances – especially for kids living in poverty, those who have suffered trauma and those battling mental health challenges.

That means reaching the whole child, the whole family – from cradle to career and beyond.

We're moving full speed ahead, but we can't do it alone. We need this entire community to jump on board, to collaborate, to innovate and to fund the solutions that will take Florida from No. 37 to No. 1.

If you're ready to change the future for Tallahassee's kids, then Children's Home Society of Florida needs you. Advocate with us to affect policy that can influence these numbers. Become part of the solution as an investor eager to address the root causes of these consequences. Be the business, leader, donor or organization that partners with us to bring the right solutions to our community. The first step is a simple phone call to 850-488-0506 or email to info@chsfl.org.

It's not just our children's future that depends on it – the future of Florida is riding on it.

Andry Sweet is the chief operating officer and interim CEO for Children's Home Society of Florida.

