

2024-2025 EXECUTIVE *Summary*

2024/2025 NEEDS ASSESSMENT EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Key Findings

The Children's Services Needs Assessment Sub-Committee has conducted a comprehensive review of the needs within Indian River County, expanding upon findings from the previous year. This 2024/2025 Needs Assessment identifies critical areas requiring intensified focus, strategic planning, and coordinated support. Our committee has prioritized three domains: Health & Well-being, Nurturing Families & Communities, and Success in School & Life and identified significant shifts in each area. These findings guide our recommendations for targeted interventions, prevention strategies, and enhanced community collaboration.

1. Health & Well-being

Our assessment emphasizes the essential need to address prenatal care disparities and youth behavioral health more intensively:

- **Prenatal Care Access:** Disparities in early prenatal care access persist, particularly among Black and Hispanic mothers. Although 2024 data shows a slight improvement in first-trimester prenatal care initiation, substantial gaps remain. To reduce prenatal care disparities, we recommend specific outreach and increased access to prenatal services for underrepresented populations.
- **Youth Behavioral Health:** The prevalence of youth depression and suicidal ideation has reached concerning levels, especially among female students. Substance use, although decreasing over the past decade, remains a complex challenge with the rise in vaping among youth. We recommend reinforcing community behavioral health resources, particularly those that provide preventive and resilience-building supports.
- **Support for Students with Special Needs:** Data shows an increase in students identified with developmental delays and autism spectrum disorder. Recognizing these trends, we recommend expanding specialized community educational resources and providing training for community organizations to provide targeted support for these students.

2. Nurturing Families & Communities

Our findings in this area underscore the need to address increasing childhood adversity and rising juvenile delinquency:

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- **Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs):** We observed that nearly 26.3% of high school students in Indian River County report experiencing four or more ACEs, a significant increase from prior years. Common ACEs include parental separation, household substance use, and mental illness. To counter these effects, we recommend expanding family-centered interventions that address ACEs and enhance stability within homes.
- **Child Abuse and Foster Care:** While the rate of child abuse among youth aged 5-11 has slightly decreased, it remains higher than the state average. Our findings also indicate an increase in foster care placements, particularly among teenagers. We recommend maintaining robust child protection services and fostering community-based support programs that prevent abuse and address trauma among youth in care.
- **Juvenile Delinquency:** The rate of juvenile arrests has increased by 13% with misdemeanor offenses on the rise among middle and high school students, exceeding the Florida statewide average rate. To reverse this trend, we urge increased support for youth mentoring programs, early intervention strategies, and community-based alternatives to traditional disciplinary measures.

3. Success in School & Life

The assessment highlights continued challenges in educational readiness and attendance, while pointing to opportunities for strengthening career pathways:

- **Kindergarten Readiness:** Despite some improvement, nearly half of incoming kindergarten students are not fully prepared for school. The data underscores a need for expanded early childhood education programs, particularly in areas with lower rates of school readiness. We recommend prioritizing funding for early learning initiatives that ensure children are equipped to succeed from the start.
- **Academic Achievement and Attendance:** Our analysis indicates that academic performance remains above state averages, yet chronic absenteeism has increased post-pandemic. We recommend targeted attendance interventions, particularly for at-risk student groups, to sustain and enhance these academic gains.
- **High School Graduation and Career Readiness:** Graduation rates continue to exceed state averages, marking five consecutive years of success. However, our findings indicate a need for additional vocational training and partnerships with local businesses to expand career readiness pathways. We recommend developing partnerships with regional employers and trade programs to prepare students for diverse post-graduation opportunities.

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Additional Insights and Recommendations

The committee's expanded data collection and community engagement efforts have revealed additional insights that inform our recommendation

- **Demographic Shifts:** Indian River County's aging population and increasing youth diversity necessitate culturally tailored and accessible services. We recommend targeted outreach and service expansion that reflects the demographic shifts within the county.
- **Accessibility of Resources:** Transportation and scheduling barriers continue to limit access to essential services. We recommend that funded programs prioritize geographic convenience and adaptable scheduling to ensure resources reach those in need effectively.

Conclusion

In summary, the 2024/2025 Needs Assessment findings by the Children's Services Advisory Committee highlight both the progress made and the emerging needs within Indian River County. Addressing these needs will require a continued commitment to collaborative partnerships, strategic investment in preventive and supportive services, and a focus on creating equitable access to resources across all sectors of the community. By prioritizing these actions, we aim to foster a healthier, more resilient, and prosperous future for all county residents.

UNDERMET NEEDS

Category	Focus Area	Progress	Unmet Needs
Health & Well-being	Prenatal Care	Slight improvement in early access to prenatal care.	Significant racial/ethnic disparities remain, with Black and Hispanic mothers less likely to receive timely care.
	Youth Behavioral Health	Decline in substance use overall, some reduction in youth vaping.	High rates of depression and suicidal ideation, especially among female students; limited mental health resources.
	Physical Health	Youth obesity rates below state average; decrease in lifetime use of harmful substances.	Higher obesity risks for minority youth and those in apartment housing; access gaps for healthy lifestyle programs.
	Special Needs Programs	Increased support for students with developmental delays and autism.	Growing demand for services exceeds current capacity, especially for targeted interventions for autism.
Nurturing Families & Communities	Childhood Adversity	Community initiatives to reduce risk factors have begun.	High levels of ACEs persist, particularly in household mental health and substance abuse.
	Child Abuse and Foster Care	Slight decrease in abuse rates.	Higher than state average for abuse incidents; increased foster care placements, particularly for teens.
	Juvenile Delinquency	Community-based programs available for early intervention.	Increase in juvenile arrests and misdemeanor offenses; need for more diversion and youth support programs.
Success in School & Life	Kindergarten Readiness	Improvements in VPK program participation.	Nearly half of incoming kindergarten students are not prepared; limited access to early learning programs.
	Academic Achievement	Strong performance on state assessments in reading and math; post-pandemic recovery.	Chronic absenteeism rising post-pandemic; attendance programs need expansion and support for high-risk students.
	High School Graduation and Career Pathways	Graduation rates above state average; existing partnerships with local businesses.	Need for expanded vocational training and job readiness programs; limited career pathways for non-college-bound youth.