THE FUTURE OF FORT BEND’S CHILDREN 2012-2014

Made possible by:

The George Foundation

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children at Risk
Speaking Out + Driving Change for Children
About CHILDREN AT RISK

CHILDREN AT RISK is a nonpartisan research and advocacy organization that drives macro-level change through public policy and evidence-based solutions. The organization began in 1989 when a group of advocates met to discuss the lack of data on the status of children and the absence of strong public policy support. CHILDREN AT RISK focuses on the wellbeing of the whole child and serves as a catalyst for change to improve the quality of life for children through strategic research, public policy analysis, community education, collaboration, and advocacy. We strive to make children's needs a priority and ensure ample resources are available for families to thrive.

CHILDREN AT RISK’s recent accomplishments include

• Conducted a study in 2012 which surveyed school districts statewide to gauge the impact of the 82nd Legislature’s $5.4 billion cut to public education on district operations and student success. Our report, Doing More With Less? Public Education in a New Fiscal Reality, was shared with legislators and contributed to significant funding restorations in the 83rd Legislative Session.
• Conducted an assessment of Fort Bend County in 2013 to evaluate the quality of life of the community’s children and propose policy solutions to improve outcomes for local youth.
• Advocated for children across Texas during the 83rd Legislative Session by researching, drafting, and testifying on over 46 pieces of key legislation.
• Hosted six legal fellows who researched successful human trafficking safe house models across the nation and proposed a set of best practices for quality safe houses in Texas through our 2013 publication, The Texas Safe House Movement: An Examination of Restorative Shelter Core Components and Recommendations.
• Conducted an assessment of parent education programs in the greater Houston area and led a coalition of partners to develop an infrastructure so that all parents can have access to evidence-based parent education.
• In 2014, released Texas School Guide: A Parent’s Roadmap to Success for Dallas ISD and Forth Worth ISD and launched TexasSchoolGuide.org to assist parents who wish to maximize their children’s educational attainment.
Fort Bend County is a place that appears to have it all, and it proudly finds itself at the top of the charts in many rankings. It is one of the fastest growing counties in the nation, experiencing population growth at six times the national average over the past decade, and this tremendous population growth comes with a diversity that is unmatched across the country.

The county tops the charts in many other ways as well. Each year when CHILDREN AT RISK ranks public schools across Texas, a number of campuses in Fort Bend County achieve tier one status. The county has the highest percentage of educated adults in the region and one of the highest average household incomes in the state. Recently, the Bureau of Labor Statistics identified Fort Bend County as the community with the highest percentage increase in employment across the nation.

The staff and board members of CHILDREN AT RISK cherish the opportunity to work with stakeholders in Fort Bend County and shine a light on the great work being done by many passionate leaders, organizations, and parents. However, we must also shine a light on the unmet needs of children across the community so we can work together to ensure no child falls through the cracks.

Unfortunately, even in a community as flourishing as Fort Bend County, we find children at risk – children whose needs remain unmet and whose potential remains untapped. Over 70,000 kids in Fort Bend County are living in or near poverty. About 13% of the county’s children lack health insurance and many kids do not have access to primary, specialty, or mental health care. Over 20% of children entering Fort Bend County high schools in 2006 failed to graduate within four years, and every year, hundreds of youth find themselves housed in the county’s juvenile detention center.

We know that our children are our future, but right now, their future is in our hands. Fort Bend finds itself at a pivotal moment in its history and the county is uniquely positioned to become a national leader in the way it addresses children’s issues. Our future will be more secure if communities like Fort Bend can rally together and decide that the needs of children come first. We need the social and political will to stand up on behalf of those who cannot stand up for themselves.

We believe that every child should have an opportunity to succeed, but as it stands today – they don’t. I hope you will join us in being a force for positive change. Our society’s most precious resource – our children – are counting on you.

Hug your kids,

Bob Sanborn, Ed.D.

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Demographics

Between the 2000 Census and 2010 Census, the U.S. population grew by nearly 10%.\(^1\) During that same timeframe, Texas grew at twice the national rate\(^2\) and Fort Bend County grew by an incredible 65\%.\(^3\) One impressive aspect of this dramatic growth is the rich diversity it brings to the county. As a study out of Rice University phrased it, Fort Bend County “is now the single most ethnically diverse county in the nation.”\(^4\) Fort Bend County has a more equal population distribution across traditional racial/ethnic classifications than any other place in the country. In 2010, the county was roughly 36% White, 21% Black, 17% Asian, and 24% Hispanic.\(^5\) The Asian population was the fastest growing group between 2000 and 2010, increasing by over 130\%.\(^6\)

While the cliché “our children are our future” may be true, it is important to realize that our children are also very much our present, with children under the age of 18 making up approximately 29% of the Fort Bend County population.\(^7\) Based on estimates since the 2010 Census, there are currently over 178,000 children under the age of 18 living in the county, and the child population has grown much more quickly than surrounding counties.\(^8\) In fact, the child population alone in Fort Bend County is larger than the total population of 90% of Texas counties.\(^9\)

The changing demographics of Fort Bend County are seen acutely in its child population. Based on projections by the Texas State Demographer, Fort Bend County will be home to nearly 250,000 children by the year 2040.\(^10\) By that time, approximately 40% of kids in the county will be Hispanic and the number of Black children will be relatively equal to the number of White children.\(^11\) With minority populations currently overrepresented in the state’s juvenile justice system and underperforming on educational assessments, Fort Bend County has the opportunity to serve as a model for other communities by taking proactive measures to prepare for this demographic shift and put every child on a path toward a successful future.

The face of the nation is changing, and a good reflection of that face can be clearly seen in the rapidly changing population of Texas. As the Texas population continues to change, policymakers and stakeholders are grappling with the best methods to serve the citizens of our state. The importance of demographic changes are most clearly seen in our state and nation’s most diverse county – Fort Bend County. The county is faced with dynamics that many parts of the country will not see for years to come, and the success of this diverse community has the potential to serve as a model for other parts of the nation.
Poverty is a complex and long-standing societal problem with a number of negative consequences. A lack of financial resources makes it difficult for a family to obtain basic necessities such as adequate housing, access to health care, nutritious meals, and other essentials that many families take for granted.

The Federal Poverty Guidelines are a measure used for administrative purposes, such as determining financial eligibility for federal programs. The 2013 Federal Poverty Guidelines for a family of four is $23,500. Many analysts agree that the guidelines are not an accurate measure of a family’s ability to meet its basic needs. The calculations used to determine poverty thresholds and guidelines are based on formulas developed in the 1960s. At that time, it was estimated that one-third of a family’s income after taxes was spent on food, and food plans from the Department of Agriculture were used as a basis for determining poverty. The cost of food in relation to other expenses, such as gas, rent, childcare, and health care, has changed considerably since the 1960s, but the federal government continues to estimate poverty based on food plans from that era. Consequently, research indicates that a family of four will need an income 1.5 to 3.5 times the amount suggested by the federal guidelines, depending on location and the age of the children, in order to meet the family’s basic needs.

Fort Bend County has a reputation for being economically vibrant, and data from the U.S. Census Bureau indicates that the county has one of the state’s highest levels of median income ($82,147). The county’s median income is just behind Collin County ($82,765) and Rockwall County ($84,763) and well above the statewide median income ($49,390). Consequently, it is not surprising that the percentage of children living in poverty in Fort Bend County is significantly lower than both the national rate of 22.5% and the statewide rate of 26.6%. An estimated 12.2% of children under the age of 18 in Fort Bend County were living below the federal poverty level in 2011.

While 12.2% may seem small, it represents over 21,000 children living in poverty in one of the nation’s wealthiest counties. Fort Bend County is home to more master planned communities than any other county in the state of Texas. These impressive subdivisions contain beautiful homes and nice neighborhood amenities. With wealthier families concentrated in these communities, it is fairly easy to identify pockets of poverty within the county. Many neighborhoods have virtually no child poverty while others have more than one-third of their children living below federal poverty levels. The Richmond/Rosenberg area in the center of Fort Bend County is home to one of the highest concentrations of child poverty in the county. Another area of highly concentrated child poverty can be found in northern Missouri City, particularly along the southern side of Main Street near Beltway 8.

Due to the outdated formula being utilized, federal poverty measures do not provide a complete picture of financial insecurity. One in ten Fort Bend County children live at or below the Federal Poverty Guidelines but many more are living near poverty and lack adequate resources for a comfortable quality of life. The number of children living near poverty can be roughly tracked by examining the number of children who qualify for reduced-price school meals. A child qualifies for reduced-price meals if his family’s income is at or below 185% of poverty guidelines ($43,568 for a family of four). Across Fort Bend County, 42% of children are living near poverty and qualify for this program. Extrapolating this percentage to the general child population, it is estimated that over 53,000 children in county live near poverty in addition to the over 21,000 children living in poverty.

Percent of Children in Poverty
ACS 2010 5yr - % Living in Poverty

Source: American Community Survey 2006-2010 (5 year estimates), U.S. Census Bureau, via Social Explorer.

Policy Recommendations:
Child poverty is tied to poor health, low graduation rates, delinquent behaviors, and a host of negative outcomes. Children often find themselves in a cycle of generational poverty. Targeted efforts should be made in highly concentrated pockets of poverty to empower families to rise out of financial despair. This requires awareness among the community as well as efforts to overcome unique cultural barriers that may exist among low-income families in various parts of the county.
Food security represents a household’s ability to obtain sufficient food for a healthy lifestyle. Families experiencing food insecurity are unable to access nutritional food at some point during the year due to limited resources. Everyone agrees that no child should go hungry; child hunger is an issue that tugs at the heartstrings of the population. Studies strongly suggest that the stress of food insecurity negatively impacts a child’s development. Areas that are adversely impacted include nutritional, social, behavioral, intellectual, and psycho-emotional well-being.

Nationwide, 22.4% of children experience food insecurity. Texas has the 9th highest child food insecurity rate in the nation at 27.6%. With a child food insecurity rate of 17.1%, Fort Bend County fares better than the state and the nation. Although children in Fort Bend County are less likely to experience food insecurity than children across the country, children who do experience food insecurity in the county are more likely to be ineligible for income-based nutrition programs. While 80% of food insecure children across the country are financially eligible for federal nutrition programs, only about 50% of food insecure children in Fort Bend County qualify for these programs. Based on these estimates, over 13,000 hungry children in the county are financially ineligible for public programs and are dependent upon charitable support. These are the children of the working poor who find themselves in a difficult situation; they are too wealthy for assistance, yet too poor to fulfill all their basic needs.

In Texas, one important food program that benefits children who experience food insecurity is the Texas Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), commonly referred to as “food stamps.” Over the past decade, there has been a steady increase in the number of children receiving food through SNAP in Fort Bend County. An average of 23,506 children in Fort Bend County received food through SNAP each month in 2012, representing an increase of 50% since 2008.

Because children spend a large amount of time at school, school campuses are a great venue for safeguarding against food insecurity. The National School Breakfast Program and the National School Lunch Program are federally funded programs utilized by public schools and nonprofit private schools across the country. A child from a family whose income falls at or below 130% of the Federal Poverty Guidelines is eligible to receive school meals for free. A child from a family whose income falls between 130% and 185% of the poverty guidelines is eligible to receive school meals at a reduced-price. During the 2013-2014 school year, 130% of the poverty level is $30,615 for a family of four and 185% is $43,568. Over 40% of the children enrolled in Fort Bend County public schools are eligible for free or reduced-price meals.
Of the students who are eligible for free or reduced-price meals in Fort Bend County, 72% utilized the program for lunch and only 30% utilized the program for breakfast in the 2012-2013 school year. This means that for the School Breakfast Program, there were 29,797 eligible students each day who did not participate and receive a free or reduced-price breakfast. Students who are eligible for school meal programs but not utilizing the programs may not be participating due to lack of awareness of programs, timing or the inability/unwillingness of students to come to school earlier to eat breakfast, atmosphere of the school cafeteria, or possible stigmas associated with receiving free or reduced-price meals.

Policy Recommendations:
With a significant number of hungry children not qualifying for public services, the local community must be creative and generous in responding to the problem. Service providers and faith-based organizations have played a vital role in feeding the hungry in Fort Bend County, and there is additional room for collaboration among these groups to serve food insecure children.

Beginning in the 2014-2015 school year, new Texas legislation (SB 376) requires campuses where 80% of the student population qualifies for free or reduced-price meals to offer a free breakfast to all students regardless of eligibility. Based on data from the 2012-2013 school year, over twenty campuses in Fort Bend County had economically disadvantaged rates at or near 80%. Schools have the option of seeking a waiver from the mandatory expanded breakfast for up to one year; however, school officials should be proactive in seeking the best options for expanding breakfast programs in 2014 rather than postponing the service.

Additionally, school officials should consider expanding access to breakfast even if they have not been mandated by the state, particularly at campuses where a majority of students are economically disadvantaged. Data shows that providing a free breakfast to all students can be cost-neutral even below the 80% threshold established by the state. Stafford MSD has seen increased breakfast participation by offering breakfast in the classroom, and students who choose to take a breakfast receive the appropriate charge on their meal accounts. Whereas the county-wide breakfast participation rate among eligible students is 30%, the participation rate at Stafford Elementary is an incredible 87%. This model utilizes both federal reimbursements and student payments to create a sustainable and highly accessed model that could be replicated in other schools.

### SCHOOLS IMPACTED BY SB 376
(80% or more of student body is economically disadvantaged)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Campus</th>
<th>District</th>
<th>Eligible for Free/Reduced</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Juan Seguin Elementary</td>
<td>Lamar CISD</td>
<td>97%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jackson Elementary</td>
<td>Lamar CISD</td>
<td>93%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>T. L. Pink Elementary</td>
<td>Lamar CISD</td>
<td>93%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ridgegate Elementary</td>
<td>Fort Bend ISD</td>
<td>89%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Christa McAuliffe Middle</td>
<td>Fort Bend ISD</td>
<td>86%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dr. Lynn Armstrong Elementary</td>
<td>Fort Bend ISD</td>
<td>85%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bowie Elementary</td>
<td>Lamar CISD</td>
<td>85%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beasley Elementary</td>
<td>Lamar CISD</td>
<td>85%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blue Ridge Elementary</td>
<td>Fort Bend ISD</td>
<td>84%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Smith Elementary</td>
<td>Lamar CISD</td>
<td>82%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jane Long Elementary</td>
<td>Lamar CISD</td>
<td>82%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E. A. Jones Elementary</td>
<td>Fort Bend ISD</td>
<td>81%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Taylor Ray Elementary</td>
<td>Lamar CISD</td>
<td>81%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Travis Elementary</td>
<td>Lamar CISD</td>
<td>81%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Navarro Middle</td>
<td>Lamar CISD</td>
<td>80%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### BORDERLINE SCHOOLS
(75% or more of student body is economically disadvantaged)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Campus</th>
<th>District</th>
<th>Eligible for Free/Reduced</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Meyer Elementary</td>
<td>Lamar CISD</td>
<td>79%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hunters Glen Elementary</td>
<td>Fort Bend ISD</td>
<td>79%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ridgemont Elementary</td>
<td>Fort Bend ISD</td>
<td>79%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>George Junior High</td>
<td>Lamar CISD</td>
<td>79%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stafford Elementary</td>
<td>Stafford MSD</td>
<td>77%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Briargate Elementary</td>
<td>Fort Bend ISD</td>
<td>77%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stafford Primary</td>
<td>Stafford MSD</td>
<td>77%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mission Bend Elementary</td>
<td>Fort Bend ISD</td>
<td>76%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Towneview Elementary</td>
<td>Fort Bend ISD</td>
<td>76%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Public information request to the Texas Department of Agriculture, based on point in time data for October 2012.
Although rising obesity rates have started to plateau, one-third of American adults are currently obese.\(^1\) Children are less likely than adults to be classified as obese; however, obesity rates among children have tripled over the past thirty years.\(^2\) A body mass index (BMI) is a common measure of body composition based on an individual’s height and weight. A child whose BMI is at or above the 85th percentile for children of the same age and gender is considered overweight.\(^3\) A child with a BMI at or above the 95th percentile for children of the same age and gender is considered obese.\(^4\)

Approximately one-third of children are either overweight or obese, both nationally and in the state of Texas. Based on self-reported height and weight measurements in 2011, 15.6% of Texas high school students were reported to be obese and 16% were overweight.\(^5\)

Childhood obesity results in increased risks of health problems, increased medical costs, lower academic performance, and decreased self-confidence.\(^6\) During a 2013 community assessment conducted by CHILDREN AT RISK, key informants from the medical community identified obesity as the number one morbidity concern for children in Fort Bend County.

Studies show that the likelihood of becoming obese as an adult is twice as high for obese children as for healthy weight children.\(^7\) Consequently, adolescence is a valuable time to assess physical health and intervene for lasting results. Texas law requires schools to assess the fitness level of students in grades 3-12 at least once per year.\(^8\) In order to comply with this requirement, schools utilize the Fitnessgram, a field test measuring aerobic capacity; body composition; and muscular strength, endurance, and flexibility.

One of the measurements in the Fitnessgram is a child’s BMI. A score in the “Healthy Fitness Zone” represents a healthy level of fitness for that particular piece of the Fitnessgram.\(^9\) Students scoring outside the Healthy Fitness Zone are categorized as either high risk or low risk. While both high risk and low risk students are in need of improvement, high risk students face a more urgent need for increased activity and a healthy diet because the potential for future health problems is probable.\(^10\) Across the state, 54% of students achieved the Healthy Fitness Zone for BMI, and about one-third of Texas students completing the Fitnessgram were classified as high risk.\(^11\) Students across Fort Bend County fared slightly better on BMI measurements, with 58% achieving the Healthy Fitness Zone and about 29% being categorized as high risk.\(^12\)

Although the county as a whole is measuring on par with the state, rates of childhood obesity are still high and not limited to one particular part of the county. In fact, over 100 campuses across Fort Bend County administered the Fitnessgram, and the top ten high risk BMI schools span all four school districts.

Healthy eating habits are a major component in maintaining a healthy weight. Unfortunately, there is cause for concern about the nutritional value of meals consumed by our children. Researchers conducted audits of lunches consumed by over 2,100 second graders in Fort Bend ISD and found that lunches brought from home were higher in sugar and/or fat and were significantly less likely to include fruits.

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### Body Mass Index (BMI): 2011-2012 District Data

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School District</th>
<th>% Healthy Fitness Zone</th>
<th>% Some Risk</th>
<th>% High Risk</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Fort Bend ISD</td>
<td>59.8</td>
<td>13.1</td>
<td>27.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lamar CISD</td>
<td>54.6</td>
<td>13.8</td>
<td>31.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Needville ISD</td>
<td>53.9</td>
<td>13.2</td>
<td>32.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stafford MSD</td>
<td>46.3</td>
<td>14.4</td>
<td>39.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fort Bend County Total</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>13.3</td>
<td>28.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Texas Total</td>
<td>54.3</td>
<td>12.9</td>
<td>32.8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

or vegetables than lunches purchased at school. Additionally, over 50% of restaurants in Fort Bend County are fast food restaurants, and it is estimated that over 45,000 low-income Fort Bend County residents do not live near a grocery store. Increased access to fast food establishments and limited access to healthy foods are problems that are correlated with higher rates of obesity and premature death.

Fortunately, several initiatives and studies on childhood obesity have been conducted in the county with promising results. Campaigns conducted in Fort Bend ISD through a collaboration with United Health as well as research conducted by Baylor College of Medicine have shown that childhood obesity can be reduced in Fort Bend County. The data collected through these programs should be used by community leaders to craft targeted interventions. For example, research conducted in Fort Bend County schools shows that students lose weight during the academic year but experience significant weight gain during the summer. This insight could lead to the targeted implementation of free or reduced-price summer programs through public-private partnerships.

Childhood obesity is not just an issue for educators and health professionals. Businesses should be especially concerned about the fitness of their future workforce because obesity in the state of Texas already carries a hefty price tag for employers. The Texas Comptroller's office estimated that obesity-related health care, lost productivity, absenteeism, and disability resulted in $9.5 billion in costs to Texas businesses in 2009. Projections indicate annual obesity related costs to Texas businesses could reach $32.5 billion by 2030.

Policy Recommendations:

While the county outperforms the state on most indicators, childhood obesity remains as prevalent in Fort Bend County as it is across Texas. Efforts have been initiated at the local level but there is considerable room for improvement across the county. A major boost in physical health would come from increasing physical education, particularly on elementary campuses. Research and national guidelines indicate that children and adolescents should engage in at least 60 minutes of physical activity daily which equals 300 minutes in a regular school week. The majority of this hour should include aerobic physical activity at moderate to vigorous intensity. Schools cannot be the sole venue of physical activity, but they do play an important role in providing an opportunity for physical activity. Texas law mandates a minimum of 135 minutes of physical activity per week for elementary aged children, but the implementation of this requirement varies by campus and could be improved by district-wide policies.

Additional programs can be effective across a spectrum of grade levels, but practically speaking, new programs are more likely to be welcomed by school personnel before third grade because of the added focus on testing at that level. Affordable programming outside traditional school hours, and particularly during the summer months, could be used to protect against sedentary lifestyles, but schools and public funds cannot sustain these initiatives without additional support. Businesses interested in charitable giving should view sponsorship of these activities as a sound investment in the future work force. Finally, physical fitness could be improved by creating greater access to safe parks and increasing the availability of fresh produce and nutritious foods, particularly in low-income areas.
Over one million children under the age of 19 are uninsured in Texas. Nationwide, the state has the second highest rate of uninsured children. In 2010, it was estimated that 15.3% of children in Texas were uninsured while 13% of children in Fort Bend County lacked health coverage. Based on these estimates, over 23,000 children in Fort Bend County were uninsured in 2010. Children who are insured are more likely to be up to date on immunizations, have a regular health care provider, have preventive care visits, make fewer emergency room visits, and even miss fewer days of school due to illness than uninsured children.

The Texas Children’s Health Insurance Program (CHIP) and Children’s Medicaid are programs that offer free or low cost health coverage to children in Texas with family income up to 200% of federal poverty levels. The number of Fort Bend County children enrolled in these programs is increasing. In 2009, the average monthly CHIP enrollment in Fort Bend County was 10,229 children, and in 2012, the average monthly CHIP enrollment was 13,080. The average monthly enrollment in Children’s Medicaid was 23,381 in 2009 and 33,646 in 2012.

While the number of children enrolled in CHIP and Medicaid is on the rise, the number of children who are eligible but not enrolled in these programs is alarming. Based on an average of 2008 and 2009 American Community Survey data, 23,200 children living in Fort Bend County were eligible for CHIP or Medicaid but over 40% of those eligible children, approximately 10,000 kids, were not enrolled in the programs.

Children can also benefit from insurance even before they are born. CHIP Perinatal provides care to pregnant women with incomes below 200% of the poverty level but do not qualify for Medicaid. Coverage lasts for 12 months, and a child born during the coverage period will receive full CHIP coverage upon delivery for the remaining period. During fiscal year 2013, there was an average monthly enrollment of 444 for this program in Fort Bend County. This represents a significant decrease since fiscal year 2010 when the average monthly enrollment was 850.
In 2011, Texas had the nation’s fifth highest birth rate among teenagers aged fifteen to nineteen. As of 2010, Texas had the country’s highest rate of repeat births among teenagers, with over 20% of births among fifteen to nineteen-year-olds being attributable to girls who had given birth previously. The total cost associated with teen pregnancies is higher for taxpayers in Texas than in any other state, resulting in public costs of over $1 billion each year for healthcare, public assistance, and child welfare. The teenage birth rate in Fort Bend County is well below both the state and national rates, and the county has one of the lowest teenage birth rates in Texas.

The number of teen births in Fort Bend County grew significantly between 2006 and 2008 but has decreased considerably since that spike. There were 180 births to Fort Bend County residents under the age of 18 in 2006, 217 births in 2008, and 163 births in 2010. However, definite disparities exist within the county, with several pockets of the county far exceeding national rates. Nationally, teen birth rates vary significantly by racial and ethnic group. The national teen birth rate is highest among Hispanics, followed by Black teenagers and then White teenagers. This trend holds true in Texas. The Hispanic population accounts for the highest number of births, representing 70% of teen births across Texas and 60% of teen births in Fort Bend County. The Hispanic teen birth rate in Fort Bend County is especially alarming because female Hispanics only account for approximately 29% of the female child population. Black females account for 13% of teen births statewide and 29% of teen births in Fort Bend County. Approximately 30% of females under 18 in Fort Bend County are White, but this group accounts for less than 11% of teen births.

Another informative indicator related to teen pregnancy is the incidence of risky sexual behavior. The Texas Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance System is a federally funded survey that monitors health risk behaviors among high school students. In 2011, 36.2% of students reported having sexual intercourse within the past three months, and just over half of these students used a condom during their most recent sexual activity. Among students who were sexually active in the past three months, 15.7% used either birth control pills or a contraceptive injection. Over 30% of surveyed ninth graders in Texas reported that they have had sexual intercourse, and this number steadily rose across grade levels. The largest increase occurred between tenth grade, where 46.9% of students self-reported that they had sex at least once, and eleventh grade, where 61.6% of students self-reported engaging in sexual intercourse. Nearly one-quarter of upper classmen reported having four or more sexual partners in their lifetime.

**Policy Recommendations:**

One of the duties of a district’s School Health Advisory Council (SHAC) is to make recommendations concerning appropriate methods of instruction on human sexuality. Course materials and instructions relating to human sexuality are selected by a district’s board of trustees with the advice of the local SHAC. In order to prevent unintended pregnancies, school boards should consider curricula that emphasize abstinence but also include medically accurate, age-appropriate information about sexual health. Community efforts can also be made outside of the school setting to educate parents and teenagers. These interventions would be especially useful in those areas of the county with consistently high teen pregnancy rates. Additionally, districts in Fort Bend County currently survey students about risky behaviors such as drug use but not sexual activity. Including questions concerning sexual behavior in the district level surveys could provide more relevant information than the existing state level data.
CHILDREN AT RISK published “Texas Juvenile Mental Health Courts: An Evaluation and Blueprint for the Future” which provides jurisdictions with the fundamental tools for establishing a mental health court.

The mental disorder diagnosis was the number one reason for inpatient hospitalization of children.

In 2010, Fort Bend County ranked 33rd among Texas counties for its ratio of psychiatrists per 100,000 citizens. Diagnostic Code 19: “mental disorder.” The mental disorder diagnosis was the number one reason for inpatient hospitalization of children over this time period. Approximately 90% of mental health diagnoses among hospitalized kids were either bipolar or depression, which includes both major depression and other. As a proportion of all inpatient hospitalizations in Fort Bend County, mental disorders have remained relatively stable at approximately 22% of inpatient hospitalizations over a seven year period.

One of the most devastating possible outcomes of unidentified mental health issues in a child is attempted suicide. Stakeholders in Fort Bend County point to recent suicides by students in local schools and a concern that such tragedies appear to be on the rise. Each year, Fort Bend ISD conducts an anonymous survey of 6th-12th grade students which includes suicidal ideations. During the 2011-2012 school year, over 3,500 students in the district were surveyed and approximately 25% reported that they had ever thought about committing suicide. Freshman students were especially likely to be considered at risk with 5.5% of respondents reporting that they thought about committing suicide either “often” or “a lot.” If the survey statistics in Fort Bend ISD are similar in the other local school districts, this means over 1,400 Fort Bend County high school students are likely to regularly think about committing suicide.

Policy Recommendations:
Among the 50 states, Texas ranks 49th in mental health expenditures per capita. With the existing barriers to mental health services, many children with serious mental illnesses are eventually presented into various systems within the county. If the untreated mental condition leads to a crisis situation, the child may be the subject of a 9-1-1 phone call or brought to an emergency room. Many children do not receive mental health treatment until they come into contact with the local juvenile justice system. The strenuous costs of mental health services can be reduced in the county by investing in more community-based treatment programs that are designed to identify and treat mental health issues before they progress. Improving community awareness, increasing screening efforts, and integrating basic mental health treatment with primary care can all contribute to positive mental health outcomes for youth.
In Texas, a child becomes an adult in the eyes of the penal system at age 17. Children younger than 10 cannot be prosecuted for any offense and youth who are older than 10, but under 17, fall within the jurisdiction of the juvenile court. Juvenile probation departments across the state manage youth in this age range who have been charged with an offense. In 2010, over 70,000 youth in Fort Bend County were 10-16 years of age. In 2012, the Fort Bend County Juvenile Probation Department received 2,646 referrals, representing an increase from 2011 in which 2,357 youth were referred.

The juvenile detention center in Fort Bend County is a secure holding facility that houses youth who have been charged with a criminal offense. In 2012, 755 referred youth were detained in the facility. The detention center houses 80 beds and in 2012 it had an average daily population of 53 youth. Housing juveniles is not cheap. With an average length of stay of 27 days and an average daily cost of $236, the average cost of juvenile detention was over $6,000 per child in 2012.

Although children under 17 are typically under the jurisdiction of juvenile courts, they can be certified and tried as adults if they commit certain offenses. A small number of youth are certified in Fort Bend County each year, with only 1 certification in 2009, none in 2010, 5 in 2011, and 4 in 2012.

Deferred prosecution offers eligible youth with an alternative to formal adjudication of delinquent conduct. The program term typically ranges from three to six months, and if a child successfully completes his term of deferred prosecution, the original charges against him will be dropped. The deferred prosecution caseload in Fort Bend County has steadily declined over the past several years from 884 participants in 2009 to 607 participants in 2012. The percentage of youth successfully completing the deferred prosecution probation term was 90.12% in 2012.

A major concern that has been voiced among stakeholders in the juvenile justice system is the prevalence of mental health issues in juvenile offenders, and the criminal justice system continues to be the largest provider of mental health services in the state. The Massachusetts Youth Screening Instrument (MAYSI) is the tool used by probation departments across Texas to identify potential mental health issues in children being admitted to juvenile detention. Upon entering the detention center, the juvenile completes the MAYSI and is assessed for drug use, physical health, and mental health needs. Children who are scored as high-risk upon completion of the MAYSI are referred to the detention center's Psychological Services Division. In 2012, 141 MAYSI referrals were made to the Psychological Services Division. In addition to psychological services, the Fort Bend County Juvenile Probation Department provides a variety of resources and special programs, including crisis intervention, GED instruction, community services restitution, mentoring programs, canine leadership, horsemanship, tattoo obliteration, parent education, and victim assistance.

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Juvenile Justice

Policy Recommendations:
For many youth, entering the juvenile justice system is their first opportunity to receive treatment for problems such as mental illness or substance abuse. Increasing accessible support and services at the community level can have a significant impact on the community’s public safety as well as reduce costs. The county is currently working on a project to develop a crisis system that better identifies individuals with behavioral health needs and responds with appropriate care. If properly executed, this system has the potential to divert individuals with mental health needs away from the court system and into care.

Several counties in Texas have improved their juvenile justice systems by implementing juvenile specialty courts. These courts have shown that rehabilitation can be achieved along with cost savings, and the county should examine and consider the possible implementation of a specialty docket, particularly a juvenile mental health court or drug court. In addition, the high success rate of programs such as the county’s deferred prosecution program is evidence of the ability to provide rehabilitation while allowing the youth to remain in the community and reducing the costs of detention.

Source: Fort Bend County Juvenile Probation Department, “Fort Bend County Juvenile Probation Department 2012 Annual Report.”

Fort Bend County Juvenile Probation Referral Trends

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Total Number of Offenses Per Year</th>
<th>Felony</th>
<th>Class C &amp; Status Offenses</th>
<th>Class A &amp; B Misdemeanors</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2008</td>
<td>3,104</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>28%</td>
<td>62%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2009</td>
<td>2,672</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>39%</td>
<td>45%</td>
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<tr>
<td>2010</td>
<td>2,569</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>39%</td>
<td>48%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2011</td>
<td>2,357</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>43%</td>
<td>43%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2012</td>
<td>2,646</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>49%</td>
<td>40%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Four school districts are fully located within the county’s borders: Fort Bend Independent School District (ISD), Lamar Consolidated ISD (CISD), Needville ISD, and Stafford Municipal School District (MSD). Over 93,000 children were enrolled in public schools between these four districts in 2011-2012 and over 70% of these students were enrolled in Fort Bend ISD. Fort Bend ISD is the seventh largest school district in Texas and houses 74 campuses, including 11 high schools, 14 middle schools, and 45 elementary schools. With a student population nearing 70,000, this large school district educates approximately 70% of the county’s public school students. Fort Bend ISD is the most ethnically diverse district in the county with a student body that is 29.4% Black, 26.2% Hispanic, 19.6% White, and 21.8% Asian. While the percentage of Fort Bend ISD students classified as economically disadvantaged (38%) is lower than other districts in the county, the actual number of economically disadvantaged students is larger than the entire student enrollment of Lamar CISD.

With over 25,000 students in 2011-2012, Lamar Consolidated ISD has the second largest student population in Fort Bend County. While it may not be the largest district in the county, it is the most geographically expansive, covering over 384 square miles. The largest ethnic group in this district is Hispanics, making up 46.1% of the student population. Nearly half (47.3%) of Lamar CISD students are classified as economically disadvantaged.

Stafford MSD and Needville ISD are the two smallest districts in the county. Stafford is home to 3,157 students who are primarily Hispanic (42.5%) and Black (39.2%). Stafford MSD has the highest rate of economically disadvantaged students district-wide at 65%. Needville ISD houses 2,664 students who are primarily White (53%) and Hispanic (40.8%). Just under 1,000, or 37.2%, of students in Needville ISD are classified as economically disadvantaged.

Every year, CHILDREN AT RISK ranks public elementary, middle, and high schools across the state of Texas. In 2013, CHILDREN AT RISK released the eighth annual School Rankings which strive to serve as an accessible guide for parents, educators, and community members on the performance of local schools. The rankings compile and analyze a variety of indicators to evaluate campuses and encourage a holistic examination of school quality. Fort Bend County is home to some of the most highly ranked schools in Texas, with its schools more likely to receive an “A” in CHILDREN AT RISK’s rankings than schools in the region and across the state.

Since 2006, the school ranking system developed by CHILDREN AT RISK has highlighted the successes and need for improvement of public schools.

Fort Bend County is home to some of the most highly ranked schools in Texas, with its schools more likely to receive an “A” in CHILDREN AT RISK’s rankings than schools in the region and across the state.

Comparative View of 2013 School Rankings

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Texas</th>
<th>Greater Houston</th>
<th>Fort Bend</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>23%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>35%</td>
<td>38%</td>
<td>39%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>43%</td>
<td>38%</td>
<td>33%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


CISD and Stafford MISD because both districts have higher rates of child poverty than the county average. Interestingly, a handful of schools in Fort Bend County appear to be “over performing.” In other words, these campuses score highly in the School Rankings despite their high rates of economically disadvantaged students. These schools may be able to serve as models for other campuses that have historically struggled academically.

Among the high performing schools throughout Texas in the 2013 School Rankings, particularly those serving disadvantaged student populations, a number of schools have been observed to implement an extended school day and/or year. For example, many high performing charters utilize an extended learning time model to foster higher achievement among
Policy Recommendations:
CHILDREN AT RISK’s School Rankings aim to serve as a transparent, accessible guide to the public regarding the performance of local schools, and to generate conversation about how schools and districts are performing in creating college-ready students. CHILDREN AT RISK encourages parents to utilize the school rankings as an advocacy tool to better understand the performance of their local schools and demand improvement. Districts are encouraged to use the data to conduct further data analysis, inform teacher and staff professional development, and target school interventions. Although more money is spent per capita in low performing Fort Bend County schools, these campuses continue to lag behind; this shows that disparities cannot simply be eradicated by funding. Clearly, Fort Bend County schools are performing ahead of the academic curve in Texas, but continued innovative efforts should be made in schools with poor academic performance. Hopefully, the 83rd Legislature’s partial restoration of education funding and decrease in mandatory testing will enable schools to expand learning opportunities and improve the quality of education.
Dropping out of high school is correlated with a host of negative outcomes both for the individual student and the community at large. Based on data from the U.S. Census Bureau and the Texas Department of Criminal Justice, Texans without a high school diploma are three times as likely to land in prison compared to Texans who graduated from high school.\(^1\) Dropouts in Texas are 75% more likely to be unemployed and far more likely to be living in poverty than graduates,\(^2\) and a single cohort of dropouts has been estimated to result in a loss of up to $9.6 billion for the state.\(^3\) In Fort Bend County, adults without a high school diploma have a median income of $20,487 compared to $30,214 for high school graduates and $62,315 for college graduates.\(^4\)

CHILDREN AT RISK calculates graduation rates by utilizing data from the Texas Education Agency (TEA) and developed a new methodology in 2009. This methodology is unique in that it tracks first-time freshmen to determine whether the cohort of students graduated from any Texas public school within a four year period. Graduation rates presented by other organizations are often inflated due to an over reporting of students leaving public school to attend private school, attend home school, or leave the jurisdiction. If a student’s reason for leaving the local public school system is not well documented, CHILDREN AT RISK does not remove them from the calculation. Using this methodology and data from the TEA, CHILDREN AT RISK’s graduation rate for Fort Bend County’s 2006-2007 first-time freshmen cohort was 78%. This means that 22% of students who entered Fort Bend County high schools in 2006 failed to graduate within four years.

CHILDREN AT RISK’s four year graduation rate across Texas was 71.6% for the class of 2010. This indicates that Fort Bend County students are dropping out at lower rates than their peers across the state; however, many students in the county continue to fall through the cracks. The gap in graduation rates between the county’s highest performing and lowest performing high schools is nearly 30%. The TEA has identified 13 characteristics which put a student at risk of dropping out of school such as limited English proficiency, pregnancy, being held back a grade, failing academic assessments, homelessness, involvement with the child welfare system, and other factors. Across Fort Bend County, 40.9% of all students were considered “at risk” of dropping out of school during the 2011-2012 school year.\(^5\)

Policy Recommendations:
In order to know the true magnitude of the dropout problem in Texas, accurate graduation and dropout data is needed, and greater transparency is needed in order to prevent underreported dropout rates. In addition to accurately tracking dropouts, schools should focus on students who are at risk of dropping out. Schools should maintain programs and activities which help keep disinterested students engaged. More services aimed at at-risk youth are needed to help reduce achievement gaps and eventual dropouts. Focusing on access to high quality early childhood education appears to be a promising practice for tackling achievement gaps from an early age.
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President and CEO
Demographics

2 Ibid.

Child Poverty

6 Ibid.
7 Ibid.
8 Ibid.
9 Ibid.
10 Based on school-level point-in-time data for October 2012.

Food Insecurity

2 Ibid. at 1.
4 Ibid. at 2.
6 Ibid.
8 Ibid.
10 Ibid.
13 Based on data extrapolated from CHILDREN AT RISK 2013 School Rankings.
14 Public information request to the Texas Department of Agriculture, based on point in time data for October 2012.
15 Ibid.

Childhood Obesity

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Endnotes

12. Ibid.
15. Ibid.
18. Ibid. at 17.
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Health Coverage

6. Ibid.

Teen Births

4. Ibid.
7. Ibid.
8. “2012 Population Projections by Age Groups (Table 2) by County,” Texas State Data Center, http://txsdc.ut.edu/Data/Files.aspx?cmd=Bh4iUm2n75LX0Zy9ZmpVCMnFCEVw4iALjBakybEAvi74EtX3jW3g (last visited Sept. 5, 2013).
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12. Ibid.
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Mental Health

3. Ibid.
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11. Ibid.
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Juvenile Justice

1 Texas Family Code § 51.02(2)(a).
3 Fort Bend County Juvenile Probation Department, “Fort Bend County Juvenile Probation Department 2012 Annual Report,” 6.
4 Ibid. at 22.
5 Ibid. at 18.
6 Ibid.
7 Ibid. at 17.
8 Ibid. at 30.
9 Ibid. at 7.
10 Ibid.
11 Texas Family Code § 54.02.
13 Public information request to the Fort Bend County Juvenile Probation Department.

School Rankings

4 2011-2012 Academic Excellence Indicator System: Fort Bend ISD
5 2011-2012 Academic Excellence Indicator System: Lamar CISD

Graduation and Dropout Rates

Speak Out and Drive Change for Children! Join our E-Advocacy Network!

Become a part of CHILDREN AT RISK’s online initiative to educate community members and child advocates on pressing issues regarding Texas’ children. Members receive informational updates on the needs of Texas’ children and calls-to-action as the Legislative Session progresses. We urge you to join our initiative to improve the quality of life of Texas’ children.

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Teen Pregnancy
Latino Children

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Fall 2014: Legal Safety Nets
Spring 2015: Human Trafficking & Domestic Violence

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CHILDREN AT RISK would like to thank The George Foundation for their generous support of this publication and for its immense efforts to improve the quality of life for children in Fort Bend County!

The George Foundation was established by Albert and Mamie George in 1945 to ensure that their wealth would continue to benefit the citizens of Fort Bend County. Dedicated to helping others and the less fortunate, Albert and Mamie created The George Foundation in hopes of seeing Fort Bend County thrive for years to come. The George Foundation gives grants and scholarships to a variety of those in need. Though The George Foundation has grown considerably since it opened its doors, the message of the organization remains the same: to open up possibilities, opportunities, connections, and potential for the communities and future prosperity of Fort Bend County.

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