

2009 Report to the Community

on the Status of Young Children in Bay and Arenac Counties



Give Michigan's Kids a
Great Start

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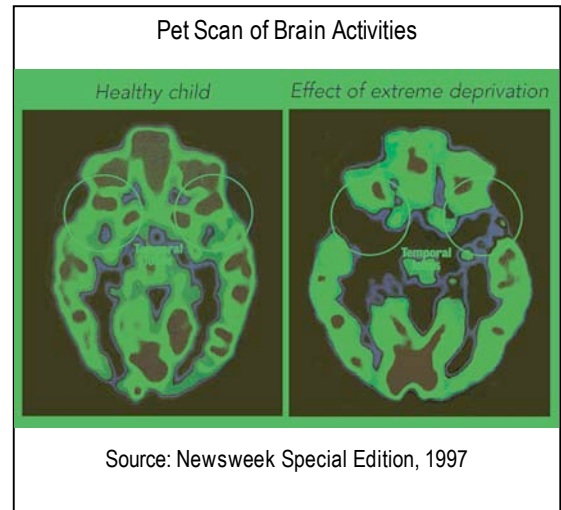
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Status of Young Children in Bay and Arenac Counties

The first five years of a child’s life are a time of great opportunities. The young child’s early experiences and environments directly impact the developing architecture of his or her brain. Everything children see, every word they hear, everything they do...from their first breath, shapes the rapidly developing brain. We now know that by age four, 90 percent of this architecture will be built and the foundation for language, social behavior, problem solving ability and emotional health will be mostly created...or not...by the time they enter kindergarten. To be successful in school and in life, Bay and Arenac Counties’ young children must grow up in an environment that develops self-confidence, positive social and emotional skills, and a love for learning. There is much that communities can do to make sure that every young child has this foundation. Leaders in communities across our county are working together in new ways so that every infant, toddler and preschooler has the opportunity to achieve his or her full potential.



Community leaders in Bay and Arenac Counties who understand the vital importance of investing in young children have come together to form our Great Start Collaborative. The Bay-Arenac Great Start Collaborative is funded by, and working in partnership with the Early Childhood Investment Corporation to prepare and then implement the *Bay –Arenac Early Childhood Action Agenda*. Our *Early Childhood Action Agenda* will guide the actions we take to ensure that every child enters kindergarten healthy and eager to learn.

For our community to make wise decisions about the future of our young children, we need to know what the current status of young children is in Bay and Arenac Counties. This report presents current community data in six areas, each of which makes a direct or indirect critical contribution to the optimal brain development, health and early learning of young children.

Population Ages 0-5 (Number) – 2003-2006

	Michigan	Bay	Arenac
2003	651,261	6,421	846
2004	650,205	6,280	834
2005	650,215	6,258	783
2006	638,195	6,241	880

From 2000-2007 there has been a small decrease in births in Bay County (4.3%) and Arenac County (7.3%). From 2003 to 2006, the 0-5 population in Bay County demonstrated consistent decreases while Arenac remained fairly stable. Minority births for Arenac have decreased by 54.8% while Bay has shown an increase of 21.7%.

Pediatric and Family Health

Healthy children are more able to engage in the full range of life experiences that promote early learning. A lack of health care or delays in treating children's health problems can negatively affect their development, sometimes with lifelong consequences. Young children and families with health insurance are more likely to go to the doctor and get help for health conditions before they become emergencies.

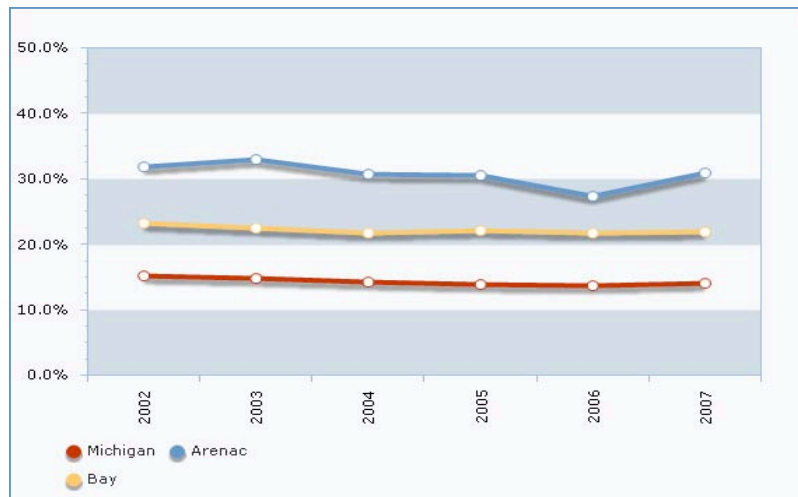
Young children, who have a regular health care provider, or a medical home, are more likely to get the quality preventative care they need to identify and address the common health needs and concerns of early childhood like immunizations and screenings for developmental, hearing and vision problems.

Children Ages 1-2 With Elevated Blood Lead – 2002 to 2007

Since 2002 the number of children ages one to two years in Bay and Arenac Counties has shown a decrease in elevated blood lead levels with only a slight increase reported in Bay County for 2005. Results are only on children who have been tested for elevated blood levels. Concern has been raised because, though all children receiving Medicaid are supposed to be tested, this leaves the potential for a significant number of children who may not be tested due to private insurance or no insurance coverage. With an older housing stock in Bay County, many children are at risk for exposure to lead poisoning which can result in irritability, aggressiveness, hyperactivity and learning problems.

Births to Mothers Who Smoked (Percent) – 2002 to 2007

Definitions: The percentage is based on all live births.



Both Bay and Arenac Counties have higher percentages of women who smoked during pregnancy than the statistics for the State of Michigan. Bay County showed approximately a 1% decrease from 23% to 22% for the years 2002-2007. Arenac County demonstrated a much higher incidence for smoking during pregnancy, as much as a 13% difference when compared to Bay County. Smoking and substance use during pregnancy can impact the positive outcomes for newborns.

Infant Deaths (rate per 1,000 Births) – 2002 to 2007

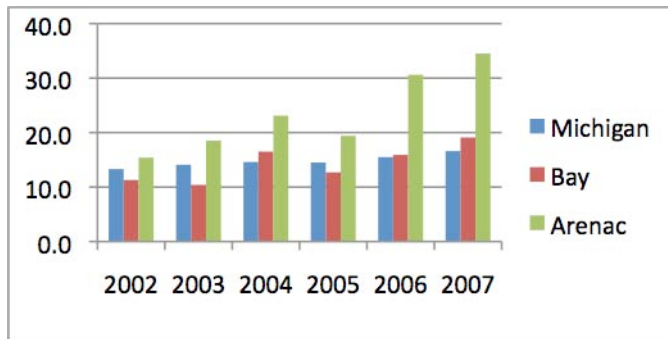
Infant deaths in Bay County have shown an increase since 2002. According to the Michigan Right Start indicators, Bay County has seen a 74.1% increase from 2000-2007. Bay ranks 35th in the State. No observable changes were noted in Arenac County.

Social and Emotional Health

Every infant needs a warm, nurturing and stable relationship with his or her parents and other caregivers to grow into a trusting, curious and confident toddler. Young children who are socially and emotionally healthy are self-confident and enjoy exploring their worlds. Healthy young children can more easily cope with their emotions, control their impulses and form friendships. They have learned through nurturing relationships that they can trust adults and look to them for guidance. Success in school requires that children get along well with their classmates, listen and respond to their teachers, and demonstrate an eagerness for learning. All of these are social-emotional skills.

Infants, toddlers and young children, like adults, can develop mental health problems like depression or traumatic stress disorder, which hinder their healthy social and emotional development. Early diagnosis and treatment of mental health problems is vital.

Abuse or Neglect Victims - Children Ages 0-5 (rate per 1,000 Children 0-5) 2002 to 2007



Unfortunately abuse and neglect statistics are on the rise in both counties. In 2007 both counties exceeded the State of Michigan numbers. With high unemployment and a low median income, families appear to be in more crises. Children who experience severe trauma are more likely to suffer poor academic and social emotional success.

Definitions: The rate per 1,000 children ages 0-5 of confirmed abuse or neglect (this includes victims of both, and is greater than the sum of abuse-only and neglect-only)

Children Ages 0-5 in Foster Care – 2002 to 2007

The number of children in Bay County who were required to spend time in the Foster Care System has remained fairly stable from 2002 to 2007. However, the number of children in Arenac County who were required to spend time in foster care has risen significantly since 2002. This supports the data for increased child abuse and neglect statistics. Statistics for Arenac County for the years 2006 and 2007 exceeded the state percentages.

Births with Less than Adequate Prenatal Care (Percent) – 2002 to 2006

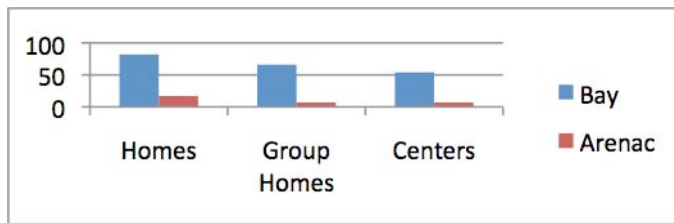
Healthy children result when mothers are healthy and receive good pre-natal care. If approximately 22% of women are receiving less than adequate pre-natal care, then the likelihood of children having future academic and social/emotional difficulties increases. The potential for women to suffer peri-natal mood disorders also increases with the lack of pre-natal care.



Early Care and Education

Parents are their children’s primary caregivers and foremost teachers. With the demands of today’s work world, most young children are cared for by someone in addition to one of their parents prior to entering kindergarten. The quality of early care and education – whether it is provided by grandma, a neighbor, the church or a childcare center – matters. High quality early care and education provides a safe, healthy and nurturing environment for infants and young children. Children who receive high quality early care and education have stronger learning, language and social skills when they enter school. Children who attend a high quality preschool program in the year or two before kindergarten are better prepared academically, socially and emotionally. High quality preschool programs have well-trained staff, small group sizes, language rich environments and actively engage parents in their children’s learning. Parents who are involved in their children’s early care and education programs benefit not only their own child, but the others who attend as well. Parents who get involved meet other parents, learn about how their children spend their days, and can build on these relationships and activities at home. Young children with developmental delays or disabilities usually have special health, developmental and learning needs which are most effectively addressed when they are identified early. Individualized early intervention services and special educational supports provide crucial developmental guidance for parents and are designed to help every child reach his or her full potential.

Types of Licensed Child Care in Bay and Arenac Counties



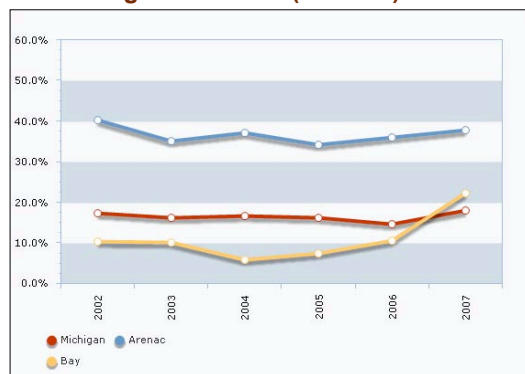
There is limited licensed child care in Arenac County, which suggests a possible shortage. With more women in the work force, quality licensed child care is critical. Relative/Aide care is the most common care used but this is unlicensed so quality of care is difficult to monitor. Reimbursement rates for child care

providers are very low and there is a shortage of available care for children with special needs and care during non-traditional hours.

Behavioral concerns in child care

Although data in both counties needs to be collected more consistently, agencies polled by the Great Start Collaborative have indicated a need for support for children who are “at risk” due to emotional and behavioral challenges. Support provided before school entry could potentially prevent children from entering the special education system.

Children Age 4 in MSRP (Percent) – 2002-2007



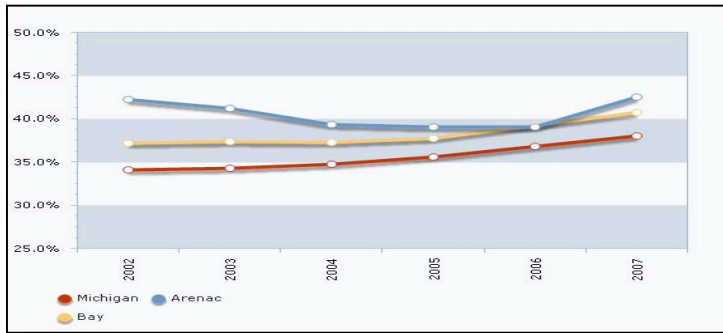
The percent of children attending a Bay County Michigan School Readiness Program has shown a definite increase while the percent of children attending an MSRP program in Arenac has remained fairly stable. These numbers and the fact that many of these programs have waiting lists suggest the continued need for quality pre-school programs. Children attending MSRP classrooms have shown positive transition to Kindergarten. There is also a need for free or low cost pre-school for three year olds in our community.

Special Note: MSRP is now known as the Great Start Readiness Program or referred to as GSRP.

Parenting Leadership

Raising young children is challenging for every family, regardless of education or income. Parents have many roles that they are called on to fulfill in the lives of their young children. Parents must be caregivers, educators, playmates, role models, providers and protectors. Knowing what to do in each role can be difficult and stressful tasks. Parents greatly benefit from easily accessible parenting information, community resources and supports. Free and low cost resources for parents are outlined in the booklet, *Bay-Arenac Counties Great Start Early Childhood Community Services*.

Births to Unwed Mothers (Percent) – 2002 to 2007



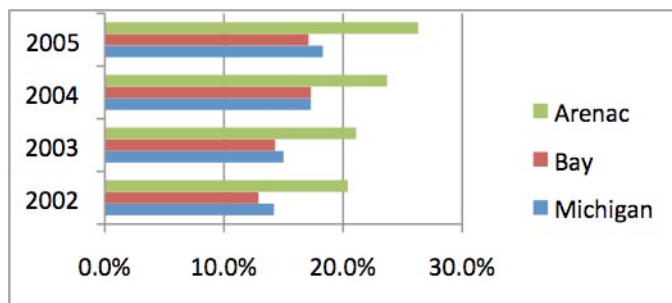
The number of births to unwed mothers has remained fairly stable in Bay and Arenac Counties for the past six years with a slight increase in 2007. Raising a child is challenging in a two parent home and even more challenging in a single parent home.

Definitions: The percentage is based on all live births.

Family Support

Young children need a stable, safe and secure family environment in order to flourish. A lack of sufficient family economic resources can place young children's health and development at risk. Poverty within the family increases family stress, increases the risk for abuse and neglect, can contribute to poor child nutrition, decreases access to opportunities and resources and places limits on the type of housing and neighborhoods in which a person can live. When parents have to focus their full attention on just meeting their family's basic needs, daily reading or play can take a backseat to keeping a roof over the family's heads and food on the table.

Poverty - Children Ages 0-17 (Percent) – 2002 to 2005



The number of children living in poverty in Arenac County significantly exceeded the State of Michigan average for all years reported. Bay County averages were slightly below the state level but high enough to cause concern. In addition, the number of children living in poverty and the median income for families living in both counties suggest that families are struggling financially. Average

incomes for Arenac County range from approximately 10 to 14 thousand dollars less per year than the state average. Bay County ranges from approximately four to seven thousand dollars less than the state average.

Unemployment continues to be a problem for both Bay and Arenac Counties. Unemployment rates for Arenac have significantly exceeded state averages for all years reported. High unemployment along with low incomes and high rates of people living in poverty suggests that Bay and Arenac children and families appear to be at risk for many factors associated with living under stressful conditions.

Next Steps

This report makes it clear that Bay and Arenac Counties have significant work to do on behalf of our young children. With your help and this data as a starting point, the Great Start Collaborative in Bay and Arenac Counties will lead the development of the *Bay-Arenac Great Start Collaborative Early Childhood Action Agenda*.

Over the next few months, the Bay-Arenac Great Start Collaborative will be gathering together members of our community, from all walks of life, to answer these questions:

- Are we as a community *okay* with the future that this data represents?
- Can we as a community *do better* for our youngest citizens?
- Why does this data *look* the way it does? What is *causing* these conditions?
- What *assets in our community* do we have that can help?
- What *assets do we need* that we do not currently have?
- What do we need to do in Bay and Arenac Counties, to assure that *every* young child arrives at kindergarten healthy, safe and eager to succeed in school?

We need you to be involved in helping to make sure we don't leave any of these questions unanswered. The future of our youngest citizens is in our hands; remember that early experiences last a lifetime. We urge you to become involved in making a real difference... Only by working together we can assure a sturdy foundation and a Great Start for every child in Bay and Arenac Counties.

Our Children Need You....**Get Involved!**

- 1) **Join the Great Start Movement**...volunteer for Bay-Arenac Great Start Collaborative focus groups, surveys, community forums and Parent Coalition. Share copies of this report with friends, family and co-workers. Invite Great Start Collaborative speakers to address your community, church, workplace and government groups.
- 2) Be an active participant in your child's life: volunteer in their pre-school, read every day to your child, and show your child you care.
- 3) Support early childhood programs by advocating for the continuation of these programs. Let your community leaders know you care.
- 4) Remember...you are your child's most important connection to the world...what you do today will make that critical difference for tomorrow.

Contact Us Today!

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Start!

A great future begins with Great

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Graphs & Data Generated from: Michigan League for Human Services

Data Sources

Bay-Arenac Counties Great Start Early Childhood Community Services brochure

Bay-Arenac Great Start Collaborative

Bureau of Labor Statistics

Kids Count Data Center, Annie E. Casey Foundation

Michigan 4C Association

Michigan Department of Community Health, Division for Vital Records and Health Statistics

Michigan Department of Education

Michigan Department of Human Services

Michigan Right Start

Small Area Health Insurance Estimates (SAIHE) web site

U. S. Census Bureau and Small Area Income and Poverty Estimates (SAIPE) web site

U. S. Census Bureau, State and County Population Estimates