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Marin scores high on children's health scorecard

Rob Rogers

A national children's health organization has given Marin County top marks in providing for the well-being of its children. But county leaders and educators say the grade of B-minus by Children Now, an Oakland-based nonprofit, is too low - even though it's the highest grade given to any California county.

"If we're in the top percentile, that's the good news," said Supervisor Susan Adams, a former nurse practitioner. "But a B-minus means there's a little more work to do."

Children Now's panel of experts considers 26 indicators of children's health and welfare in assigning grades to each county. Of the state's 58 counties, 53 received grades of C or lower, while only three - Marin, El Dorado and Placer counties - earned the highest grade, a B-minus.

The organization ranked Marin high in several categories, including health insurance for children, dental care, school attendance and prenatal care for women in the first two trimesters of pregnancy, which 99 percent of Marin mothers receive.

Yet its report suggested Marin could improve its care for teens at risk for depression and substance abuse, and called for improved after-school child care, which the study suggests only 37 percent of the county's children receive.

"We have over 700 families on a waiting list to get into affordable child care in this county," said Amy Reisch, executive director of the First 5 Marin Children and Families Commission.

The county recently modified its development code to make it easier for day care facilities to obtain licenses in residential areas, Adams said, and its new \$60 million Health and Wellness Campus, scheduled for a Nov. 16 grand opening in San Rafael, will provide needed medical services to low-income families, she said.

"This creates a home for health care for people who truly need these services," Adams said. "We have six new dental pods with digital radiography and incredible resources in our mental health facility."

The new campus' dental facility could prove critical, Reisch said, even though 84 percent of Marin's children see a dentist regularly, according to the Children Now study.

"There are people for whom accessing dental care is going to be a challenge even if they do have insurance, since there are not that many dentists in the county who will take Medi-Cal and Healthy Children (state insurance)," Reisch said.

The Children Now study ranked Marin high in education, particularly in fourth-graders who meet or exceed standards in English language arts and 10th-graders who pass the English portion of the high school exit exam.

"While Marin County may be doing well related to our children, we have so much more to do," said Superintendent of Schools Mary Jane Burke. "We have children in our community who aren't yet attending preschool, which we know can make a difference for the rest of their lives. It's incumbent upon all of us to continue to strive and work toward the day when our children have all of their needs met."

Marin County's "report card" is available at [www.childrennow.org/score card](http://www.childrennow.org/scorecard)

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