

# Community Needs Assessment

2019



## Executive Summary

Tri-County Council for Child Development, Inc. (TCCCD) operates the Tri-County Head Start (TCHS) grant. Head Start grantees are required to conduct a comprehensive Community Needs Assessment every five years, corresponding with the organizations 5-Year Grant Cycle, and updated annually. The purpose of the assessment is to collect data related to the needs of the community and resources available to Head Start eligible children and families. The Community Needs Assessment is also used to inform the Head Start planning process, utilizing the data received to improve services for eligible children and families.

## Research Components

The core research team took a comprehensive approach to identifying the needs in the communities it serves. In seeking to respond to the requirements of the Office of Head Start, the team conducted a thorough review and analysis of secondary data, that included Head Start program data, and implementing a Community Survey. In this approach, the quantitative data is supplemented by the unique perspectives of community members, providing a richer picture of the child development and social service needs in the Tri-County area.

## Key Findings and Recommendations

The following key findings and recommendations were discovered during the analysis of the collected data:

- **Access to Transportation**

Access to reliable transportation continues to be an issue of concern in the Tri-County Head Start service area, especially in the rural areas. While many Head Starts have eliminated their transportation services, it needs to remain a vital aspect of the TCHS services provided. Work will continue to prioritize bus service for families without transportation, and to ensure the bus services are reliable and consistent.

- **Access to Affordable Housing**

Homelessness and access to affordable housing in the counties served is an ongoing issue, with inadequate numbers of housing units available to fill the needs in the community. Tri-County Head Start will expand training to staff on resources available both inside the tri-county area and those outside of the area to better serve children and families.

- **Access to Early Care and Education**

The number of available slots for quality early care and education continues to be well below the need in the tri-county area. Tri-County Head Start will continue to work on expanding services when opportunities are available and working on community partnerships to increase the quality of services and education of staff to build the pipeline of highly qualified early childhood professionals in the community.

- **Access to Health and Mental Health Services**

Health Services in the service area remains a concern, with insufficient resources and many families receiving services outside of the counties, families are not accessing services at consistent rates. Adequate prenatal care and pediatric dentistry are two areas of concern that greatly impact the children in the community. As communities become more aware of the impacts of trauma and Adverse Childhood Experiences, the awareness of the deficiency of available mental health supports is becoming more of a concern and priority. While services are available in the counties they are not easily accessed in all situations.

- **Community Social Connections**

While the services are limited within the counties, the services that are available remain to be underutilized and many community members are unaware that the service exists at all. Tri-County Head Start will remain committed to educating staff and families on what services are available within the county and also what is available for them outside of the counties so that families can receive the services and help they need. Additionally, Tri-County Head Start will continue to host events and trainings where families can connect with each other and create the strong social bonds that enhance and build communities.

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## Tri-County Head Start • Community Assessment

### Overview of Tri-County Head Start

Tri-County Head Start has been providing services to children and families in Berrien, Cass, and Van Buren counties since 1972. The program currently serves 908 children and their families in Early Head Start and Head Start in both home-based, and center-based programming.

#### Service Area

The organization's service area includes the 3,179 square miles that encompass Berrien, Cass, and Van Buren counties in Southwest Michigan. Beginning fall of 2019, TCHS had a total of 20 locations with 44 classrooms serving the following cities:

##### Berrien County

- Benton Harbor
- New Buffalo
- Niles
- Sawyer
- Watervliet

##### Cass County

- Cassopolis
- Dowagiac
- Edwardsburg
- Marcellus

##### Van Buren County

- Bangor
- Decatur
- Gobles
- Paw Paw
- South Haven

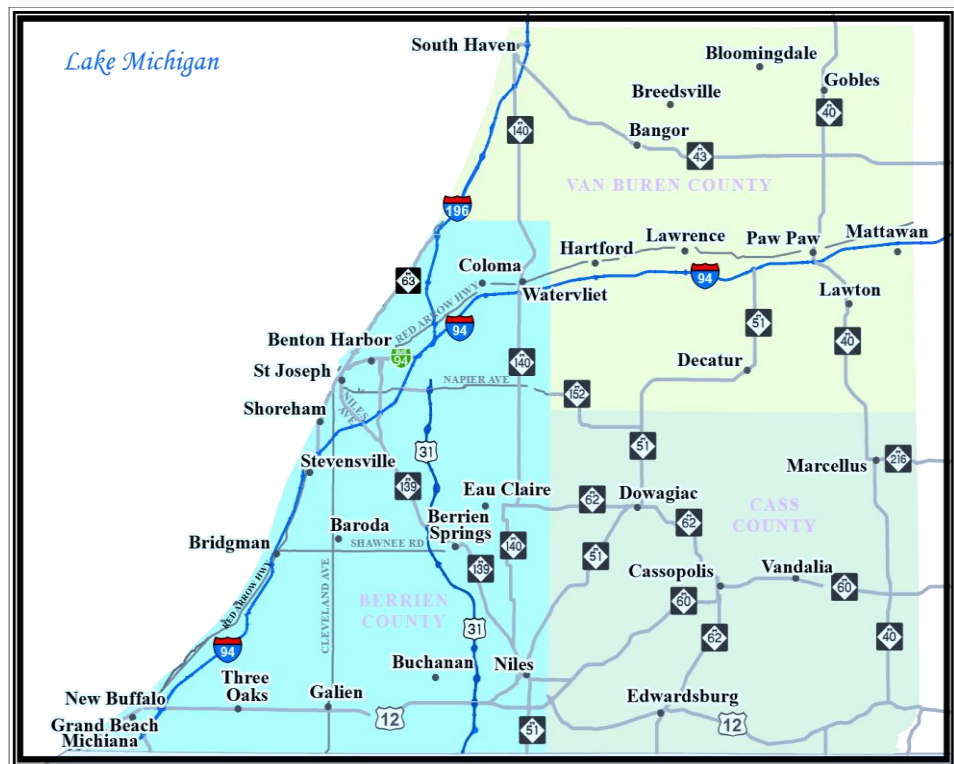


Figure 1: Tri-County Head Start Service Area (Southwest Michigan Planning Commission, 2019)

#### Head Start Services

Head Start services are offered to 704 eligible children who are 3-4 years of age. Services are provided in center-based and home-based options operating during a traditional school calendar year. Center-based classrooms operate Monday through Thursday and are full-day (7 hours), with the exception of three classrooms that operate part-day, 3.5 hour, AM and PM sessions. Home-Based services consist of a 90-minute visit to the family's home, once per week (32 visits annually), and two monthly classroom sessions to allow the children to socialize with other children and prepare them for a classroom setting.

During the 2019-2020 program year, Head Start will be utilizing three curriculums in the center-based settings as a way to test and evaluate the available options to ensure the very best curriculum is implemented for the children the program serves. The curriculums will include Creative Curriculum (the organization's current curriculum), High Scope, and Frog Street. The home-based program uses the Growing Great Kids curriculum.

#### Early Head Start Services

Early Head Start services are offered to 204 pregnant women and children from birth to age 3. Services are provided in center-based and home-based options operating full-day/full-year. Center-based classrooms operate Monday-Thursday for 8.5 hours each day. The home-based option consists of a 90-minute visit to the family's home, once per week (46

**Tri-County Head Start • Community Assessment**

visits annually), and two monthly classroom sessions to allow the children to socialize with other children and prepare them for a classroom setting.

During the 2019-2020 Program year, Early Head Start will also be utilizing three curriculums in the center-based settings as a way to test and evaluate the available options to ensure the very best curriculum is implemented for the children the program serves. The curriculums will include Creative Curriculum (the organization’s current curriculum), High Scope, and Frog Street. The home-based program uses the Growing Great Kids curriculum.

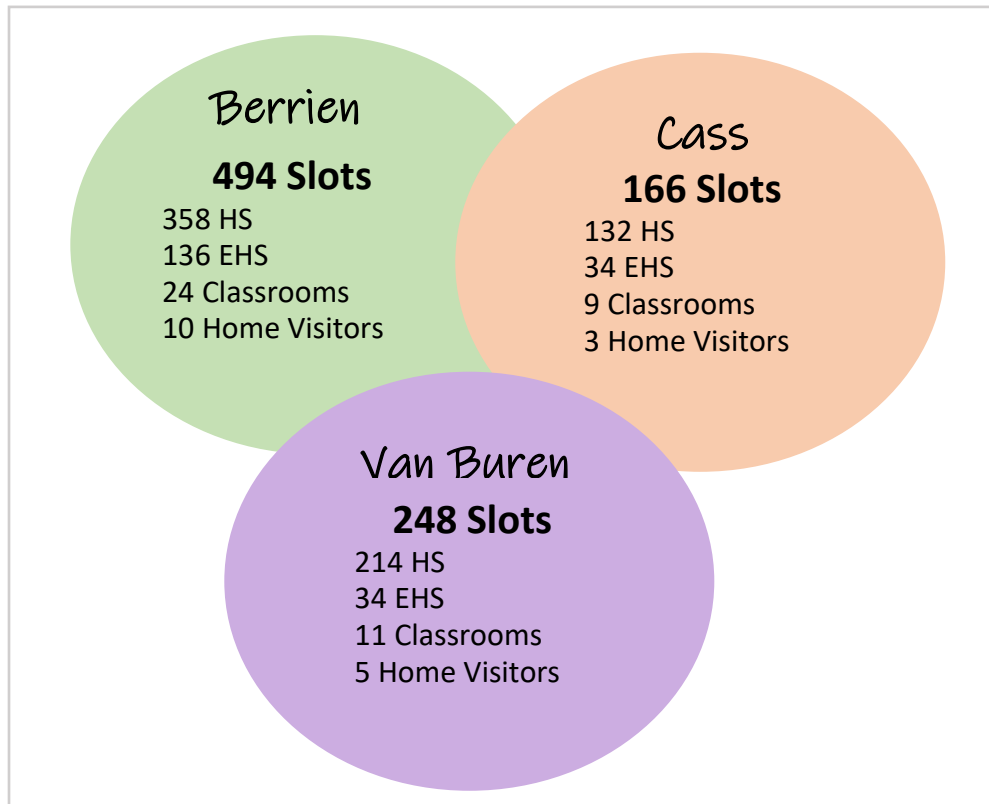
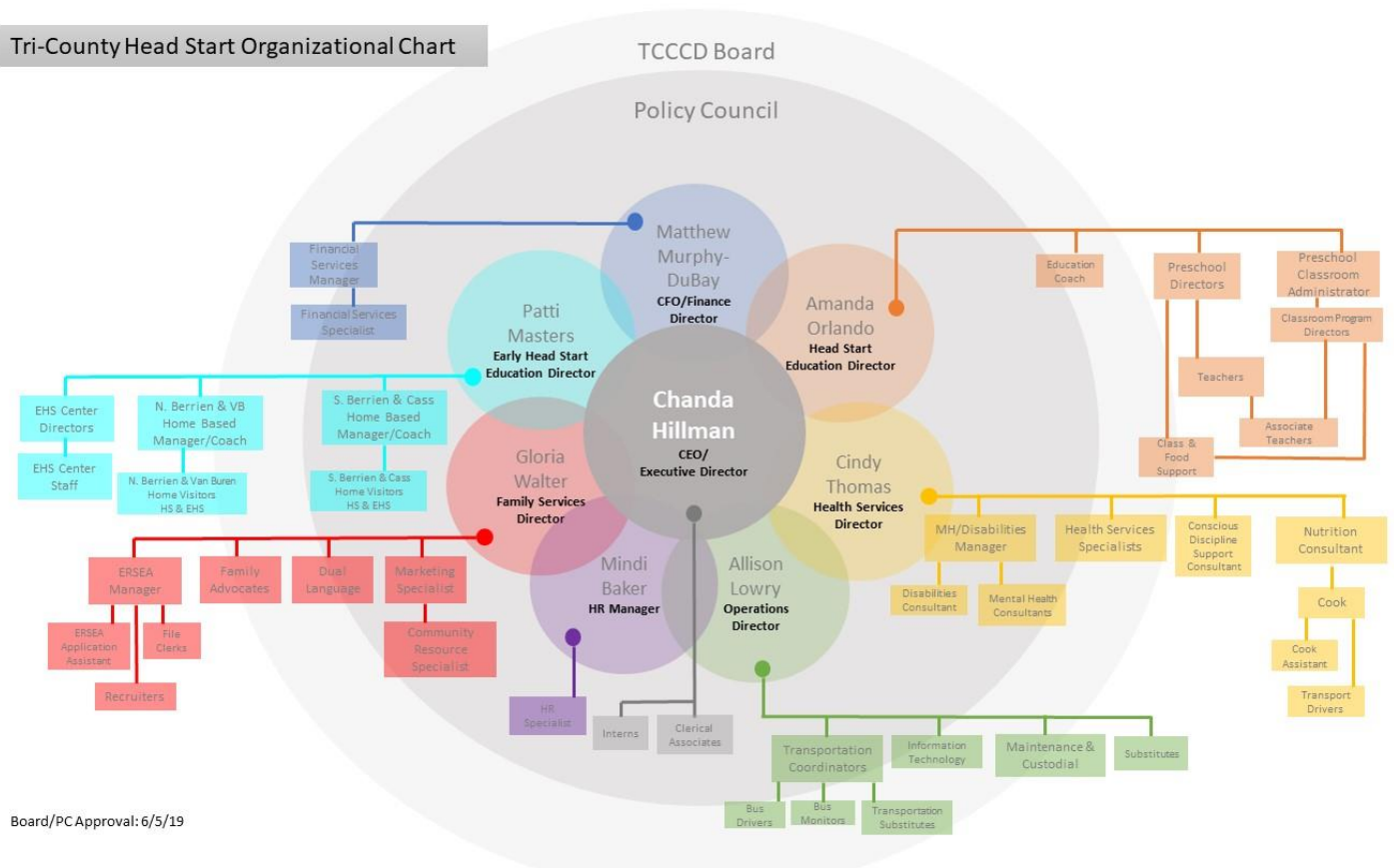


Figure 2: Tri-County Head Start Program Options

**Tri-County Council for Child Development, Inc.**

Tri-County Council for Child Development, Inc. is governed by a governance model that includes the Board of Directors, consisting of Community Professionals, and the Policy Council, made up of parents representing each center and community partners. The organization employs approximately 250 staff members, including Teachers, Bus Drivers, Home Visitors, Family Advocates, and Mental Health Consultants.

Tri-County Head Start Organizational Chart



Board/PC Approval: 6/5/19

Figure 3: Tri-County Head Start Organizational Chart

## Methodology

The leadership team of Tri-County Head Start worked with their assigned Training and Technical Assistance Grantee Specialist to develop a process and plan for the Community Needs Assessment. The leadership team then with the input of the Board and Policy Council developed a Community Needs Assessment plan. The plan included developing a CORE community assessment team, consisting of members of the staff, Board, Policy Council, and community members. The CORE team compiled, reviewed and analyzed collected program and secondary data, including data from the annual Parent Survey. Additionally, they developed and implemented a Community Survey that was sent out throughout the Tri-County area. In this approach, the qualitative and quantitative data were connected to give a richer perspective of parents and community members, and the strengths and needs of Berrien, Cass, and Van Buren counties. At the final CORE team meeting the results and recommendations were discussed, then ranked in order of importance and impact. The top five recommendations or focuses were used in a Creative Matrix. The Creative Matrix is a tool that is designed as a rapid brainstorming session to develop a pool of possible solutions to implement that would address each identified issue. The ideas generated from the Creative Matrix will be used to guide the creation of BROAD goals and SMART objectives for the next 5-year grant period.

## Primary Data

Two surveys were created and distributed with input from the Community Needs Assessment CORE team. The first survey was a Parent Survey that was also used in the program’s self-assessment process. The survey included questions about current preschool needs, barriers to participating, access to services, and satisfaction with the Head Start program. The survey consisted of 31 questions, had 160 respondents, and took approximately 6 minutes to complete. Teachers, Family Advocates, and Home Visitors sent the information to families via email, flyers, and by offering a device in person to complete the survey.

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The second survey, the Community Needs Assessment, included questions about demographics, strengths and needs in the three counties, satisfaction level of services offered, and availability of childcare services. The survey was distributed on Social Media and through email networks with the community agencies that TCHS is affiliated with. The survey had 278 responses, with 36% coming from Berrien County, 22% from Cass County, and 36% from Van Buren county, 6% did not live in the three counties but worked within them. The survey consisted of 14 questions and took approximately 5 minutes to complete.

## Secondary Data

Secondary data was collected from a variety of sources including the U.S. Census Bureau, Annie E. Casey Foundation’s Kids Count Data Center, U.S. Department of Education, United Way’s ALICE information, Michigan League of Public Policy, Michigan Department of Education, TCHS Program Information Report, in addition to data gathered from community organizations within Berrien, Cass, and Van Buren counties. All data sources are cited individually throughout the report.

## Demographic Profile of Service Area

The service area of Tri-County Head Start includes Berrien, Cass, and Van Buren counties in Michigan’s most Southwestern counties bordering Lake Michigan and Indiana.

### Berrien County

Berrien County, Michigan makes up 1,581 square miles (568 square miles of land, and 1,014 square miles of water) in the most southwest corner of Michigan bordering Lake Michigan, Cass and Van Buren counties, and Indiana (United States Census, 2019). The county has 42 miles of Lake Michigan shoreline, 86 lakes, and three major rivers (Berrien County, Michigan Administration, 2019). Cities in Berrien County include Benton Harbor, St. Joseph, Berrien Springs, Niles, Bridgman, Buchanan, Coloma, New Buffalo, and Watervliet, with smaller villages throughout the county.



Figure 4: Seal of Berrien County Michigan, (Berrien County, Michigan Administration, 2019)

The county ranks 61 for overall ranking in child well-being, out of 83 counties in Michigan according to the Michigan League for Public Policies, Kids County in Michigan (Michigan League for Public Policy, 2019). In Benton Harbor, where TCHS serves more than a quarter of our children, this year experienced controversy with the state threatening to shut down the High School due to a financial and academic crisis (Dwyer, 2019). The uncertainty is still looming, but it appears that the State and Benton Harbor School Board are seeking an alternative to keep the school district up and running while a fiscal and academic solution can be determined. Tri-County Head Start can play a role in ensuring that the students and families we serve in the community are ready for school and future success.

### Population

As of July 2018, the population has decreased in the past 8 years by 1.7% to 154,141 people. Out of the total

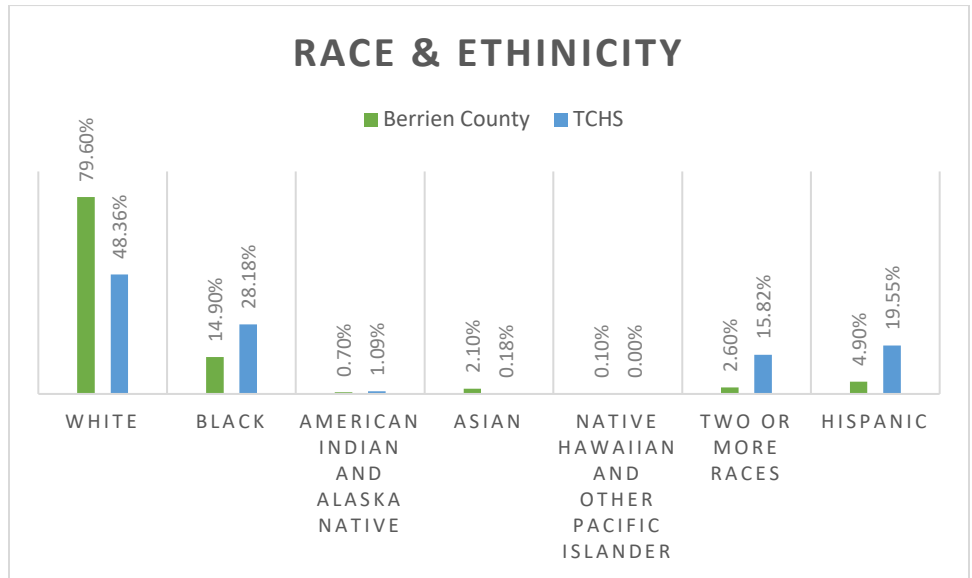
Berrien County Population Age	
Persons under 5 years	5.7%
Persons under 18 years	21.8%
Persons 65 years and over	19.7%

population there are approximately 8,786 children who are between the ages of birth and 5 years of age, of those approximately 26.1%, or 1,845 are living at or below poverty. At TCHS we are currently serving 494 children in Berrien County, or approximately 26.8% of the eligible children.

The majority of children in Berrien County live in two-parent families (62.4%) while 37.6% live in one-parent families. The median income in Berrien County is \$47,237 which is under the state’s median income of \$54,840.



**26.1%**  
Of Berrien County  
children live  
**in poverty**



**Cass County**

Cass County, Michigan makes up 492 square miles and borders Indiana, and St. Joseph, Berrien, and Van Buren counties in Southwest Michigan (United States Census, 2019). The county borders, Berrien, Van Buren, and St. Joseph counties in Michigan, and Indiana and is considered part of a Metropolitan Statistical Area, that includes the South Bend and Mishawaka area in Indiana, called Michiana (United State Census, 2019). The residents of the county take great pride of their history regarding the Fugitive Slave Laws and their protection of escaped slaves during and after the 1840’s and their participation in the Underground Railroad (Wilson, 1979). The county is also an important area for Native Americans, where the Pokagon Band of Potawatomi Indians refused to be removed in the 1830’s, and now houses their headquarters in Dowagiac, and a casino ran by the tribe (Discover Cass County, 2019). There is only one city in Cass County, Dowagiac, and four villages, Cassopolis, Edwardsburg, Marcellus, and Vandalia (Cass County Michigan Governmental Offices, 2019).

The county ranks 51 for overall ranking in child well-being, out of 83 counties in Michigan according to the Michigan League for Public Policies, Kids County in Michigan (Michigan League for Public Policy, 2019).

Figure 5: Seal of Cass County Michigan (Cass County Michigan Governmental Offices, 2019)

**Population**

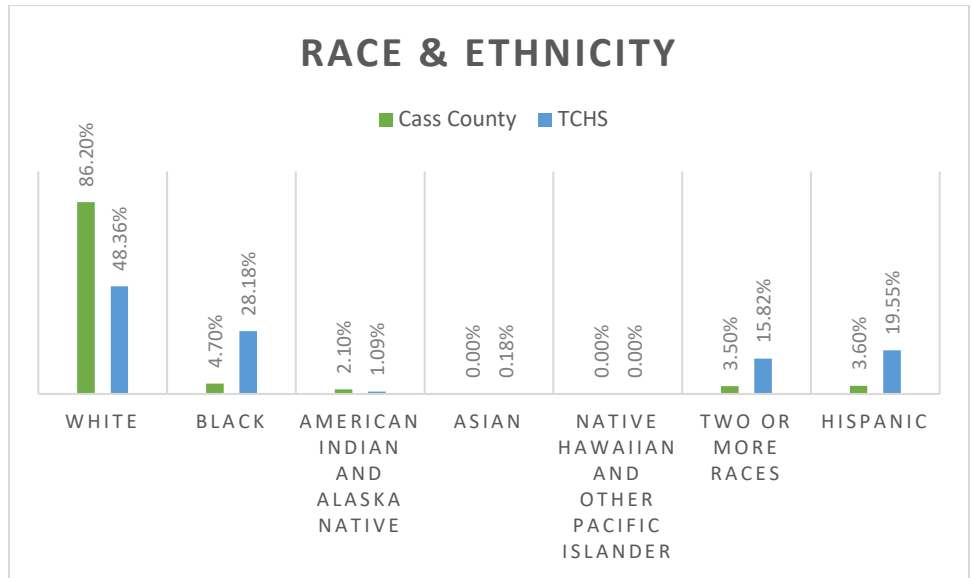
The population has decreased by 2% since 2012 to 51,209 people. Out of the total population there are approximately 3,056 children who are between the ages of birth and 5 years of age, of those approximately 17.9%, or 547 are living at or below poverty. At TCHS we are currently serving 166 children in Cass County, or approximately 30.3% of the eligible children.



Cass County Population Age	
Persons under 5 years	6.0%
Persons under 18 years	20.8%
Persons 65 years and over	21%

The majority of children in Cass County live in two-parent families (68.5%) while 31.5% live in one-parent families (Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2019). The median income in Cass County is \$52,063 which is under the state’s median income of \$54,840.

**62.6%**  
 Of Cass County  
 children, ages 3-4  
 are not enrolled  
 in pre-school



**Van Buren County**

Van Buren County, Michigan makes up 1,090 square miles (607 square miles of land, and 482 square miles of water) in the most southwest corner of Michigan bordering Lake Michigan, Allegan, Berrien, Cass, and Kalamazoo counties (United States Census, 2019). The county has 14 miles of Lake Michigan shoreline, and more than 300 lakes (Market Van Buren, 2019). Cities in Van Buren County include Bangor, Gobles, Hartford, and South Haven, with villages of Bloomingdale, Breedsville, Decatur, Lawrence, Lawton, Mattawan, and Paw Paw. Van Buren county is included in the Kalamazoo-Portage Metropolitan Statistical Area (United States Census, 2019).

The county ranks 55 for overall ranking in child well-being, out of 83 counties in Michigan according to the Michigan League for Public Policies, Kids County in Michigan (Michigan League for Public Policy, 2019). A potential closing of the Palisades Nuclear Powerplant in Covert township, that employs 600 people could greatly impact the economy of the county, the closure was slated for 2018 but has been postponed until at least 2022 (Devereaux, 2019).

**Population**

The population has decreased by only 0.3% since 2012 to 75,201 people. Out of the total

Van Buren County Population Age	
Persons under 5 years	7.4%
Persons under 18 years	23.8%
Persons 65 years and over	18.1%

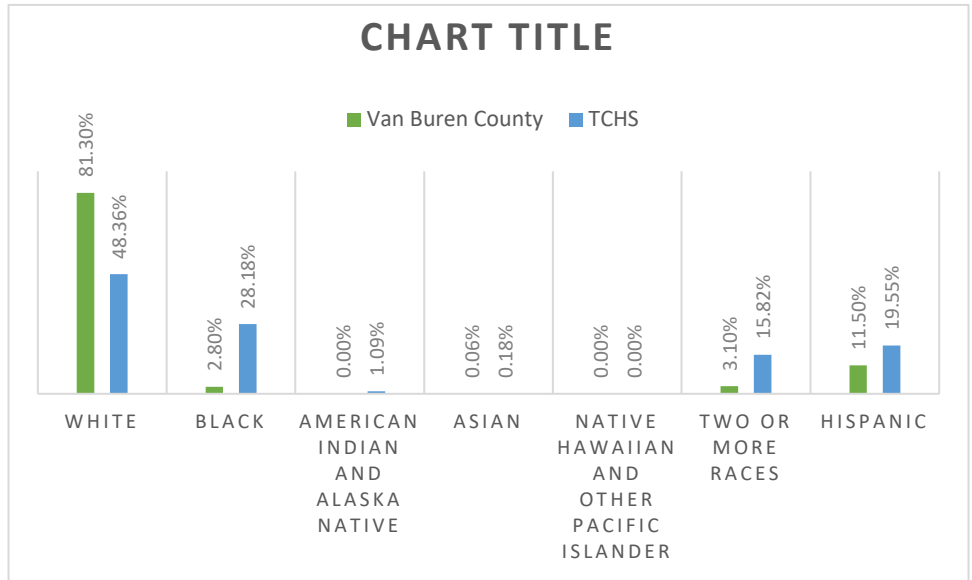
population there are approximately 5,566 children who are between the ages of birth and 5 years of age, of those approximately 18.1%, or 1,007 are living at or below poverty. At TCHS we are currently serving 248 children in Van Buren County, or approximately 24.6% of the eligible children.

The majority of children in Van Buren County live in two-parent families (68.5%) while 31.5% live in one-parent families (Michigan League for Public Policy, 2019). The median income in Van Buren County is \$52,114 which is under the state’s median income of \$54,840.

Figure 6: Seal of Van Buren County Michigan (Van Buren County Government, 2019).



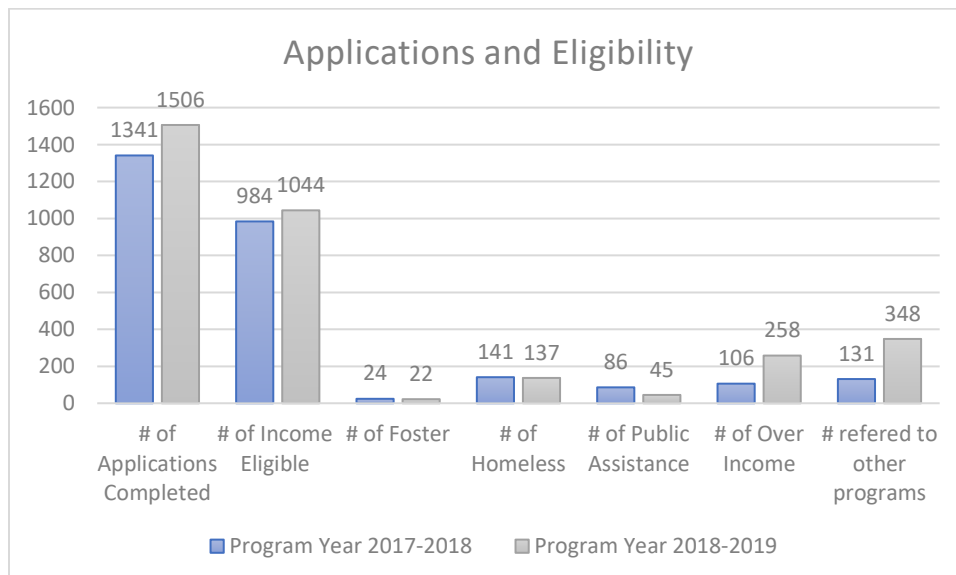
**40.1%**  
 Of Van Buren  
 County prenatal  
 moms receive less  
 than adequate  
**Prenatal care**



### Strengths and Needs of Head Start Eligible Families

At TCHS, a robust recruitment plan has been implemented and includes marketing, door-to-door canvassing, attending Kindergarten and Preschool roundups, attending community events and connecting with community partners for referrals.

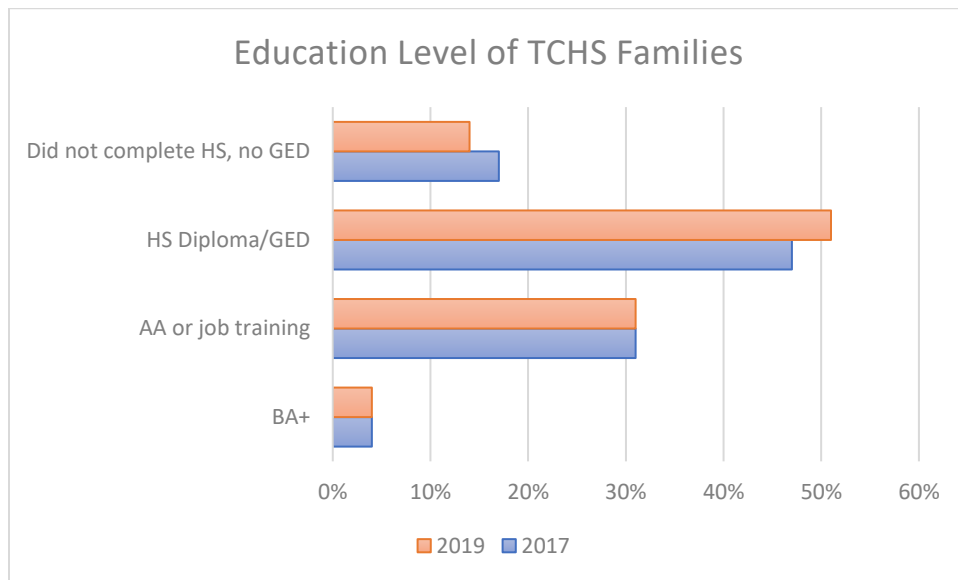
Prior to 2017, the organization did not complete an application with a family if during a prescreening over the phone, it appeared the family was not eligible. During the recruitment process in 2017, that process was changed to complete applications with all interested families. Often it was the case that once the in-person interview was completed it was discovered that the family was actually homeless according to the McKinney-Vento definition, or the child had a diagnosed disability, or the family actually fell within the income guidelines. This has resulted in an increased number of completed applications, and has reached more families who previously would have been told they were ineligible for the program. This also gives us a picture of the overall need for preschool services in the counties we serve and allows us to refer more eligible children to the state-funded PreK program, the Great Start Readiness Program, also known as GSRP.



## Tri-County Head Start • Community Assessment

Of the enrolled families at Tri-County Head Start over the past three program years there has been an increase in the percentage of families who are employed by the end of the program year, increasing from 52.7% of families having at least one-parent employed to 56.9% from 2017 to 2019. The number of families where all parents are unemployed has dropped from 29.2% to 21.9% in the past three years.

Education levels of parents has seen small improvements with fewer families having no High School diploma or GED, and more having them. However, the number of families who are currently in school or a job training program has dropped in the past three years from 13.2% to 7.3%.



Another significant change seen is the number of families enrolled in the WIC (Women, Infants, and Children) program, enrolled families have increased by 8% in the past three years. This goes along with the most requested service needed three years ago being nutrition and health education. Families are being referred to WIC when those services are needed. The most requested service for the past two years has been Parenting Education and we have seen interest increase in our Conscious Discipline parenting education program.

## Community Resources and Strengths

The communities of Berrien, Cass, and Van Buren counties have many year-round outdoor activities, such as Lake Michigan, many lakes, rivers, maintained trails, and recreational activities. There are wonderful education opportunities available in the counties with Southwestern Michigan College, Lake Michigan College, and Andrews University, along with extension courses offered by Western Michigan University, and Ferris State University.

The Tri-County area has few resources for families outside of the state-run agencies such as the Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS), and Community Mental Health (CMH) compared to more populated counties in the state.

Mental Health agencies include Community Mental Health, Woodlands Behavioral Healthcare Network, and Riverwood Center, all of which have specific qualifiers to receive services to their programs.

There are three homeless shelters in Berrien county, none in Cass County, and one in Van Buren county. This means that often when a family is experiencing homelessness, they have to go to a larger county to receive services. For families this means children often end up changing schools so the family can receive services in another county.

There are some pediatric offices in the Tri-County area, but the area is still relatively underserved, with four in Berrien County, two in Cass County, and two in Van Buren County, meaning many families travel to neighboring counties for services. This often results in delayed follow-up appointments, immunizations, and well-child exams.

## Tri-County Head Start • Community Assessment

For dental care there are 14 dentists per 100,000 people in Berrien county, and four in each Cass and Van Buren counties per 100,000 people. Not all of those dentists will accept children under the age of five. If a child needs further dental treatment they have to be referred out of county, most often to Grand Rapids, or Holland.

There are several food deserts in the three counties, where healthy food is either difficult to access or is 10 miles or more from a supermarket. This map shows where the food deserts exist in the Tri-County area.

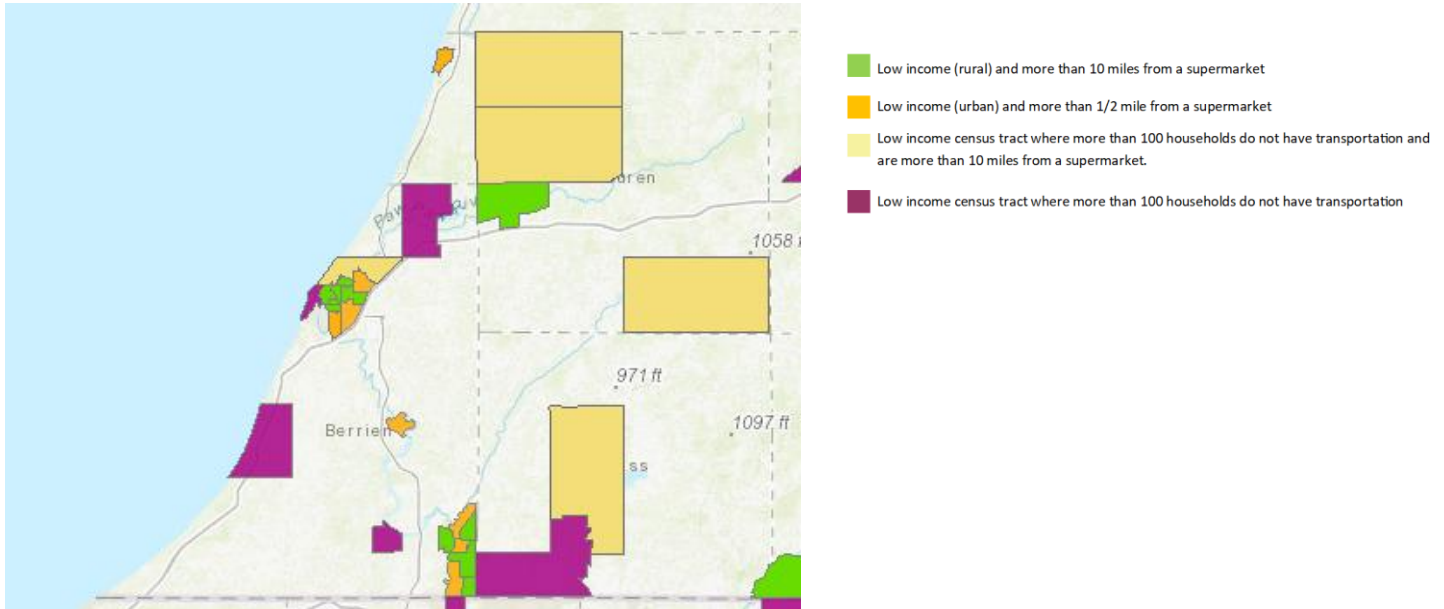


Figure 7: Food Deserts in the Tri-County Area (United States Department of Agriculture, 2019)

## Services for Children with Disabilities

Children with disabilities in Berrien, Cass, and Van Buren counties have access to services through each county school district or RESA. At TCHS, we refer children for screenings and work with various providers to ensure services are provided. This includes service providers working with children in our classrooms, and some children who are dual-enrolled, spending half of the day within a TCHS classroom and the other half of the day in a special education classroom, all with coordinated transportation. Head Start programs must reserve at least 10% of their slots for children with an IEP or IFSP. In the 2018-2019 program year 17.9% of the children enrolled had an IEP or IFSP.

According to the latest Kids Count, the percentage of children enrolled in special education services birth to five, are 3.7% in Berrien County, 3.9% in Cass County, and 5.7% in Van Buren County (Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2019). Below is the breakdown of the children identified in each county with an IEP or IFSP and the number that are being serviced by TCHS.

County Enrolled in TCHS	Total TCHS served with IEP or IFSP/RESA or ISD	Cognitive impairment	Emotional Impairment	Hearing Impairment	Visual Impairment	Physical Impairment	Speech/Language Impairment	Early Childhood Developmental Delay	Severe Multiple Impairment	Autism Spectrum Disorder	Traumatic Brain Injury	Other Health Impairment
<b>Berrien</b>	66/481 13.7%	1/3 33.3%	0	0	0	0	53/326 16.3%	11/88 12.5%	0	1/25 4%	0	0
<b>Cass</b>	26/87 29.9%	0	0	0	0	0	17/63 27%	8/21 38%	0	0	0	1/1 100%
<b>Van Buren</b>	50/347 14.4%	0	0	0	0	0	30/204 14.7%	20/105 19%	0	0	0	0

**Tri-County Head Start • Community Assessment**  
**Social Service Needs and Resources**

Education

Adult Education

Adult Education	Berrien County	Cass County	Van Buren County	Michigan	TCHS
HS Diploma/GED or higher	89.5%	88%	87.4%	90.2%	86%
Bachelor’s Degree or higher	26.7%	17.9%	19.9%	28.1%	4%
Children born to mothers without a High School diploma or GED	15.2%	18.6%	18.3%	11.9%	14%

This chart shows that in the Tri-County area, fewer adults are obtaining their High School Diploma or GED than the state average, fewer adults have bachelor’s degrees, and more children are being born to mothers without a HS Diploma or GED. These numbers are more significant when looking at the adults in the Head Start program. This shows the importance of the effort in our program to assist families in advancing their education.

In the three counties there are various programs, and colleges available for families to obtain a HS Diploma/GED or to advance their education. In the 2018-2019 program year 7.3% of families were advancing their education.

Children’s Education

Children’s Education	Berrien County	Cass County	Van Buren County	Michigan
3-and-4-year-olds not in preschool	56.1%	62.6%	63.2%	52.9%
Students not graduating on time	36.5%	17.9%	20.5%	19.8%
Third Graders not proficient in reading	60.3%	58%	56.1%	55.6%

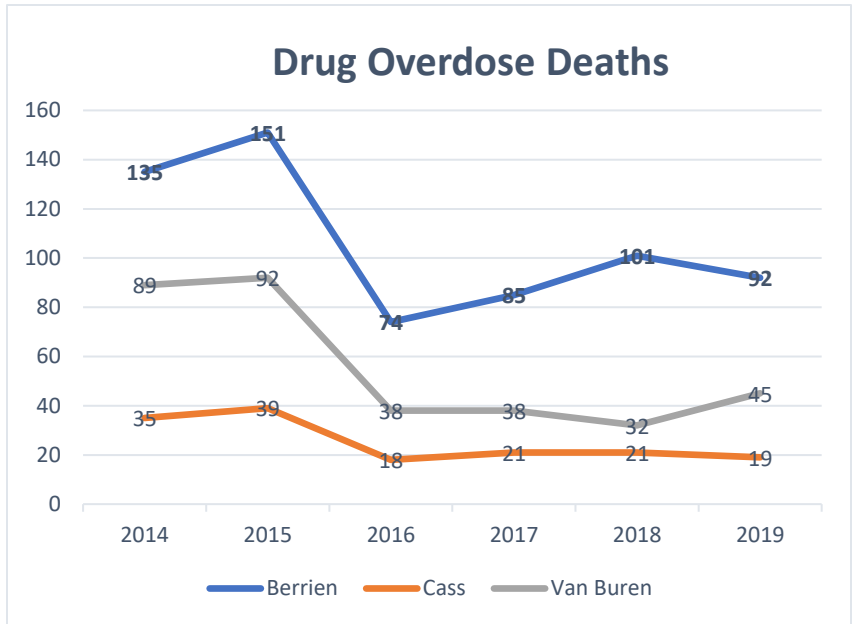
The new Michigan Kindergarten Readiness Assessment, that began rolling out last year, will be implemented throughout the three counties, in fall of 2019. This instrument is to be applied as a tool to help understand the readiness of students who attend Pre-K programs in the state and if they are more prepared to succeed at a higher rate than students who do not participate. The tool is designed to be used between the first day of Kindergarten and October 1<sup>st</sup>, in the four domains of Language and Literacy, Social Foundation, Mathematics, and Physical Well-Being and Motor Development. This change, in addition to the Third Grade Reading Law, is changing the landscape of early education in Michigan, with more pressure on Early Education providers to produce the data behind their effectiveness and impact in preparing children and families for school success. With the current statistics regarding the Third-Grade Reading Law a majority of 3<sup>rd</sup> graders in all three counties could be retained and not advance to the next grade. It is of up-most importance that Tri-County Head Start focuses on early literacy skills and offers professional development to staff to ensure our students are school ready and able to advance at a rate consistent or higher than those not enrolled in high-quality preschool programs.

**Tri-County Head Start • Community Assessment**

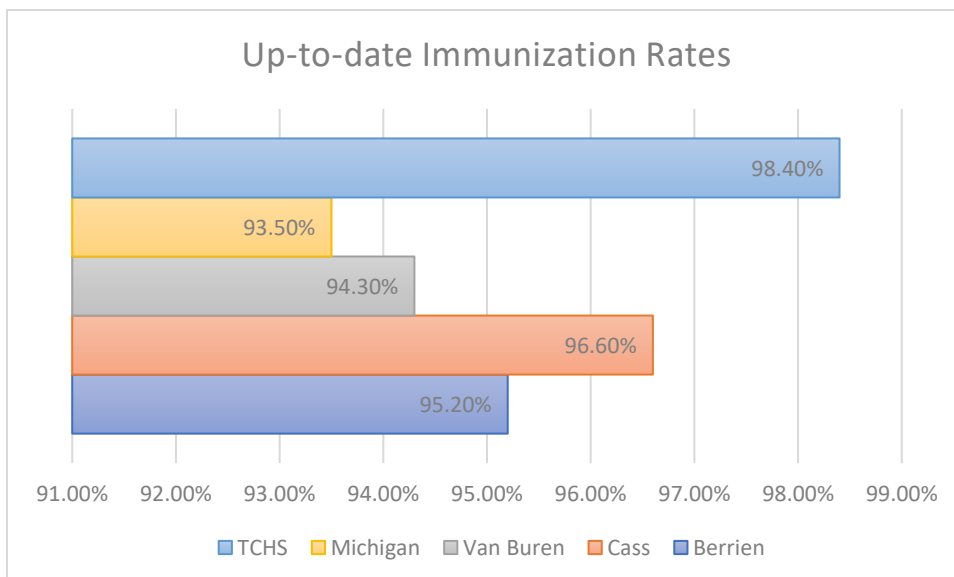
**Health**

Berrien, Cass, and Van Buren counties have fewer health care resources than some of the surrounding counties. Due to limited services, some follow-up services are more difficult for families with limited transportation. The Family Advocates and Home Visitors at Tri-County Head Start take between one and three trips monthly with families as far as Holland and Grand Rapids to receive needed services.

- Life expectancy varies most greatly in Berrien County, with both Benton Harbor and Niles life expectancy being approximately 62-72 years of age, while St. Joseph has a life expectancy of 82-90 years of age. The average life expectancy of each county is at 76.8 years in Berrien County, 77.9 years in Cass County, and 78.3 years in Van Buren county, while the Michigan average is 78.2, and the average in the United States is 78.6 (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), 2018).
- In Michigan, children born with Neonatal Opioid Withdrawal Syndrome has increased eightfold from 0.9 per 1,000 births in 2004 to 7.1 per 1,000 births in 2014, (National Institute on Drug Abuse, 2019).
- Drug overdose deaths in the three counties has declined since 2014 but has held relatively steady in the years since (County Health Rankings and Roadmaps, 2019).



Immunization rates in Kindergarteners in Berrien, Cass, and Van Buren counties are higher than the rate in the state, which is at 93.5% (Michigan Department of Health and Human Services, 2018). Immunization rates are also higher in the Tri-County Head Start organization than the state and the county.



## Tri-County Head Start • Community Assessment

Maternal and Infant health indicators for the counties are as follows, per the Michigan League of Public Policies, Kids County data (Guevara Warren, 2019). In the Tri-County area there is only one birthing hospital and few options for prenatal care, the lack of services contributes to the less than adequate prenatal care which puts children and mothers at increased health risks.

Health Indicators	Berrien County	Cass County	Van Buren County	Michigan
Births to Mothers who smoked during pregnancy	23.2%	27.7%	19.3%	16.2%
Low Birthweight Babies	8.1%	7.1%	6.6%	8.6%
Births to teens under age 20	7.6%	8.6%	7.6%	5.2%
Repeat teen births ages 15-19	17.3%	10.2%	23.0%	17.9%
Less than adequate prenatal care	39.7%	40.3%	40.1%	32.2%
Late or no prenatal care	9.2%	9.2%	9.3%	5.4%
Infant Mortality per 1,000	6.4	7.3	6.1	6.7

Reported communicable diseases in 2018, per the Michigan Department of Health and Human Services.

- Berrien County had 8,078 reported incidences. Most were flu like, gastrointestinal illnesses = 7609 or 94.2%
- Cass County had 634 reported incidences. Most were flu like, gastrointestinal illnesses = 509 or 80.3%
- Van Buren County had 2173 reported incidences. Most were flu like, gastrointestinal illnesses = 1790 or 82.4%

Mental Health Services were also a major concern for those who responded in the community needs survey, with 37.01% of respondents who were dissatisfied with availability.

## Nutrition

Food and nutrition assistance services exist in all three counties, but is predominately focused in Berrien County, with the Be Healthy Berrien initiative. This initiative is a group of organizations working to reduce and prevent obesity. At least one WIC office is available in each county, in addition to food banks and other organizations that work in crisis situations for emergency food.

In spite of these resources, food insecurity continues to be a problem. Feeding America estimates that 17.5% of children in Berrien County, 17% of children in Cass County, and 18.4% of children in Van Buren County are food insecure (Feeding America, 2019).

Other nutrition indicators are shown in the following table. As shown, there are higher numbers in all three counties for children who are receiving these food supports than the state average.

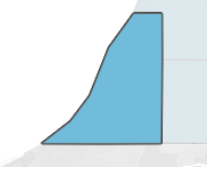
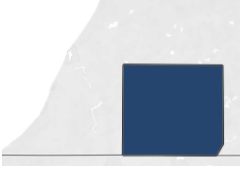



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	Children receiving free & reduced lunch	Children 0-4 receiving WIC	# of agencies that provide assistance with food
Berrien	58.36%	55.9%	69 (1 for every 89 food insecure children)
Cass	53.7%	55.0%	16 (1 for every 104 food insecure children)
Van Buren	53.8%	66.2%	24 (1 for every 123 food insecure children)
Michigan	50.3%	47.3%	

**Housing and Homelessness**

Affordable housing is a major concern in all three counties. Two of the counties border Lake Michigan, where homes and rentals are priced out of range for the majority of residents. The lack of available rentals and homeless shelters in all three counties creates further burdens for families and at times forces them to leave the county for housing. In the community needs survey, 39.7% of respondents were dissatisfied with the availability of affordable housing.

Berrien	Cass	Van Buren
		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 3,336 low income apartments</li> <li>• 47.48% of renters overburdened (spend more than 30% of income on housing)</li> <li>• 3.6% of children 0-4 homeless</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 204 low income apartments</li> <li>• 49.02% of renters overburdened (spend more than 30% of income on housing)</li> <li>• 4.7% of children 0-4 homeless</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 1,707 low income apartments</li> <li>• 44.4% of renters overburdened (spend more than 30% of income on housing)</li> <li>• 5% of children 0-4 homeless</li> </ul>
<p><b>17% of children enrolled in TCHS in 2018-19 were homeless</b></p>		<p><b>2.8% of children 0-4 are homeless</b></p>

**Child Care availability**

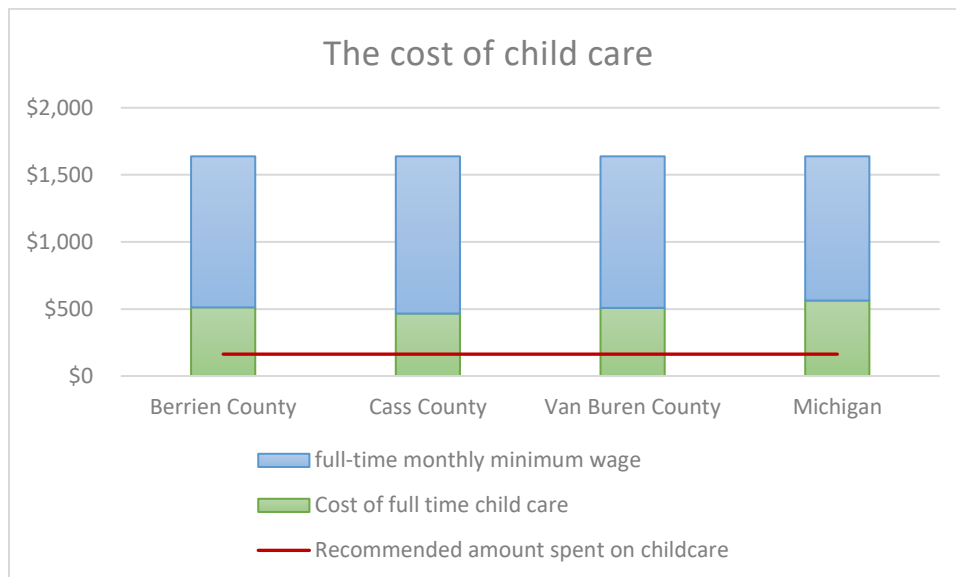
Besides Tri-County Head Start and the Great Start Readiness Program, the state-funded four-year-old preschool, there are many fee-for-service options for childcare and preschool. However, in all three counties there is a lack of childcare to meet the needs of working families. The number of slots in both Berrien and Cass counties have reduced from 2010 to 2017, and while the number of available slots increased in the same time period, there are still only slots available for 53.9% of the potential children. In the community needs survey, 20% of respondents responded that in the past three years they have had to decline a job offer or leave a job due to the lack of available childcare.

**Tri-County Head Start • Community Assessment**

	Children ages 0-5 eligible for subsidized care	Change in total childcare slots from 2010-2017	Change in total childcare slots providing infant and toddler care	# of children birth to age 9 vs. number of total slots	Children with all parents in the workforce	Gap in care, % of children can serve (based on all parents working)
<b>Berrien County</b>	6.7%	-29.6%	-19.1%	18,320 children, 3,997 childcare slots	69.2% 12,677 children birth to age 9	31.5%
<b>Cass County</b>	5.1%	-40.4%	-44.7%	5,515 children, 607 childcare slots	60.1% 3,315 children birth to age 9	18.3%
<b>Van Buren County</b>	5.4%	+33.3%	+3.0%	9,466 children, 3,314 childcare slots	64.9% 6,143 children birth to age 9	53.9%

Figure 8: Child Care Availability (Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2019), (Public Sector Consultants, 2019)

These issues are further complicated by the expense of childcare in the three counties. The recommended amount to spend on childcare is 10% of income. For a family working full-time at minimum wage earning \$1,638 per month childcare should equal approximately \$163 per month. Families in Berrien County pay on average \$512 per month, families in Cass County pay \$466 per month, and in Van Buren County they pay \$508 per month, all lower than the state average of \$563 but still well above the 10% mark. For childcare for one child to meet the 10% threshold in Michigan, the family would have to be earning at least \$67,560 per year. In the community needs survey, 42.5% of respondents were dissatisfied with the availability of affordable childcare.



## Tri-County Head Start • Community Assessment

### Transportation and communication

#### Transportation Availability

The three counties are mostly rural, with very limited public transportation. In Benton Harbor and surrounding areas there are fixed bus routes, and in the other areas there are dial-a-ride services available at a cost ranging from \$2-\$6 each way within county, and up to \$20 each way for out of county to medical appointments. When asked about what would make the Tri-County area better, improved public transportation was one of the top responses.

Chances of becoming a victim of crime:

#### BERRIEN COUNTY

1 in 40

#### CASS COUNTY

1 in 52

#### VAN BUREN COUNTY

1 in 44

#### Households without transportation



- Berrien County – 8.7%
- Cass County – 4.6%
- Van Buren County – 6.1%
- Michigan – 8.0%

#### Broadband Availability

	Broadband Coverage
Berrien County	89.9%
Cass County	97.3%
Van Buren County	79.0%

Broadband and internet access is important to independence and helping families out of poverty. With connectivity families can access necessary and needed resources, employment opportunities and educational opportunities. In the state of Michigan 89% of residents have access to Broadband service (Broadband Now, 2019).

Broadband access varies within each county dramatically in some areas, in Dowagiac (Cass County) coverage is at 90.6%, in Buchanan (Berrien County) coverage is 85.5%, and in Paw Paw (Van Buren County) coverage is 95.6%.

#### Other Social Services

Children in foster care are a priority for Head Start enrollment and the number of children in out-of-home care has been rising in the three counties. From 2012 to 2017 the number of children in out-of-home care increased by 85 children in the three counties, and the number of investigated families increased by 1,089 (Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2019).

One recent change that has the potential to impact the Tri-County area is the recent legislation that legalized recreational use of Marijuana. This legalization has the potential to impact the lives of children and families we serve but also reduce the number of eligible and qualified staff available for positions within TCHS.

The crime rates in all three counties have been decreasing over time. Berrien County has an overall crime rate of 2,476 per 100,000 residents, Cass County has an overall crime rate of 1,926 per 100,000 residents, and Van Buren County has an overall crime rate of 2,272 per 100,000 residents (Michigan Incident Crime Reporting, 2017).

## Summary of Findings and Recommendations

An assessment of the demographic, social, and economic characteristics of the population of the Tri-County area indicates a need for Head Start services. To engage in an enriched environment where children and their families can advance their education and socioeconomic status, the community needs to continue to create opportunities for children from disadvantaged backgrounds considering the rank of overall well-being, the number of three and four-year-old's no in preschool, and the need for childcare in all three counties.

There are many resources in Berrien, Cass, and Van Buren counties that target the needs of families living in poverty. However, the findings of this report indicate that the needs of families are not fully being met. Addressing the needs of local children and families is an important step towards improving the economy and well-being of the communities we serve.

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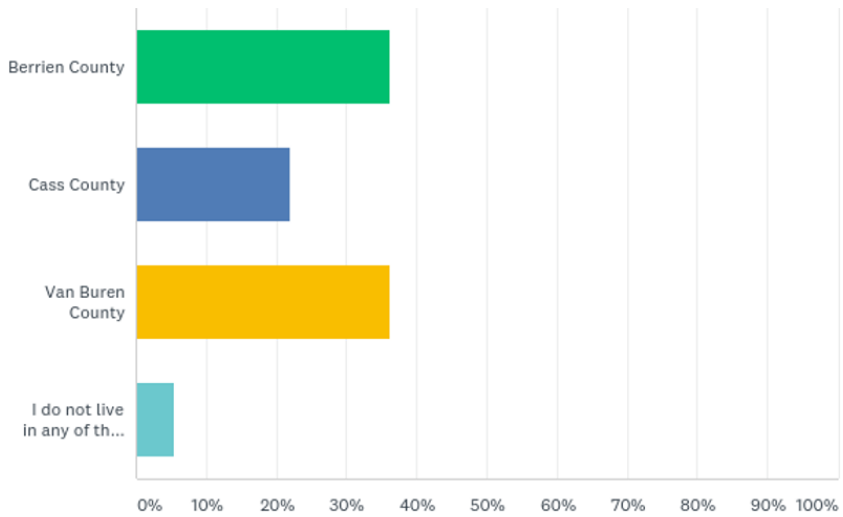
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Appendices

Appendix A: Community Needs Assessment Survey

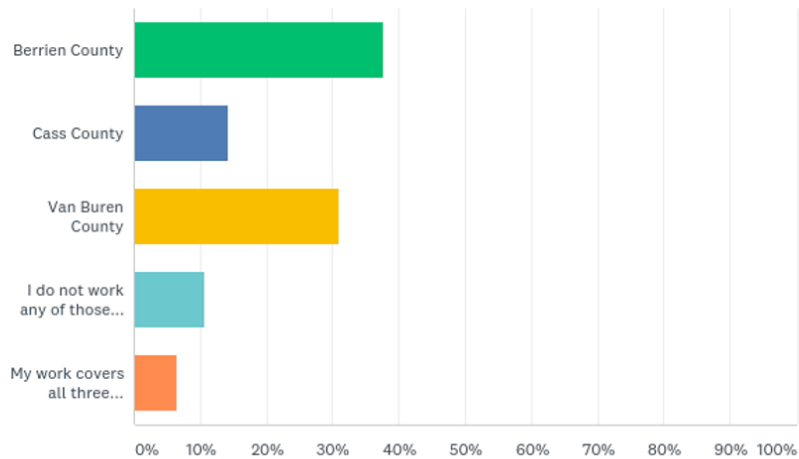
### Q1: Do you live in...

Answered: 273 Skipped: 5



### Q2: Do you work in...

Answered: 274 Skipped: 4



Q9 What is one thing you like best about living or working in Berrien, Cass, or Van Buren Counties?

friendly seasons Beautiful Location feel supportive enjoy great county city  
know close lake work small town feel rural school lakes area  
living Lake Michigan families close family  
community need people Small  
Small community big city Small town home  
Close home resources close place love minutes help country  
rural area Beautiful area quiet many Beach

Q10 What would make Berrien, Cass, or Van Buren counties a better place to live and/or work?

transportation child care Less businesses restaurants Less crime options  
High wages public transportation Youth activities roads  
opportunities activities children Better roads Higher  
services daycare jobs affordable housing families  
Better paying Better employment community shopping  
children pay people counties resources etc live help  
places Higher paying job opportunities things needs education schools  
health care kids housing



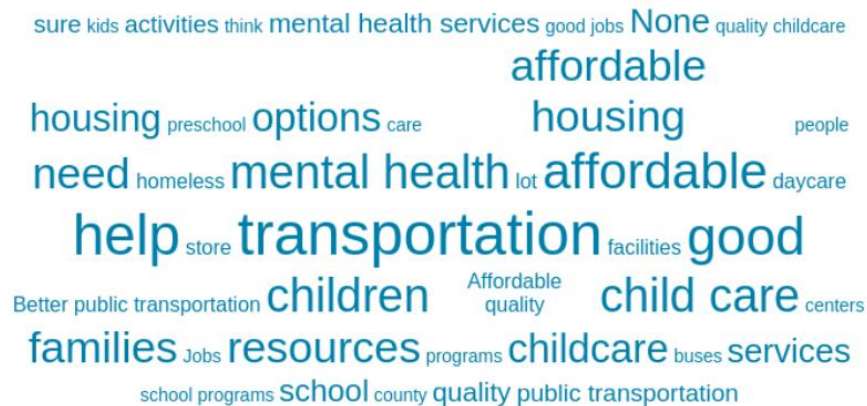
Q11

# How satisfied are you with the availability of...

Answered: 229 Skipped: 49

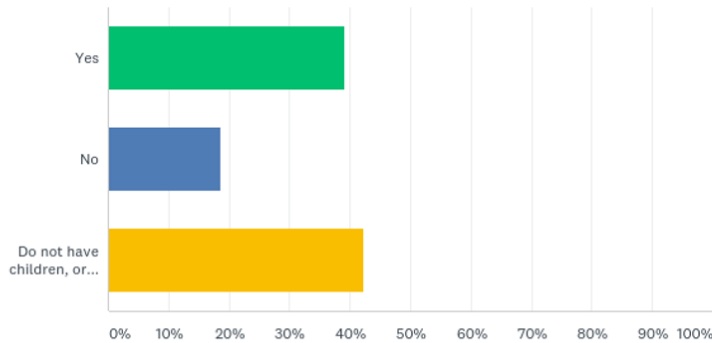
	VERY SATISFIED	SOMEWHAT SATISFIED	NEITHER SATISFIED NOR DISSATISFIED	DISSATISFIED	VERY DISSATISFIED	TOTAL
Affordable Child Care	6.64% 15	16.37% 37	34.51% 78	28.32% 64	14.16% 32	226
Quality Child Care	11.89% 27	24.23% 55	34.80% 79	20.70% 47	8.37% 19	227
Affordable Housing	7.05% 16	25.99% 59	27.31% 62	24.23% 55	15.42% 35	227
Full-Time Employment	20.61% 47	31.14% 71	23.25% 53	18.42% 42	6.58% 15	228
Transportation	10.09% 23	21.93% 50	32.89% 75	21.49% 49	13.60% 31	228
Medical Services	19.38% 44	34.80% 79	19.82% 45	21.59% 49	4.41% 10	227
Dental Services	21.05% 48	37.72% 86	19.30% 44	16.23% 37	5.70% 13	228
Mental Health Services	10.57% 24	22.91% 52	29.52% 67	23.35% 53	13.66% 31	227
Opportunities for you to be involved in decisions that affect your community	14.47% 33	29.39% 67	39.47% 90	12.72% 29	3.95% 9	228
Healthy Food Choices	17.98% 41	32.46% 74	21.05% 48	22.81% 52	5.70% 13	228

## Q12 What resources are missing from Berrien, Cass, or Van Buren Counties?



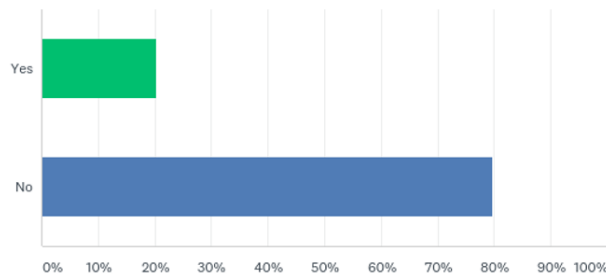
### Q13: If you have young children, do you have reliable childcare?

Answered: 225 Skipped: 53



### Q14: Have you in the past 3 years, had to decline a job offer, or lost a job due to lack of childcare?

Answered: 226 Skipped: 52



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Appendix B: Creative Matrix

Community Needs Assessment Meeting

	How might we improve social connections in communities?	How might we improve access to health services?	How might we improve access to early care and education?	How might we improve housing opportunities?	How might we improve transportation access in the community?
<p>People &amp; Partnerships Think about...</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Organizations, Companies, and their leaders</li> <li>Strategic Partnerships</li> <li>What organizations are already doing this work or could help in this work?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Joint events with GSRP</li> <li>Community centers or spaces for various activities (free sport league, splash pads, walking trails, comm. Garden, etc.)</li> <li>More Bilingual services.</li> <li>Build community focused building and with partners.</li> <li>Attend community meetings.</li> <li>Partnership with libraries, towns, villages, parks.</li> <li>Work With local communities to improve</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Clinic/ Immunization days at health dept.</li> <li>Partner with an establishment clinic to have a “school” base clinic at center.</li> <li>Have mental health at services.</li> <li>Partnership/collaborate with providers</li> <li>Clinic or services for prenatal care.</li> <li>Doctors/Dentist come to the school 2 times a year.</li> <li>Partner with providers</li> <li>Bring More HCP into HSAC</li> <li>Have health services in schools</li> <li>Health department thinking outside the box.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>ISD’s school districts philanthropy business partners.</li> <li>In large local businesses.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Who has the capacity to build efficiently, yet with beauty and quality?</li> <li>Along with developing administrative systems that help people stay in homes.</li> <li>Participate in homeless count (our families are under counted)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Work with Vo-Tech (collaborate)</li> <li>Uber -other organization give \$+0 uber drivers to transport families for free</li> <li>Support Berrien County transportation initiative.</li> <li>Uber? Lift? Amazon?</li> <li>Discounts with coupons for car maintenance.</li> </ul>

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	<p>shared spaces with liability in mind (young perspective)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Who specializes in hospitality, inclusiveness and fun?</li> <li>• Open up organizations/ services to other populations.</li> <li>• Community wide calendar.</li> <li>• Joint events with boys and girls club</li> <li>• Hire or partner with marketing.</li> </ul>				
<p>Events &amp; Programs Think About...</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Family Events</li> <li>• Conferences</li> <li>• Community Trainings</li> <li>• Workshops</li> <li>• What events or programs could we do to solve this issue?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Business donate free passes for entire families to have fun together in their community.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Health Fair with community partners for families to attend.</li> <li>• Have fun events- Have providers, health department present to education on resources.</li> <li>• Clinics to come to our centers.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Have before and after care.</li> <li>• More available, more center based.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Promote project connects.</li> <li>• Have a soar trainer</li> <li>• Basic house maintenance tips.</li> <li>• Have financial budget courses for families. (IDA) /home ownership/ teleman Educate families on resources and assist.</li> <li>• Educate families on safe housing-</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Car maintenance programs</li> <li>• Basic car care tips</li> <li>• Work with metal yards and local schools to rehab cars for families.</li> </ul>

Tri-County Head Start • Community Assessment

				<p>when looking for housing and keeping housing.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Teach financial skills.</li> </ul>	
<p>Internal Policies &amp; Procedures Think About...</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Incentives</li> <li>• Training &amp; Education</li> <li>• Organization Guidelines</li> <li>• What can we do internally to solve this problem?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Job skills training programs @ TCHS.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Band together with other Head Starts to lobby government for funding as normal yearly/ semiannual task</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• More slots</li> <li>• Restructure EHS acceptance standards.</li> <li>• Aggressive awareness/ ? campaign</li> <li>• More EHS classrooms</li> <li>• Internally be more out in community. Advertise about who and what we are.</li> <li>• Diversity just by offering head start.</li> <li>• Build it and they will come.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Tiny Houses at HS centers.</li> <li>• Let families know they can stay with their school if they are homeless.</li> <li>• More internally housing people like Holly.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Door to door transportation.</li> </ul>
<p>Social Media Think About...</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Videos &amp; Pictures</li> <li>• Posts &amp; Messages</li> <li>• Likes</li> <li>• Friends &amp; Networks</li> <li>• How can we address this with</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Face book link to other services- Provide contact info right on page.</li> <li>• Put events on social media for family area</li> <li>• Social groups online that include families in a community.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Post pics/ videos clips of hearing / vision clinics improve awareness.</li> <li>• Advertise Health days</li> <li>• Health education weekly on social media. (answering the whys)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Advertise childcare subsidy with HS families.</li> <li>• Community Awareness of childcare subsidy.</li> <li>• Enrollment events at locations.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Video/ (3 min.) Documentary of current state of housing in the region.</li> <li>• Link to housing resources on TCHS homepage.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Car pool board</li> <li>• Available public transportation.</li> <li>• (United Way is good at this) Community social media/ campaign for awareness of new transport in community.</li> </ul>

**Tri-County Head Start • Community Assessment**

marketing or social media?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• More social media outlets (Twitter, instagram)</li> <li>• Post links to free family events/ activities.</li> </ul>				
<p>Games &amp; Competition Think About...</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How do we entice others to help?</li> <li>• Motivations</li> <li>• Rewards, Badges, Points, and Prizes</li> <li>• Teamwork</li> <li>• Scoring and Leaderboards</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• HS TBall , Soccer, Flag Football</li> <li>• Family fun fair</li> <li>• TCHS 5k</li> <li>• HS parent Olympics</li> </ul>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Refer a friend program?</li> <li>• Free t-shirt?</li> </ul>	Contest by local business architecture to build affordable housing.	
Wildcard		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Medical transportation</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Radio / commercial/ billboard/ early education.</li> <li>• Before and after daycare.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Promote community living on farms.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Door to door transportation</li> <li>• Medical transportation</li> <li>• Door to door</li> <li>• Medical transporter for our families.</li> </ul>

Top Brainstorm Solutions

*Community Needs Assessment Recommendations Meeting*

<b>Long-Term Goals</b>	
<b>Luxuries</b>	<b>Strategic</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Have medical care available at centers</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Hire a PA or Nurse practitioners</li><li>• Buildings that bring other resources together along with event space</li></ul>
<b>Short-Term Goals</b>	
<b>Targeted</b>	<b>High Value</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Develop a preferred network of car dealers and garages</li><li>• Family fun fair</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Teacher pipelines with more than just SMC</li><li>• More EHS slots</li></ul>