



## what is the Beyond ABC report?

Since 1996, Children's Health<sup>SM</sup> has published Beyond ABC, an in-depth look at the quality of life of children in North Texas counties: Dallas, Collin, Cooke, Denton, Fannin, Grayson, Tarrant and (new to the report) Ellis.

This report examines four key areas that shape children's quality of life today and influence their opportunities for tomorrow: health, economic security, safety and education. As Texas continues to be an epicenter for growth and development, the report reveals progress and challenges we can solve together as a community.



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2025-2026

# beyond

Assessing the Well-Being of Children in North Texas

Published by  
 children'shealth®

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**On the cover:**  
Julian Marie, age 4  
Tarrant County

**On the back cover:**  
Patrick, age 7  
Dallas County

Zadie, age 2, Dallas County

Welcome to the 19th edition of Beyond ABC, a comprehensive report on the quality of life for children in North Texas.

At Children's Health, we know each child's well-being is shaped by a complex interplay of factors. Beyond ABC examines more than 60 indicators across four areas: health, economic security, safety and education. These influences can impact a child's long-term health. Where children live, their family's income and job opportunities, the quality of their schools, their access to nutritious food and whether they live in stable housing all influence their development and long-term well-being.

This year's edition takes an even broader view of our region with the addition of Ellis County, building upon our historical data collections across Dallas, Collin, Cooke, Denton, Fannin, Grayson and Tarrant counties.

As this year's report shows, children across North Texas continue to face significant challenges, including the lasting effects of the COVID-19 pandemic. These struggles, often intensified by social media, the threat of school violence and unstable home environments, persist for too many young people. At the same time, research indicates there is progress. Communities are expanding access to care and resources, giving more children the support they need to grow up healthy, resilient and hopeful.

The report also highlights a continuing trend: widening geographic disparities. While North Texas benefits from rapid growth and prosperity, this growth brings new pressures. In suburban areas, infrastructure often struggles to keep pace with demand. In many rural areas, smaller populations cannot support the range of services available elsewhere in the region.

To meet these challenges, the Beyond ABC Advisory Board – composed of leaders, experts and community advocates – has developed a comprehensive set of recommendations. Their insights reflect the complex realities of an increasingly diverse youth population and point toward a shared path forward. Together, we can ensure every child in our community has the opportunity to thrive.

Our mission at Children's Health is, and always has been, to make life better for children. The challenges before us are real, but they also present opportunities for us to come together as a community to overcome barriers and to create healthier futures. For more than 110 years, we have stood with children and families across North Texas, helping each new generation grow stronger and more resilient. It is a responsibility we embrace with purpose and resolve. Together, we will build a brighter tomorrow for every child.



Chris

CHRISTOPHER J. DUROVICH

President and Chief Executive Officer  
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BEYOND ABC ONLINE

In addition to the material printed in this report, you can access previously published information about children's well-being in North Texas at [childrens.com/beyondabc](https://childrens.com/beyondabc). There you will find reports issued since 2010 that provide comprehensive information on the quality of life of children in North Texas.



Preston and Taj, ages 14 and 12, Collin County

about Children’s Health

For more than 110 years, the mission of Children’s Health has been to make life better for children.

Since our humble beginnings in 1913 as a “baby camp,” our commitment to our community has included not only high-quality patient care but also advocacy, education and preventive care with an unwavering focus on our mission.

As the leading pediatric health care system in North Texas and one of the largest pediatric health care providers in the nation, we remain committed to giving more families access to world-class, highly specialized care.

Our mission extends beyond the walls of our hospitals and clinics, meeting families where they live, learn and play. With more than 50 pediatric specialty and subspecialty programs across North Texas and 1,895 medical and dental staff, we provide the highest quality of care to more children in more places than ever before.

Our system features two full-service hospitals – Children’s Medical Center Dallas and the newly expanded Children’s Medical Center Plano – and the interdisciplinary Children’s Medical Center Research Institute at UT Southwestern. We also provide care at numerous specialty centers and urgent care locations, the Children’s Health Andrews Institute for Orthopaedics & Sports Medicine and the Rees-Jones Center for Foster Care Excellence. We have further expanded our reach through groundbreaking telehealth services both in and out of schools, as well as the Children’s Health Care Network, consisting of more than 680 clinicians providing care at 180 pediatric primary care, specialty and therapeutic facilities across our region.

As the pediatric population of North Texas continues to grow, we are growing alongside it, enhancing our ability to deliver leading-edge pediatric care close to home. Expanding access to care takes many forms: impactful community health initiatives, broad outreach, a growing network of providers,



Children's Medical Center Dallas

pioneering research and treatments, a commitment to equitable care, comprehensive clinical programs and investment in world-class facilities.

The addition of a new, state-of-the-art, nearly 400,000-square-foot patient tower at Children’s Medical Center Plano doubled the capacity of the Emergency Department, nearly tripled the number of beds and significantly expanded clinical capabilities, allowing us to serve more patients and families where they need it most.

The new Children’s Health Specialty Center Fairview builds on this strong foundation north of Dallas. It houses a variety of specialty clinics, including the Children’s Health Andrews Institute, cardiology, pulmonology, neurology, gastroenterology, allergy and immunology, and otolaryngology/ENT, provided by Children’s Health Medical Group and UT Southwestern providers.

Children’s Health will broaden access to the region’s top pediatric care in southern Dallas at the UT Southwestern Medical Center at RedBird. The site will include clinical space for the Children’s Health Andrews Institute, primary care and integrated behavioral health care. Treated specialties will include general surgery, urology, ear, nose and throat, neurology, epilepsy, gastroenterology, pulmonology, cardiology and hematology.

Children’s Health and UT Southwestern also broke ground on a new, transformative \$5 billion campus that will be one of the largest pediatric hospitals in the nation after completion in 2031. The new campus will serve as a destination for leading-edge patient care and emerging treatments, helping expand access to top-tier pediatric care, drive innovation in research and clinical practice and create an environment designed for healing, discovery and excellence. Our growth reflects our ongoing commitment to meet the health care needs of children and families in the communities we serve – both now and for generations to come.



Children's Health Specialty Center Prosper



This conceptual rendering shows the proposed design of the new Dallas pediatric campus

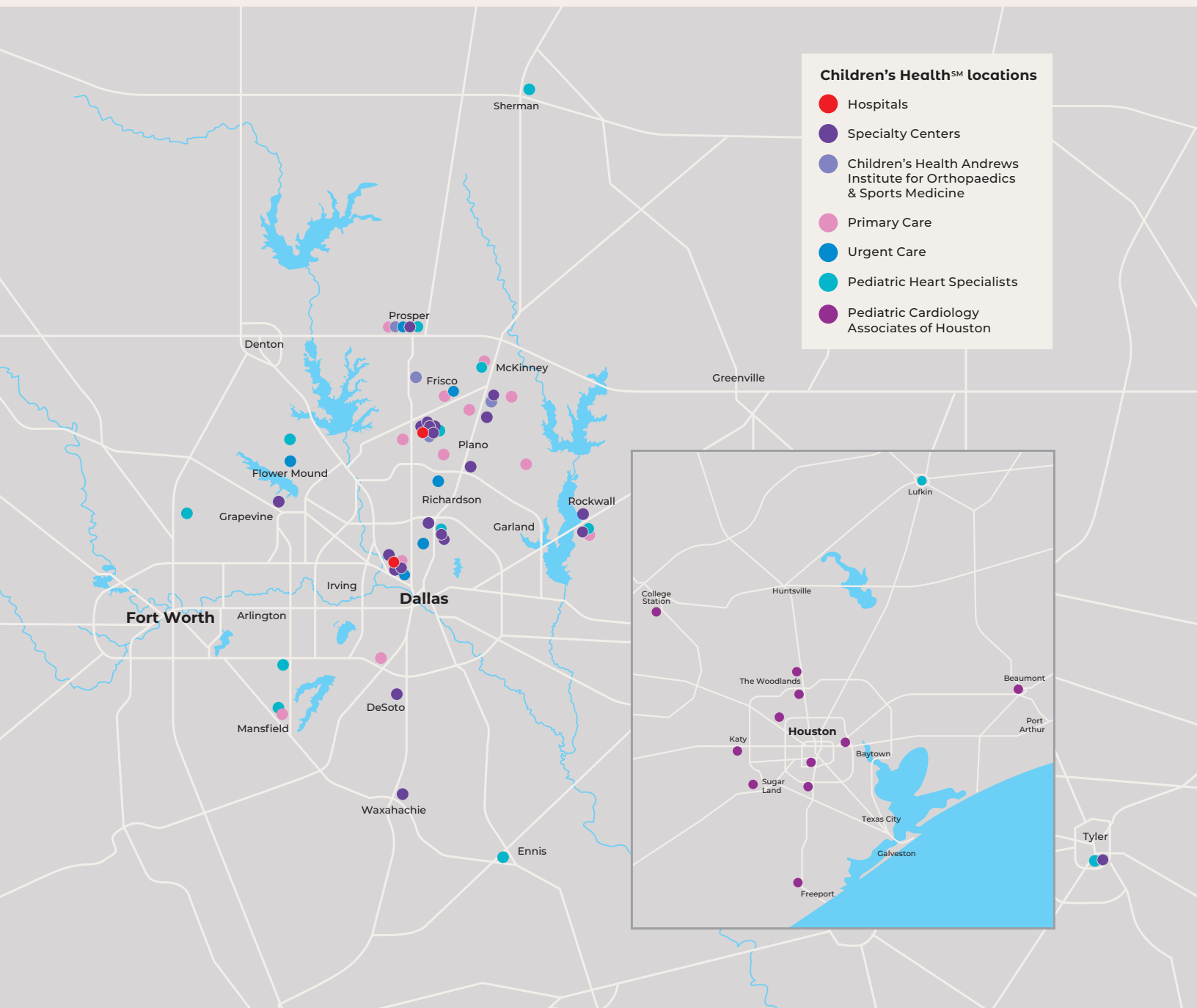


Children's Medical Center Research Institute at UT Southwestern



Children's Medical Center Plano

# map of Children's Health locations



# Children's Health is making life better for children with care close to home.



1 million+ patient visits annually



More than \$111 million in charity care provided annually\*

The nation's first and only pediatric health system with **Level I and Level II Children's Surgery Center designations** at multiple sites



The **only pediatric Level I trauma center** in North Texas and the **first Level III pediatric trauma center** in Collin County



Children's Medical Center Dallas is ranked by U.S. News & World Report in **all pediatric specialties** for eight consecutive years



Magnet designation for **nursing excellence** every year since 2009

*Note: All numbers listed are as of Dec. 31, 2024.  
\*Retail value of charity care*



Miles, age 4, Ellis County



Art class in Denton County

# Children’s Health pediatric community programs and services

**Children’s Health continues to expand and strengthen our community-based programs to improve the health and well-being of children across North Texas.** Through a proactive, ground-up approach, we are helping make life better for millions of children in our region. The Beyond ABC report plays a critical role in these efforts by helping us identify and prioritize the most urgent needs affecting children.

By partnering with community leaders and organizations to meet families where they are, we connect our health care providers across the community to better serve children and ensure accessible, integrated care. We also champion innovative community programs to offer wellness programs and primary care in nontraditional settings, such as churches and community centers, to break down barriers and bring care closer to home.

This approach is possible only through the relationships Children’s Health is forming with other clinical organizations, physician groups, nonprofit organizations and action-oriented neighborhood coalitions. Services we provide through these efforts include advanced care for sports-related injuries and prevention at Children’s Health Andrews Institute, multifaceted school-based health care, our Rees-Jones Center for Foster Care Excellence and our award-winning Behavioral Health Integration and Guidance Initiative.

But the work does not stop there. We recognize that health is shaped by more than medical care – it’s also influenced by social determinants like housing, food security and education. By working with community organizations, nonprofits and other service providers, we can share information across our system and connect families to additional resources to help support the best quality of life for their children.

## School-based Telehealth and Telehealth at Home

School nurses can now connect students with health care providers right from school using School-based Telehealth by Children’s Health Virtual Care. As one of the fastest-growing telemedicine programs in the country, our School-based Telehealth Program has expanded to more than 257 schools throughout 27 school districts in Texas, conducting more than 20,000 visits since 2014. A recent survey indicated more than 40% of parents would have visited the emergency room if not for the School-based Telehealth Program, resulting in significant cost savings. School-based Telehealth is bridging health care access gaps for underserved communities – one student, one school and one visit at a time.

## Texas Child Health Access Through Telemedicine

The Texas Child Health Access Through Telemedicine (TCHATT) Program is funded by the Texas Child Mental Health Care Consortium and operates in partnership with UT Southwestern. TCHATT provides school-based telebehavioral health services to students in more than 900 public and charter schools across nine counties in North Texas. The program offers short-term therapy as well as psychiatric consultation, case management, psychoeducation and referrals to community resources. Services are provided at no cost to families.

## The Behavioral Health Integration and Guidance (BHIG) Initiative

The BHIG Initiative is a no-cost program designed to empower pediatric primary care providers to detect, treat and manage low- to moderate-acuity mental and behavioral health conditions in youth, such as anxiety, depression and stress. By providing continuing education, technical assistance and access to child psychiatry consultation, BHIG enhances primary care capacity to offer timely, integrated mental health care, reducing waiting times for specialist referrals and enabling intervention earlier. This approach supports youth mental health prevention and promotes positive mental well-being by equipping providers with evidence-based tools and collaborative care models, ultimately improving access and outcomes for children and families across North Texas.

## Children’s Health Andrews Institute for Orthopaedics & Sports Medicine

As the only institute of its kind in the region, Children’s Health Andrews Institute works to get young athletes back on the field. Our multidisciplinary experts place a strong emphasis on research, education and injury prevention to greatly reduce the number of athletes being sidelined from injuries. Developed under the direction of nationally renowned orthopedic surgeon James Andrews, M.D., this state-of-the-art institute offers a full spectrum of services from orthopedic surgery, a same-day fracture clinic and spinal care to rehabilitation, performance training, nutrition planning, advanced imaging and diagnostics.

## The Rees-Jones Center for Foster Care Excellence

The only clinic of its kind in North Texas, the Rees-Jones Center provides primary medical and behavioral care to young people with current or past child welfare involvement. The center provides extended appointments and a collaborative, trauma-informed environment able to serve a range of special needs, including medical complexity, in-utero drug and alcohol exposure, and pregnant or parenting youth. Through health services research, policy analysis and medical education, the center’s experts promote policies and practices that advance care and outcomes for children and families involved in the child welfare system.

## Get Up & Go Weight Management Program

Designed by physicians and registered dietitians, Get Up & Go by Children’s Health addresses the needs of children with high weight or obesity by creating awareness and understanding of how lifestyle choices affect health. This community-based initiative provides a wide range of free programs and services at several YMCA and community locations in Dallas, Denton and Collin counties to empower families in making lasting healthy lifestyle changes. The program also offers virtual options. Get Up & Go is a free, 10-week program that takes a team approach to achieving a healthy weight, encouraging both children and their families to set goals and learn together.

**Asthma Management Program**

The nationally certified Asthma Management Program at Children’s Health has been proven to reduce asthma-related emergency department visits as well as school and work absences. This three- to six-month program helps those 18 and younger better manage their condition for more symptom-free sleep, learning and play.

**Injury Prevention**

Injuries are the number one cause of death for children, but they are preventable. The Injury Prevention Service at Children’s Health helps keep children safe from traumatic injuries by offering evidence-based education tools at our hospitals and in the community. From car seat safety to water safety and firearm safety, our program provides educational materials, interactive events and resources in English and Spanish.

**Children’s Health Insurance Program and Children’s Medicaid Outreach**

In Texas, children without health insurance may qualify for low-cost or no-cost coverage through government programs such as the Children’s Health Insurance Program (CHIP) or Children’s Medicaid. The programs cover office visits, prescription drugs, dental care, eye exams and glasses. Outreach representatives help families apply for assistance virtually or in person throughout their community, whether at a child’s school, a public library or another location.



Olivia, age 10, Denton County

philanthropy

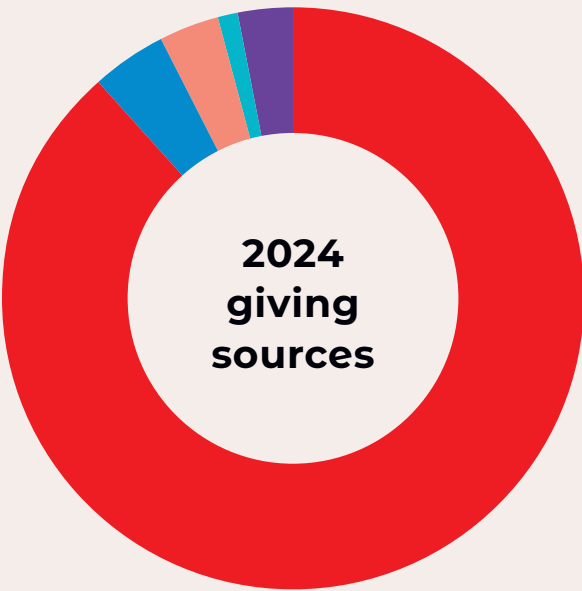
Incredible begins with you

Children’s Health is the leading nonprofit pediatric health care system in North Texas, and philanthropic support helps us do much more than provide medical care – charitable gifts help us make life better for children in many ways.

As the fundraising arm for Children’s Health, Children’s Medical Center Foundation secures philanthropic support through partnerships with individual donors, corporations and other organizations to benefit the entire health system and the children in our communities. All contributions to Children’s Medical Center Foundation directly impact patients and their families.

It takes incredible passion, incredible generosity and incredible supporters to come together to meet the needs of North Texas children. Investments in our facilities, in the services we offer and in the research we conduct play a significant role in ensuring Children’s Health continues to provide the best pediatric care to all we are privileged to serve.

Our fundraising successes reflect the trust and confidence the community places in Children’s Health to care for the children of today and future generations.



| giving sources        |  | 2024          |
|-----------------------|--|---------------|
| ● Individuals         |  | \$194,161,209 |
| ● Other organizations |  | \$8,957,886   |
| ● Foundations         |  | \$7,570,792   |
| ● Corporations        |  | \$2,510,727   |
| ● Estates and trusts  |  | \$6,375,295   |
| Total                 |  | \$219,575,911 |

14,000+ donors

helped us make life better for children

20 patient ambassadors shared their stories through fundraising campaigns and events

More than \$600,000 raised on North Texas Giving Day

\$219.5 million raised

for campus enhancements, research, mental health initiatives and many other programs

120+ gamers from across the Metroplex raised more than \$70,000 on National Game Day

More than 1,300 team member donors

250 peer-to-peer fundraiser pages were created, raising more than \$301,000

More than 240 corporate partners

4,300+ virtual Valentine’s Day cards

were sent to patients and team members for encouragement

7,500 capes

were given to patient superheroes and team members

# Beyond ABC Advisory Board 2025-2026

Children's Health would like to thank the committed and knowledgeable members of the Advisory Board. The board convened a series of meetings early in 2025 to discuss and analyze the issues and current conditions affecting the health and well-being of children in North Texas. The recommendations included in the Beyond ABC report are the result of the trusted insights, expertise and ideas presented by the members of the Advisory Board.



Lachlan, age 8, Dallas County

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# Beyond ABC Advisory Board 2025-2026 recommendations

## Health

### Improve access to mental and behavioral health care for children

The National Institutes of Health reports nearly 20% of children ages 3 to 17 in the United States have a mental, emotional, developmental or behavioral disorder. Texas youth face increasing rates of anxiety, depression, suicide and substance use. And mental and behavioral health stressors for children continue to mount due to social media pressures, academic strains and threats of school violence, among other reasons. The COVID-19 pandemic intensified these challenges, exposing systemic gaps in school-based services, provider availability and access to early intervention. While the state has made substantial investments to improve mental and behavioral health care for kids, more must be done to further integrate mental health support into schools and primary care settings and to expand access to services across the continuum of care.

### Protect Medicaid for children and ensure more children have access to health insurance coverage

Nearly 4 million children in Texas are enrolled in Medicaid, representing about 75% of the state's total Medicaid population. Additionally, the Children’s Health Insurance Program (CHIP) provides coverage to a significant number of low-income children. However, Texas leads the nation in the number and percentage of uninsured children, with nearly 12% lacking health coverage – double the national average. Many of these children are eligible for Medicaid or CHIP but remain unenrolled because of barriers to applying for and accessing these programs. As lawmakers at the federal and state levels contemplate significant changes and funding cuts to Medicaid and CHIP, the Advisory Board is concerned about impacts to services for all children. The board supports the protection and preservation of Medicaid and CHIP for Texas children.

## Economic Security

### Address housing instability and improve access to housing options

North Texas continues to experience a severe housing affordability crisis, exacerbated by rapid population growth, restrictive zoning laws and escalating construction costs. The region faces a significant housing deficit. This disparity between supply and demand has led to rising rents, increased homelessness and the displacement of low-income residents. To address these challenges, a comprehensive, multifaceted policy approach is necessary to increase housing supply, reduce costs and ensure equitable access to housing for all residents. The Advisory Board supports programs that help stabilize families now and produce long-term affordable housing solutions.

### Improve access to healthy foods

Access to healthy foods and proper nutrition is critical for a child's well-being. The Advisory Board highlighted multiple challenges North Texas families face regarding food insecurity, including decreasing food drive donations, scarce food availability during the summer and on weekends, and extreme wait times for Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) sign-ups. Expanded resources and additional nutrition education and outreach are needed to ensure equitable access to affordable, nutritious food for all North Texas children, especially those in food-insecure communities.

## Safety

### Enact safeguards to protect children from online harm

As children spend increasing amounts of time online for education, entertainment and social interaction, their exposure to cyberbullying, online predators, inappropriate content and data exploitation has grown significantly. A multitiered approach is necessary to enhance children's online safety through regulatory and public policy frameworks, education and technological innovation. This includes enacting safeguards to protect children from online harm, promoting digital literacy and responsible online behavior, ensuring accountability for digital platforms regarding children’s data and safety, and empowering parents, educators and caregivers with tools and training.

### Improve Texas’ foster care system and enhance support for foster care youth

Despite recent improvements, the foster care system in Texas continues to fail its most vulnerable residents. First, the community-based model that shifts case work and services from the state to local nonprofit and private organizations needs better coordination. Financial constraints, accountability issues, technological shortcomings and workforce instability have hindered the model's effectiveness. Second, recent legislative changes have altered the state's approach to child abuse definitions and investigations. These include the end of anonymous reporting of abuse or neglect, a revised definition of neglect, a new severity classification of cases and increased protection of parental rights. Although the Advisory Board supports the objective to maintain family integrity and reduce the number of children placed in foster care, the board is concerned these changes affect the safety of children and may prevent children from getting timely support.

## Education

### Support adequate funding for Texas public schools

Texas ranks among the lowest states in per-pupil spending and continues to face significant disparities in education quality based on geography and socioeconomic status. Recent changes have also left districts with less say in how funds are utilized. In response, some districts are facing difficult decisions regarding cutting programs and closing schools, while teacher and staff attrition skyrockets. The Texas Legislature made recent investments to address gaps in school funding and to increase teacher pay, including passing an \$8.5 billion public education funding plan during the state legislative session. This is a positive step forward. The Advisory Board urges Texas lawmakers to ensure adequate and sustainable school funding across all districts and to support targeted interventions to close student achievement gaps.

### Improve student literacy

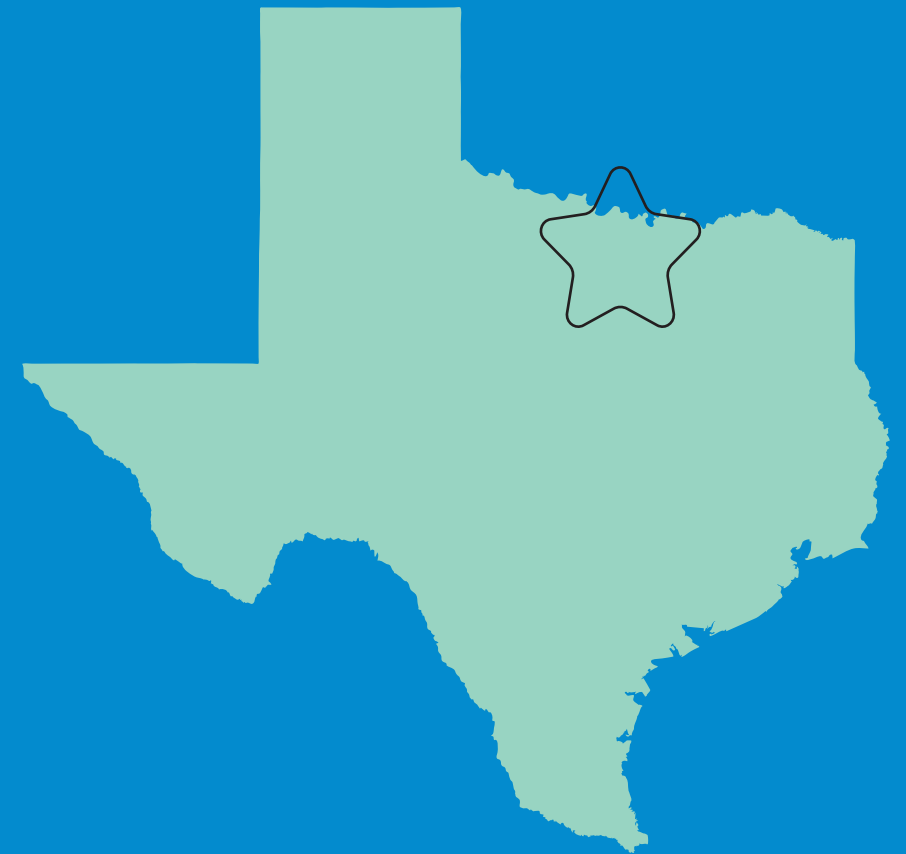
Texas faces a literacy crisis, with recent data indicating students are performing below average in reading comprehension. This situation is exacerbated by challenges such as teacher turnover, inconsistent implementation of literacy programs and disparities in educational resources across districts. To address these issues, a comprehensive, evidence-based approach is necessary to ensure all students have the foundational literacy skills required for academic success and lifelong learning. The Advisory Board supports strengthening reading programs in schools and giving parents additional support and tools to work on reading at home.



Violet, age 9, Denton County



# demographic summary



Madison and Scarlet, ages 8 and 6, Ellis County

Collin County

Collin County, located immediately north of Dallas County, remains one of the fastest-growing counties in the United States, adding more residents from 2022 to 2023 than any other county in the nation.<sup>1</sup> Princeton, located in central Collin County, was the fastest-growing city in the nation.<sup>2</sup> The county’s population reached 1.12 million in 2023, a 14.6% increase since 2019.<sup>3</sup> The youth population also grew significantly, rising by nearly 24,000 to 280,048, a 9.3% increase. This rapid growth is fueled by a combination of factors, including job opportunities, high-performing schools and a strong housing market. Migration into Collin County has been from domestic and international sources.<sup>4</sup>

The county’s youth population is increasingly diverse. Non-Hispanic white children now make up 43% of the population, down from nearly 50% in 2019. The Asian child population rose to 18.5%, up from 15.6%, while children identifying as other or multiple races more than doubled, from 8.5% to 19.6%. Hispanic and/or Latino children make up 19.9%, which was a slight increase. These shifts reflect broader statewide trends in racial self-identification and multicultural growth, as well as changes in the procedures for collecting U.S. Census data.<sup>5</sup>

Collin County continues to report the region’s lowest child poverty rate at 7.1%, which has remained virtually unchanged since 2019. However, disparities exist: 15.1% of Black/African American children and 12.1% of Hispanic/Latino children live in poverty, compared to only 3.7% of non-Hispanic white children. The poverty rate for Black children rose by more than 5 percentage points from 2019 to 2023.

Median family income in Collin County reached \$140,955 in 2023, a 4.4% increase from 2019 (adjusted for inflation). Married-couple families with children earned \$166,779, while single-father and single-mother households earned \$89,152 and \$63,742, respectively. These figures are among the highest in the region, reflecting the county’s robust economic base and high levels of education.

| Collin                                                             | 2023    |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------|---------|
| Total youth population                                             | 280,048 |
| Percentage American Indian                                         | 0.4     |
| Percentage Asian                                                   | 18.5    |
| Percentage Black/African American                                  | 11.1    |
| Percentage Hispanic and/or Latino                                  | 19.9    |
| Percentage other or multiple races                                 | 19.6    |
| Percentage Pacific Islander                                        | 0.1     |
| Percentage white/Caucasian non-Hispanic                            | 43.0    |
| Percentage all children living in poverty                          | 7.1     |
| Percentage Black/African American children living in poverty       | 15.1    |
| Percentage Hispanic and/or Latino children living in poverty       | 12.1    |
| Percentage white/Caucasian non-Hispanic children living in poverty | 3.7     |

To improve comparability of estimates between counties, all discussion of population, poverty and family structure is based on IUPR analysis of U.S. Census Bureau American Community Survey five-year estimates for 2019 and 2023.



Cooke County

Cooke County, located in the northwest corner of the North Texas region, had a total population of 42,473 in 2023, a 6.1% increase of just over 2,400 residents since 2019.<sup>1</sup> The youth population grew more modestly, rising by about 400 children to 9,947, a 4.2% increase. While growth has been steady, Cooke remains one of the region’s smaller and more rural counties.

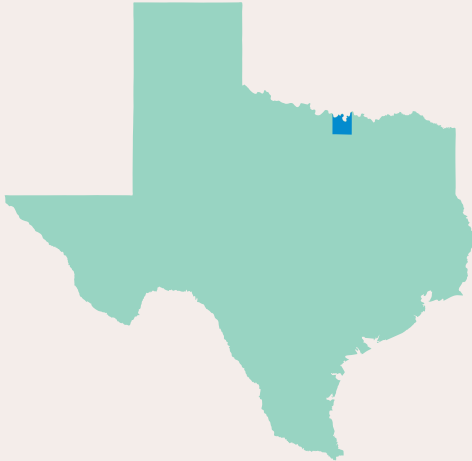
The county’s youth population is predominantly non-Hispanic white, at 58.3%, although this share has declined from 61.3% in 2019. Hispanic and/or Latino children now make up 32.9% of the population, up from 30.1%, while the share of children identifying as other or multiple races tripled, rising from 8.6% to 25.8%. These shifts reflect broader statewide trends in racial self-identification and the growing presence of multiracial families.<sup>2</sup>

Cooke County has the highest child poverty rate in the region at 26%, up from 24.6% in 2019. Racial disparities are especially stark: Nearly 94% of Black/African American children and 45.5% of Hispanic/Latino children live in poverty, compared to 12.9% of non-Hispanic white children. The poverty rate for Black children rose dramatically – by more than 28 percentage points – while the rate for Hispanic/Latino children increased by nearly 9 points. These figures underscore the persistent economic challenges facing rural communities, where access to services and employment opportunities can be limited.<sup>3</sup>

Median family income in Cooke County rose to \$91,182 in 2023, a 4.9% increase from 2019 (adjusted for inflation). Married-couple families with children earned \$101,500. While there were too few respondents to report income data for single-father households, single-mother households earned \$37,665, a 28% increase from 2019, though still far below regional averages. Note that the small Cooke County population can lead to less stable census estimates.

| Cooke                                                              | 2023  |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------|-------|
| Total youth population                                             | 9,947 |
| Percentage American Indian                                         | 0.6   |
| Percentage Asian                                                   | 0     |
| Percentage Black/African American                                  | 3.9   |
| Percentage Hispanic and/or Latino                                  | 32.9  |
| Percentage other or multiple races                                 | 25.8  |
| Percentage Pacific Islander                                        | 0     |
| Percentage white/Caucasian non-Hispanic                            | 58.3  |
| Percentage all children living in poverty                          | 26.0  |
| Percentage Black/African American children living in poverty       | 93.7  |
| Percentage Hispanic and/or Latino children living in poverty       | 45.5  |
| Percentage white/Caucasian non-Hispanic children living in poverty | 12.9  |

To improve comparability of estimates between counties, all discussion of population, poverty and family structure is based on IUPR analysis of U.S. Census Bureau American Community Survey five-year estimates for 2019 and 2023.



Dallas County

With a population of just over 2.6 million, Dallas County remains the most populous county in North Texas.<sup>1</sup> However, it was one of the few counties in the region to experience a population decline between 2019 and 2023, losing more than 3,000 residents. The youth population decreased by more than 25,000, a 3.7% decline, making Dallas the only county in the region to experience a decline in its child population. This trend reflects a broader pattern of urban-to-suburban migration, as families seek more affordable housing and space in surrounding counties.<sup>2</sup>

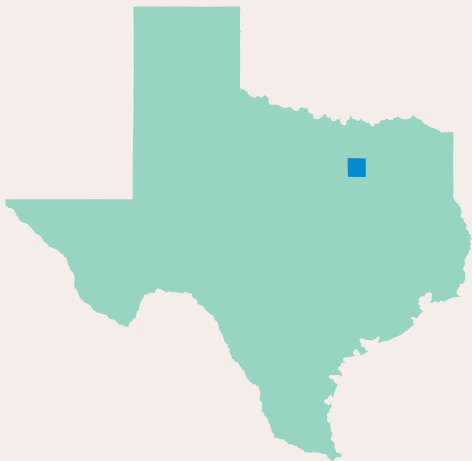
Dallas County's youth population remains highly diverse. Hispanic and/or Latino children make up 52.6% of the population, which has remained stable since 2019. Non-Hispanic white children now represent 16%, down slightly from 16.8%. The share of children of other or multiple races increased from 12.7% to 36.2%, reflecting changes in data collection and shifting patterns in racial self-identification, a trend observed across Texas.<sup>3</sup>

The child poverty rate declined from 23.3% in 2019 to 20.6% in 2023, although it remains higher than regional (15%) and state (18.9%) rates. Racial disparities persist: 28.6% of Black/African American children and 23.5% of Hispanic/Latino children live in poverty, compared to 6.6% of non-Hispanic white children.

Median family income rose to \$85,452 in 2023, a 7% increase from 2019 (adjusted for inflation). While married-couple families with children earned \$101,802, single-parent households earned significantly less. These figures underscore the ongoing economic challenges that continue to affect many families, particularly in urban core areas.

| Dallas                                                             | 2023    |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------|---------|
| Total youth population                                             | 661,827 |
| Percentage American Indian                                         | 0.7     |
| Percentage Asian                                                   | 6.0     |
| Percentage Black/African American                                  | 21.9    |
| Percentage Hispanic and/or Latino                                  | 52.6    |
| Percentage other or multiple races                                 | 36.2    |
| Percentage Pacific Islander                                        | 0.1     |
| Percentage white/Caucasian non-Hispanic                            | 16.0    |
| Percentage all children living in poverty                          | 20.6    |
| Percentage Black/African American children living in poverty       | 28.6    |
| Percentage Hispanic and/or Latino children living in poverty       | 23.5    |
| Percentage white/Caucasian non-Hispanic children living in poverty | 6.6     |

To improve comparability of estimates between counties, all discussion of population, poverty and family structure is based on IUPR analysis of U.S. Census Bureau American Community Survey five-year estimates for 2019 and 2023.



Denton County

Denton County, situated north of Tarrant and west of Collin counties, is one of the fastest-growing counties in Texas and the United States, driven by domestic and international migration.<sup>1</sup> Its total population reached 945,644 in 2023, a 13.4% increase since 2019.<sup>2</sup> The youth population also grew, rising by nearly 16,000 to 224,897, a 7.7% increase. This growth reflects Denton County's strong appeal to families and professionals seeking suburban living with access to the Dallas-Fort Worth metro area.

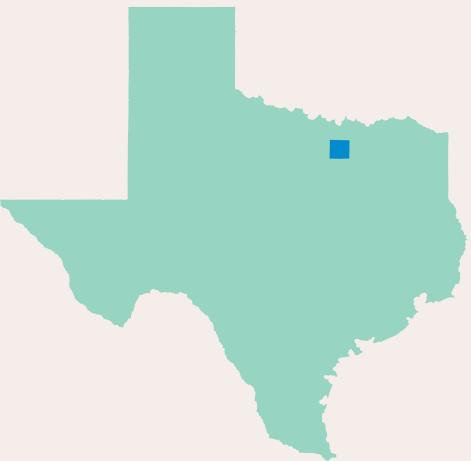
The county's youth population is increasingly diverse. Non-Hispanic white children now make up 44.9% of the population, down from 51.2% in 2019. Hispanic and/or Latino children account for 26%, a slight increase, while the share of children identifying as other or multiple races more than doubled, from 10.6% to 23.3%. The Asian child population also grew, rising from 8.5% to 10.6%. These shifts reflect broader statewide trends in racial self-identification and multicultural growth.<sup>3</sup>

Denton County's child poverty rate declined slightly to 7.7% in 2023, remaining well below regional (15%) and state (18.9%) rates. However, disparities persist. While 4.9% of non-Hispanic white children live in poverty, the rate for Black/African American children rose to 16%, up from 14.2% in 2019. In contrast, the poverty rate for Hispanic/Latino children dropped from 15.6% to 11.2%.

Median family income in Denton County rose to \$132,005 in 2023, a 3.7% increase from 2019 (adjusted for inflation). Married-couple families with children earned \$157,530, while single-father and single-mother households earned \$79,913 and \$56,619, respectively. While most family types saw income gains, single-mother households experienced a slight decline, diverging from regional trends.

| Denton                                                             | 2023    |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------|---------|
| Total youth population                                             | 224,897 |
| Percentage American Indian                                         | 0.9     |
| Percentage Asian                                                   | 10.6    |
| Percentage Black/African American                                  | 10.9    |
| Percentage Hispanic and/or Latino                                  | 26.0    |
| Percentage other or multiple races                                 | 23.3    |
| Percentage Pacific Islander                                        | 0.1     |
| Percentage white/Caucasian non-Hispanic                            | 44.9    |
| Percentage all children living in poverty                          | 7.7     |
| Percentage Black/African American children living in poverty       | 16.0    |
| Percentage Hispanic and/or Latino children living in poverty       | 11.2    |
| Percentage white/Caucasian non-Hispanic children living in poverty | 4.9     |

To improve comparability of estimates between counties, all discussion of population, poverty and family structure is based on IUPR analysis of U.S. Census Bureau American Community Survey five-year estimates for 2019 and 2023.



Ellis County

Ellis County, located just south of Dallas County, has experienced some of the fastest growth in North Texas. Its total population reached 203,927 in 2023, a 17.4% increase since 2019.<sup>1</sup> The youth population also expanded significantly, rising by nearly 7,400 to 53,955, a 15.9% increase. This rapid growth reflects the county’s emergence as a popular destination for families seeking more affordable housing and suburban amenities within commuting distance of Dallas.<sup>2</sup>

The county’s youth population is increasingly diverse. Non-Hispanic white children now make up 45.9% of the population, down from 51.2% in 2019. Hispanic and/or Latino children account for 35.2%, a slight increase, while the share of children identifying as other or multiple races more than doubled, rising from 9.8% to 25.9%. The Black/African American child population also grew, increasing from 10.3% to 13.3%. These shifts mirror broader trends in diversity.<sup>3</sup>

Ellis County’s child poverty rate declined from 13% in 2019 to 11.3% in 2023, placing it below the regional (15%) and state (18.9%) rates. However, racial disparities persist: 7.5% of non-Hispanic white children live in poverty, compared to 16.6% of Hispanic/Latino children. Notably, the poverty rate for Black children dropped sharply from 27.5% to 13.5%, cutting the rate by more than half over five years.

Median family income in Ellis County rose to \$106,294 in 2023, a 3.7% increase from 2019 (adjusted for inflation). Married-couple families with children earned \$127,295, while single-father households earned \$64,370. In contrast, single-mother households saw a significant decline in income, falling from \$38,850 to \$32,984, a 15% drop that diverges from regional trends and may reflect economic vulnerabilities among single-parent families in fast-growing suburban areas.<sup>4</sup>

Ellis County’s rapid growth, increasing diversity and improving poverty rates reflect a dynamic, growing suburban environment, though income disparities among single-parent households remain a concern.

| Ellis                                                              | 2023   |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------|--------|
| Total youth population                                             | 53,955 |
| Percentage American Indian                                         | 0.6    |
| Percentage Asian                                                   | 0.7    |
| Percentage Black/African American                                  | 13.3   |
| Percentage Hispanic and/or Latino                                  | 35.2   |
| Percentage other or multiple races                                 | 25.9   |
| Percentage Pacific Islander                                        | 0.3    |
| Percentage white/Caucasian non-Hispanic                            | 45.9   |
| Percentage all children living in poverty                          | 11.3   |
| Percentage Black/African American children living in poverty       | 13.5   |
| Percentage Hispanic and/or Latino children living in poverty       | 16.6   |
| Percentage white/Caucasian non-Hispanic children living in poverty | 7.5    |

To improve comparability of estimates between counties, all discussion of population, poverty and family structure is based on IUPR analysis of U.S. Census Bureau American Community Survey five-year estimates for 2019 and 2023.



Fannin County

Fannin County, located in the northeastern corner of North Texas along the Oklahoma border, had a population of 36,525 in 2023, a 5.8% increase of nearly 2,000 residents since 2019.<sup>1</sup> The youth population grew by about 480 children to 7,796, a 6.5% increase that slightly outpaced its overall growth rate. While modest in scale, this growth reflects the broader trend of population expansion into rural and exurban areas as housing costs rise in urban centers.<sup>2</sup>

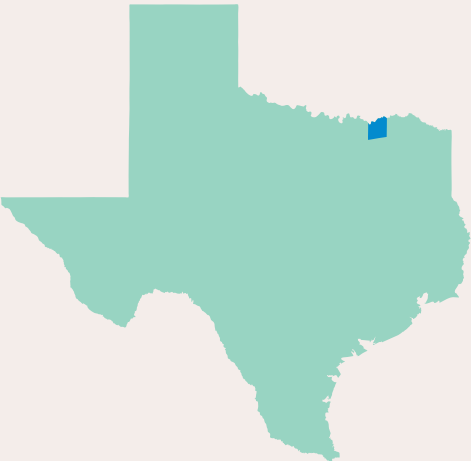
The county’s youth population remains predominantly non-Hispanic white at 69.7%, though this share has declined from 72.9% in 2019. Hispanic and/or Latino children now make up 19.1% of the population, up from 17.5%, while the rate of children identifying as other or multiple races more than doubled, rising from 6.5% to 14.9%. These demographic shifts mirror statewide trends in racial self-identification and the growing presence of multiracial families.<sup>3</sup>

Fannin County’s child poverty rate rose to 16.8% in 2023, up from 13.7% in 2019. Racial disparities are significant: More than half (55.7%) of Black/African American children live in poverty, a sharp increase from 29.4% in 2019. Hispanic/Latino children experienced a slight increase in poverty to 22.6%, while the rate for non-Hispanic white children rose to 12.3%. These figures reflect the persistent economic challenges facing rural communities, where access to services and employment opportunities can be limited.<sup>4</sup>

Median family income in Fannin County reached \$83,681 in 2023, a 2.6% increase from 2019 (adjusted for inflation). Married-couple families with children earned \$97,184. Single-father households experienced a significant increase in income, rising from \$50,305 to \$94,583, an 88% increase. In contrast, single-mother households experienced a significant decline, with median income falling from \$35,594 to \$27,917. Note that in counties with smaller populations, census estimates can be less stable.

| Fannin                                                             | 2023  |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------|-------|
| Total youth population                                             | 7,796 |
| Percentage American Indian                                         | 0.1   |
| Percentage Asian                                                   | 0.6   |
| Percentage Black/African American                                  | 4.1   |
| Percentage Hispanic and/or Latino                                  | 19.1  |
| Percentage other or multiple races                                 | 14.9  |
| Percentage Pacific Islander                                        | 0     |
| Percentage white/Caucasian non-Hispanic                            | 69.7  |
| Percentage all children living in poverty                          | 16.8  |
| Percentage Black/African American children living in poverty       | 55.7  |
| Percentage Hispanic and/or Latino children living in poverty       | 22.6  |
| Percentage white/Caucasian non-Hispanic children living in poverty | 12.3  |

To improve comparability of estimates between counties, all discussion of population, poverty and family structure is based on IUPR analysis of U.S. Census Bureau American Community Survey five-year estimates for 2019 and 2023.



## Grayson County

Grayson County, located along the Red River north of Collin County, had a population of 139,988 in 2023, a 6.8% increase of nearly 9,000 residents since 2019.<sup>1</sup> The youth population grew at a slightly faster pace, increasing by 2,660 to reach 33,760, an 8.6% rise. This steady growth reflects the county's role as a more affordable alternative to the rapidly expanding suburban counties to its south.

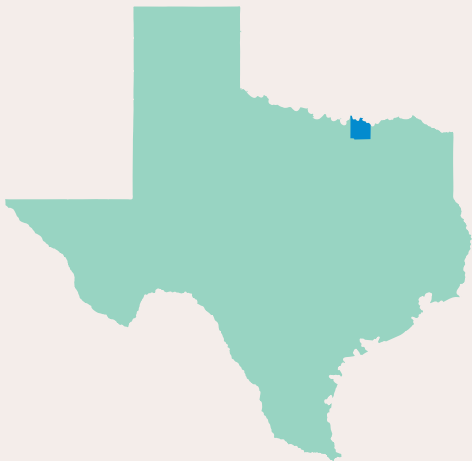
The county's youth population remains predominantly non-Hispanic white at 59.7%, although this share has declined from 63.6% in 2019. Hispanic and/or Latino children now make up 24.9% of the population, up from 22.1%. In comparison, the share of children identifying as belonging to other or multiple races doubled to 20.4%, aligning with broader trends in racial and ethnic identities.<sup>2</sup>

Grayson County's child poverty rate declined from 18.7% in 2019 to 15.5% in 2023. Racial disparities are evident: 38.4% of Black/African American children and 18.9% of Hispanic/Latino children live in poverty, compared to 10.6% of non-Hispanic white children. While poverty rates for white and Hispanic/Latino children declined, the rate for Black children remained virtually unchanged.

Median family income in Grayson County rose to \$85,605 in 2023, a 4% increase from 2019 (adjusted for inflation). Married-couple families with children earned \$103,333. Single-mother households saw a notable 28% increase in income, rising to \$38,284, while single-father households experienced a slight decline to \$49,521.

| Grayson                                                            | 2023   |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------|--------|
| Total youth population                                             | 33,760 |
| Percentage American Indian                                         | 0.4    |
| Percentage Asian                                                   | 1.4    |
| Percentage Black/African American                                  | 5.9    |
| Percentage Hispanic and/or Latino                                  | 24.9   |
| Percentage other or multiple races                                 | 20.4   |
| Percentage Pacific Islander                                        | 0      |
| Percentage white/Caucasian non-Hispanic                            | 59.7   |
| Percentage all children living in poverty                          | 15.5   |
| Percentage Black/African American children living in poverty       | 38.4   |
| Percentage Hispanic and/or Latino children living in poverty       | 18.9   |
| Percentage white/Caucasian non-Hispanic children living in poverty | 10.6   |

To improve comparability of estimates between counties, all discussion of population, poverty and family structure is based on IUPR analysis of U.S. Census Bureau American Community Survey five-year estimates for 2019 and 2023.



## Tarrant County

Tarrant County, anchored by Fort Worth, is the second-most populous county in North Texas, with a population of 2.14 million as of 2023.<sup>1</sup> Since 2019, the county has added nearly 86,000 residents, a growth rate of 4.2%. The youth population also grew, though more modestly, increasing by about 4,800 children to 548,477. This slower growth in the child population compared to the overall population may reflect broader demographic shifts, including declining birth rates and an aging population.<sup>2</sup>

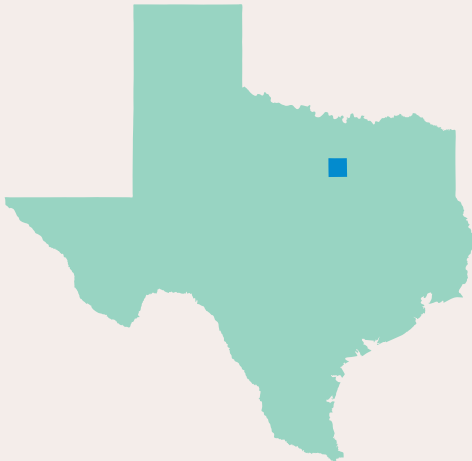
Tarrant County's demographic profile continues to diversify. Hispanic and/or Latino children make up 38.4% of the youth population, a share that has remained stable since 2019. The percentage of non-Hispanic white children declined from 35.2% to 32.1%, while the share of children identifying as other or multiple races more than doubled, from 14.8% to 31.2%. These shifts reflect statewide trends in racial self-identification and the growing number of multiracial households, as well as changes in data collection processes.<sup>3</sup>

The county's child poverty rate declined from 17.1% in 2019 to 15.3% in 2023, aligning more closely with the regional rate of 15%. However, disparities remain: 21.9% of Black/African American children and 19.1% of Hispanic/Latino children live in poverty, compared to 7.7% of non-Hispanic white children. The sharpest improvement was among Hispanic/Latino children, whose poverty rate dropped by 5 percentage points.

Median family income in Tarrant County rose to \$99,287 in 2023, a 4.5% increase from 2019 (adjusted for inflation). Married-couple families with children earned \$118,828, while single-father and single-mother households earned \$61,871 and \$42,337, respectively. These gains reflect the county's continued economic growth, supported by strong migration and job creation in the Fort Worth area.<sup>4</sup>

| Tarrant                                                            | 2023    |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------|---------|
| Total youth population                                             | 548,477 |
| Percentage American Indian                                         | 0.5     |
| Percentage Asian                                                   | 5.1     |
| Percentage Black/African American                                  | 19.0    |
| Percentage Hispanic and/or Latino                                  | 38.4    |
| Percentage other or multiple races                                 | 31.2    |
| Percentage Pacific Islander                                        | 0.3     |
| Percentage white/Caucasian non-Hispanic                            | 32.1    |
| Percentage all children living in poverty                          | 15.3    |
| Percentage Black/African American children living in poverty       | 21.9    |
| Percentage Hispanic and/or Latino children living in poverty       | 19.1    |
| Percentage white/Caucasian non-Hispanic children living in poverty | 7.7     |

To improve comparability of estimates between counties, all discussion of population, poverty and family structure is based on IUPR analysis of U.S. Census Bureau American Community Survey five-year estimates for 2019 and 2023.



Endnotes

**Collin County**

1 Tasha Tsiaperas, "Dallas-Fort Worth Population Still Booming," Axios, March 15, 2024, <https://www.axios.com/local/dallas/2024/03/15/dfw-population-growth-2024>.

2 "Princeton Tops U.S. Growth as North Texas Cities Dominate Fastest-Growing List," Dallas Business Journal, May 15, 2025, <https://www.bizjournals.com/dallas/news/2025/05/15/princeton-fastest-growing-city-dfw-census.html>.

3 U.S. Census Bureau, "Sex by Age (Table B01001)"; U.S. Census Bureau, "Poverty Status by Sex and Age (Table B17001)."

4 "Dallas-Fort Worth Leads All Metro Areas in Population Growth, Adding over 150,000 New Residents," NBC 5 Dallas-Fort Worth, March 14, 2024, <https://www.nbcdfw.com/news/local/dallas-fort-worth-leads-all-metro-areas-in-population-growth/3489168/>.

5 Alexa Ura, "Hispanics Officially Make up the Biggest Share of Texas' Population, New Census Numbers Show," The Texas Tribune, June 22, 2023, <https://www.texastribune.org/2023/06/21/census-texas-hispanic-population-demographics/>; Kaitlan Wong, "The Rise of Multiracial Texans: What Data Tell Us - Every Texan," Every Texan blog, April 1, 2025, <https://everytexan.org/2025/04/01/the-rise-of-multiracial-texans-what-data-tell-us/>.

**Cooke County**

1 U.S. Census Bureau, "Sex by Age (Table B01001)"; U.S. Census Bureau, "Poverty Status by Sex and Age (Table B17001)."

2 Alexa Ura, "Hispanics Officially Make up the Biggest Share of Texas' Population, New Census Numbers Show," The Texas Tribune, June 22, 2023, <https://www.texastribune.org/2023/06/21/census-texas-hispanic-population-demographics/>.

3 "Dallas-Fort Worth Leads All Metro Areas in Population Growth, Adding over 150,000 New Residents," NBC 5 Dallas-Fort Worth, March 14, 2024, <https://www.nbcdfw.com/news/local/dallas-fort-worth-leads-all-metro-areas-in-population-growth/3489168/>.

**Dallas County**

1 U.S. Census Bureau, "Sex by Age (Table B01001)" (U.S. Census Bureau, 2025); U.S. Census Bureau, "Poverty Status by Sex and Age (Table B17001)" (U.S. Census Bureau, 2025).

2 Tasha Tsiaperas, "Dallas-Fort Worth Population Still Booming," Axios, March 15, 2024, <https://www.axios.com/local/dallas/2024/03/15/dfw-population-growth-2024>.

3 Kaitlan Wong, "The Rise of Multiracial Texans: What Data Tell Us - Every Texan," Every Texan blog, April 1, 2025, <https://everytexan.org/2025/04/01/the-rise-of-multiracial-texans-what-data-tell-us/>.

**Denton County**

1 "Dallas-Fort Worth Leads All Metro Areas in Population Growth, Adding over 150,000 New Residents."

2 U.S. Census Bureau, "Sex by Age (Table B01001)"; U.S. Census Bureau, "Poverty Status by Sex and Age (Table B17001)."

3 Alexa Ura, "Hispanics Officially Make up the Biggest Share of Texas' Population, New Census Numbers Show," The Texas Tribune, June 22, 2023, <https://www.texastribune.org/2023/06/21/census-texas-hispanic-population-demographics/>; Kaitlan Wong, "The Rise of Multiracial Texans: What Data Tell Us - Every Texan," Every Texan, April 1, 2025, <https://everytexan.org/2025/04/01/the-rise-of-multiracial-texans-what-data-tell-us/>.

**Ellis County**

1 U.S. Census Bureau, "Sex by Age (Table B01001)"; U.S. Census Bureau, "Poverty Status by Sex and Age (Table B17001)."

2 "Dallas-Fort Worth Leads All Metro Areas in Population Growth, Adding over 150,000 New Residents," NBC 5 Dallas-Fort Worth, March 14, 2024, <https://www.nbcdfw.com/news/local/dallas-fort-worth-leads-all-metro-areas-in-population-growth/3489168/>.

3 Kaitlan Wong, "The Rise of Multiracial Texans: What Data Tell Us - Every Texan," Every Texan, April 1, 2025, <https://everytexan.org/2025/04/01/the-rise-of-multiracial-texans-what-data-tell-us/>; Alexa Ura, "Hispanics Officially Make up the Biggest Share of Texas' Population, New Census Numbers Show," The Texas Tribune, June 22, 2023, <https://www.texastribune.org/2023/06/21/census-texas-hispanic-population-demographics/>.

4 See endnote 2.

**Fannin County**

1 U.S. Census Bureau, "Sex by Age (Table B01001)"; U.S. Census Bureau, "Poverty Status by Sex and Age (Table B17001)."

2 "Dallas-Fort Worth Leads All Metro Areas in Population Growth, Adding over 150,000 New Residents," NBC 5 Dallas-Fort Worth, March 14, 2024, <https://www.nbcdfw.com/news/local/dallas-fort-worth-leads-all-metro-areas-in-population-growth/3489168/>.

3 Alexa Ura, "Hispanics Officially Make up the Biggest Share of Texas' Population, New Census Numbers Show," The Texas Tribune, June 22, 2023, <https://www.texastribune.org/2023/06/21/census-texas-hispanic-population-demographics/>.

4 Eliza Relman, "Poverty Is Rising Faster in American Suburbs as Lower-Income People Are Pushed out of Big Cities," Business Insider, October 19, 2023, <https://www.businessinsider.com/suburban-areas-poverty-rising-faster-than-cities-post-pandemic-2023-10>; "Dallas-Fort Worth Leads All Metro Areas in Population Growth, Adding over 150,000 New Residents."

**Grayson County**

1 U.S. Census Bureau, "Sex by Age (Table B01001)"; U.S. Census Bureau, "Poverty Status by Sex and Age (Table B17001)."

2 Alexa Ura, "Hispanics Officially Make up the Biggest Share of Texas' Population, New Census Numbers Show," The Texas Tribune, June 22, 2023, <https://www.texastribune.org/2023/06/21/census-texas-hispanic-population-demographics/>.

**Tarrant County**

1 U.S. Census Bureau, "Sex by Age (Table B01001)"; U.S. Census Bureau, "Poverty Status by Sex and Age (Table B17001)."

2 Raheed Rajwani and Tasha Tsiaperas, "Dallas-Fort Worth's Growing Population Is Aging," Axios Dallas, July 11, 2024, [https://www.axios.com/local/dallas/2024/07/11/dallas-fort-worth-s-growing-population-is-aging?utm\\_source=chatgpt.com](https://www.axios.com/local/dallas/2024/07/11/dallas-fort-worth-s-growing-population-is-aging?utm_source=chatgpt.com).

3 Kaitlan Wong, "The Rise of Multiracial Texans: What Data Tell Us - Every Texan," Every Texan blog, April 1, 2025, <https://everytexan.org/2025/04/01/the-rise-of-multiracial-texans-what-data-tell-us/>.

4 Fort Worth Star-Telegram Editorial Board, "1 Million and Growing: How to Be Ready for the next Million in Fort Worth," Fort Worth Star-Telegram, May 15, 2025, Access World News, <https://infoweb.newsbank.com/apps/news/document-view?p=AWNB&docref=news/1A099BE18528A5F0>; Eric E. Garcia, "Monumental Milestone: Fort Worth Population Officially Exceeds 1 Million," Fort Worth Report, May 15, 2025, <http://fortworthreport.org/2025/05/15/monumental-milestone-fort-worth-population-officially-exceeds-1-million/>.

health



Regina, age 8, Dallas County

North Texas counties experienced persistent disparities and emerging challenges across key indicators of child health and well-being over the past few years.

While some metrics showed modest improvement, the overall situation reflects gaps in access, affordability and care coordination. Preventable emergency department visits remained high, with more than 50% of pediatric visits in Dallas and Tarrant counties classified as avoidable in 2023. These patterns point to persistent barriers in primary care access, particularly for Medicaid-eligible and uninsured individuals.

Childhood obesity rates exceeded national benchmarks in most counties, with Dallas and Ellis peaking above 45%. Pediatric diabetes prevalence and hospitalizations also rose, especially in urban areas. Asthma remains one of the most common chronic conditions among children, with more than 176,000 affected regionally and hospitalization rates highest in Dallas and Tarrant counties. Air quality, particularly ozone exposure, worsened in 2022 and 2023, compounding respiratory risks. Of the five North Texas counties with monitoring sites, only Ellis County met federal ozone safety standards in 2024.

Early childhood health indicators revealed mixed progress. Immunization rates declined across all counties, with most falling below the 95% threshold for community protection. Early prenatal care declined in Dallas, Tarrant and Ellis counties, while low birth weight and preterm birth rates rose in urban and rural areas. Infant mortality remained highest in Dallas County, though the statewide expansion of Medicaid postpartum coverage in 2024 may improve outcomes over time.

Mental and behavioral health needs continued to rise. Waitlists for autism evaluations exceeded one year in some counties, and access to pediatric specialists remained limited. The Beyond ABC Advisory Board's health working group emphasized the need for integrated care models, expanded school-based services and culturally responsive outreach. They also cited health literacy, vaccine misinformation and trust in health care systems as barriers to effective care.

Despite these challenges, Advisory Board members highlighted local initiatives such as Help Me Grow North Texas (which links families with community resources), Texas Child Health Access Through Telemedicine (TCHAT) and community-based asthma programs as promising models for improvements. The health working group underscored the importance of stable funding, workforce investment and cross-sector collaboration to address rising needs. Without coordinated action, North Texas risks widening health disparities and bypassing critical opportunities to support children's long-term well-being.



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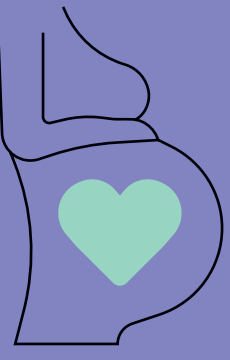
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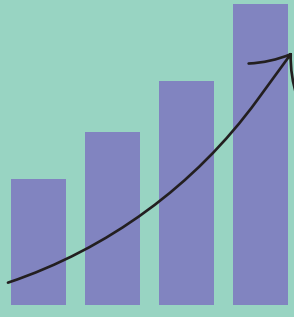
104,215 fewer



Dallas County children were enrolled in Medicaid in 2024 than in 2023

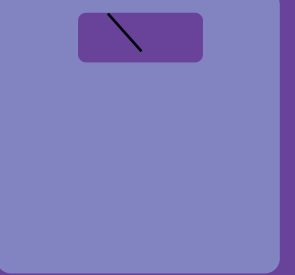
Collin County consistently reports highest rates of early prenatal care for expecting mothers





Diagnoses of emotional disturbances and addictive disorders are climbing in most North Texas counties

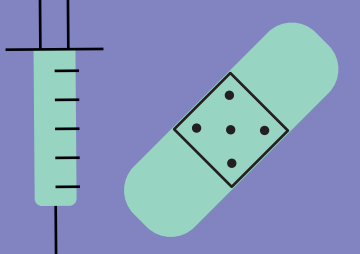
The rate of young people becoming overweight or obese is rising



More than half of pediatric ER visits in Dallas and Tarrant counties were considered avoidable

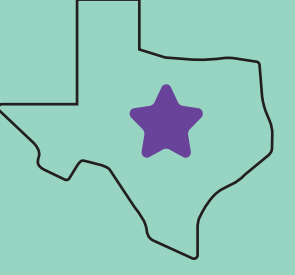


Kindergartners' immunization rates are dropping regionally



Number of children with diabetes (Type 1 or Type 2) increased in every North Texas county from 2020 to 2024

Texas remains the state with the highest rate of uninsured children: 11.9%



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# Children Without Health Insurance

## Percentage of children without health insurance

Uninsured children in North Texas continue to encounter significant barriers to receiving timely and adequate health care. Children without insurance face elevated risks of unmet health needs, delayed diagnoses and worse long-term outcomes.<sup>1</sup> Access to consistent care is essential for managing chronic conditions, ensuring immunizations and supporting healthy development.<sup>2</sup>

Dallas County recorded the highest uninsured rate among North Texas counties, increasing from 13.8% to 15.2% from 2019 to 2023. Tarrant County followed, with an increase from 10.6% to 11.6%. Meanwhile, Collin and Denton counties maintained relatively low rates, with Collin remaining steady between 7.3% and 7.9% and Denton rising modestly from 7.5% to 8.5% during the five-year period.

Fannin County showed the most improvement, dropping from 11.4% to 8.6%. Cooke County decreased from 13.7% in 2020 to 12.6% in 2023. Ellis County experienced a jump from 12.1% in 2019 to 13.9% in 2022, then a slight decline to 13.1% in 2023. Grayson County peaked at 14.7% in 2021 before falling to 13.3% in 2023.

These disparities are particularly acute in Dallas County, where the 15.2% uninsured rate translates to about 95,000 children lacking coverage,

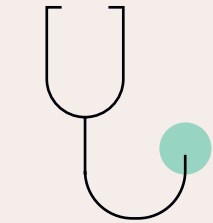
| County  | 2019 | 2020 | 2021 | 2022 | 2023 |
|---------|------|------|------|------|------|
| Collin  | 7.4  | 7.9  | 7.7  | 7.5  | 7.3  |
| Cooke   | 11.4 | 13.7 | 13.3 | 13.0 | 12.6 |
| Dallas  | 13.8 | 13.7 | 14.7 | 14.9 | 15.2 |
| Denton  | 7.5  | 7.3  | 7.5  | 7.9  | 8.5  |
| Ellis   | 12.1 | 12.7 | 13.5 | 13.9 | 13.1 |
| Fannin  | 11.4 | 11.7 | 11.0 | 9.3  | 8.6  |
| Grayson | 13.2 | 13.0 | 14.7 | 14.2 | 13.3 |
| Tarrant | 10.6 | 11.1 | 11.7 | 11.8 | 11.6 |

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey

based on 2023 population estimates. This places additional strain on hospital emergency departments and safety-net providers, often resulting in preventable hospitalizations.

Texas remains the state with the highest rate of uninsured children in the nation, with 11.9% in 2023.<sup>3</sup> While Dallas County consistently exceeds the state rate and suburban counties like Collin and Denton fare better, rural counties such as Cooke and Grayson align more closely with the state rate. Nationally, the uninsured rate for children improved slightly from 5.7% in 2019 to 5.3% in 2023.<sup>4</sup>

Texas' higher uninsured rate reflects the state's restrictive Medicaid eligibility and its decision not to expand coverage under the Affordable Care Act, exacerbating regional disparities.<sup>5</sup> In Texas, and particularly the Dallas metropolitan area, the combination of urban poverty and procedural hurdles to Medicaid and Children's Health



**Children without insurance** face elevated risks of unmet health needs.

Insurance Program (CHIP) enrollment (such as long processing delays and cumbersome paperwork) has driven persistent and elevated uninsured rates among children.

Targeted outreach, streamlined enrollment processes and investment in community health programs are needed for Texas to reduce its high percentage of uninsured children. Without sustained attention, thousands of children in North Texas will remain at risk.

# Medically Complex Children Receiving Special Education Services

## Number of children with health complexities receiving special education services in public and charter schools

Number of children with health complexities receiving special education services in public and charter schools

Children with medical complexity (CMC) – those requiring extensive, coordinated care for chronic or life-threatening conditions – often depend on special education services in school. Across North Texas, the number of students qualifying for these services has shown a slight upward trend from 2021 to 2025, likely reflecting early identification of children in need. Enrollments in Tarrant, Denton and Collin counties were generally stable or slightly higher. However, Dallas County served 1,307 students in 2025, down from a high of 1,478 in 2021.

Low counts in rural counties like Cooke and Fannin, both reporting 10 or fewer children who require special education services, may indicate under-identification from shortages of evaluators and health professionals. Ellis County saw a 9% increase, while Grayson County had a 16% decrease in enrollments.

In Texas, 95.9% of initial evaluations for special education were completed within the federally mandated 60 school days, short of the 100% compliance target.<sup>1</sup> This delay disproportionately affects medically complex children, whose timely assessments are vital. Compared to healthy children, their outcomes differ significantly:

| County  | 2021  | 2022  | 2023  | 2024  | 2025  |
|---------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|
| Collin  | 657   | 655   | 661   | 631   | 637   |
| Cooke   | 0     | 0     | 0     | 14    | 10    |
| Dallas  | 1,478 | 1,464 | 1,411 | 1,367 | 1,307 |
| Denton  | 389   | 422   | 399   | 379   | 402   |
| Ellis   | 98    | 96    | 100   | 104   | 107   |
| Fannin  | 11    | 0     | 0     | 0     | 0     |
| Grayson | 74    | 71    | 77    | 67    | 62    |
| Tarrant | 888   | 887   | 884   | 859   | 892   |

Source: Texas Department of Education special education reports

National estimates show they experience only half the success rates in school engagement and well-being.<sup>2</sup> Those with medical complexities also face higher risks of school absenteeism, developmental delays and gaps in care.

In 2017, the Health Resources and Services Administration Maternal and Child Health Bureau funded an inaugural quality improvement project with interdisciplinary teams of policymakers and practitioners to help communities with growing CMC populations, especially after the COVID-19 pandemic.<sup>3</sup> A recent study showed that less than 8% of the 1.2 million defined as CMC received care from a well-functioning health care system.<sup>4</sup> Care for these children accounts for a disproportionately large share of pediatric health spending in the United States and globally.<sup>5</sup>



**Children with medical complexities** face higher risks of school absenteeism, developmental delays and gaps in care.

National models increasingly promote integrated care systems linking schools and social services with health care providers. Texas addresses these issues through Medicaid programs like the Medically Dependent Children Program.<sup>5</sup>

ACCESS TO CARE

Children Enrolled in CHIP

Number of children enrolled in Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP)

| County  | 2020   | 2021   | 2022   | 2023  | 2024   |
|---------|--------|--------|--------|-------|--------|
| Collin  | 7,047  | 5,165  | 2,182  | 1,123 | 2,733  |
| Cooke   | 472    | 333    | 122    | 59    | 153    |
| Dallas  | 41,430 | 29,012 | 11,182 | 364   | 15,479 |
| Denton  | 7,174  | 5,303  | 2,239  | 1,147 | 2,648  |
| Ellis   | 2,099  | 1,549  | 627    | 364   | 913    |
| Fannin  | 351    | 263    | 107    | 58    | 161    |
| Grayson | 1,480  | 1,009  | 440    | 227   | 647    |
| Tarrant | 27,723 | 19,416 | 7,382  | 4,220 | 11,182 |

Source: Texas Health and Human Services records and statistics, health care statistics

Children’s Medicaid

Number of children enrolled in Children’s Medicaid

| County  | 2020    | 2021    | 2022    | 2023    | 2024    |
|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|
| Collin  | 42,536  | 53,991  | 64,227  | 70,017  | 52,334  |
| Cooke   | 3,823   | 4,614   | 2,236   | 5,553   | 4,139   |
| Dallas  | 296,988 | 346,085 | 388,580 | 409,517 | 305,302 |
| Denton  | 39,214  | 51,852  | 61,738  | 67,298  | 49,186  |
| Ellis   | 14,423  | 17,554  | 20,616  | 23,090  | 17,958  |
| Fannin  | 2,866   | 3,449   | 3,898   | 4,201   | 3,271   |
| Grayson | 11,766  | 14,135  | 16,361  | 17,609  | 13,302  |
| Tarrant | 187,773 | 229,913 | 262,228 | 284,397 | 211,896 |

Source: Texas Health and Human Services records and statistics, health care statistics

Children's Medicaid and the Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP) provide vital health care access for low-income children, ensuring they receive necessary medical care.

CHIP enrollment experienced sharp changes during and after the COVID-19 pandemic between 2020 and 2024. Dallas County declined from 41,430 in 2020 to 364 in 2023, then rebounded to 15,479 enrollments in 2024, a 62.7% decrease from 2020. In contrast, Tarrant County had 27,723 children enrolled in CHIP in 2020, but dropped to 4,220 enrollments in 2023 and then rose to 11,182 in 2024, a 59.7% decrease over the five-year period.

Collin County enrollments dropped from 7,047 in 2020 to 1,123 in 2023 before rebounding to 2,733 in 2024, a 61.2% decrease during the five-year period. Denton County saw a similar trend, going from 7,147 in 2020 to 1,147 in 2023 and then rising to 2,648 in 2024, which was a 63.1% decrease since 2020. The smaller counties Cooke, Ellis, Fannin and Grayson also experienced dips in 2023 but had increases in 2024.

Enrollment in Children's Medicaid peaked in all counties in 2023 before declining at varying levels in 2024. Dallas County increased from 296,988 in 2020 to 409,517 in 2023, then enrollments fell to 305,302 in 2024, a 3.2% decline. Tarrant County grew from 187,773 in 2020 to a high of 284,397 in 2023, then fell to 211,896 in 2024, a 25.5% decrease from the previous year's high. Similarly, Collin and Denton counties peaked in 2023 with 70,017 and 67,298 respectively

before dropping in 2024 to 52,334 and 49,186 Medicaid enrollments in 2024.

Ellis, Fannin and Grayson followed similar trends with Children's Medicaid, peaking in 2023, then declining in 2024. Cooke County had a slight increase in enrollments over the five-year period, with 3,823 children enrolled in 2020, rising to a high of 5,553 in 2023 before falling to 4,139 in 2024 (an 8.3% increase for the five-year span).

The Families First Coronavirus Response Act's continuous enrollment provision, which prevented disenrollments during the pandemic, prompted the enrollment surge from 2021 to 2023 across North Texas.<sup>1</sup> However, when that provision expired in April 2023, enrollment in CHIP and Medicaid began to decline as eligibility standards were reviewed regionally.<sup>2</sup> Procedural barriers caused significant enrollment losses, especially in urban Dallas and Tarrant counties: Dallas County's Medicaid enrollment dropped by 104,215 children between 2023 and 2024. Rural counties like Cooke faced challenges due to limited enrollment assistance.<sup>3</sup> Other possible contributors to the sharp decline in CHIP enrollments are the complex application process, stricter eligibility criteria, immigrants' fear of seeking government services and lower community awareness compared to Medicaid.<sup>4</sup>

Texas Medicaid enrollment decreased from 3.6 million in 2022 to 3.1 million in 2024 (a 13.9% drop) and CHIP



CHIP enrollment experienced sharp decreases between 2020 and 2024.

from 1.2 million to about 800,000 (a 33.3% decrease).<sup>5</sup> Nationally, 25 million people had lost Medicaid by August 2024 during the unwinding of continuous coverage.<sup>6</sup> Texas' stricter policies and lower eligibility thresholds compared to states with Medicaid expansions contributed to larger enrollment losses.

To restore coverage, Texas might streamline the application process, expand multilingual outreach, reduce call center wait times and deploy community-based enrollment support, especially in rural areas.<sup>7</sup> Enhancing telehealth and digital platforms can help close access gaps, ensuring equitable health care for North Texas children.

Nonemergency ER Visits

Number and percentage of emergency department visits classified as preventable, avoidable or nonemergency

Hospital emergency departments throughout North Texas remain vital for medical care. However, many visits are preventable, avoidable or nonemergency, which strain hospital resources, increase costs and reveal ongoing issues with access to care.<sup>1</sup> The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention report more than 150 million annual ER visits in the United States, with about 40% classified as nonemergency or potentially avoidable.<sup>2</sup> Such visits often involve common issues like dental pain, minor infections, asthma flare-ups and chronic disease complications treatable in outpatient care settings.<sup>3</sup>

Research links rising ER use to primary-care shortages, limited after-hours care and insurance gaps, especially among Medicaid users and low-income groups. The Commonwealth Fund reports about 151 annual avoidable ER visits per 1,000 enrolled adults ages 18 to 64 with employer insurance.<sup>4</sup> In Texas, where Medicaid hasn't expanded, the rate is higher among those who are uninsured or underinsured.<sup>5</sup>

The financial burden is large. A July 2024 alert from Texas Children's Health Plan estimated more than 1.5 million preventable ER visits for Texas Medicaid and Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP) participants cost \$754 million.<sup>6</sup> The report highlighted that

| County  |            |  | 2019    | 2020   | 2021    | 2022    | 2023    |
|---------|------------|--|---------|--------|---------|---------|---------|
| Collin  | Number     |  | 28,133  | 15,686 | 23,133  | 30,986  | 31,845  |
|         | Percentage |  | 51.3    | 44.3   | 43.0    | 45.1    | 47.3    |
| Cooke   | Number     |  | 2,507   | 1,176  | 1,811   | 2,219   | 1,923   |
|         | Percentage |  | 56.4    | 48.9   | 49.4    | 50.1    | 48.0    |
| Dallas  | Number     |  | 151,772 | 74,054 | 104,496 | 114,364 | 106,236 |
|         | Percentage |  | 59.0    | 51.2   | 50.3    | 50.1    | 50.4    |
| Denton  | Number     |  | 32,955  | 18,337 | 26,172  | 31,518  | 32,373  |
|         | Percentage |  | 53.9    | 47.5   | 45.0    | 47.4    | 48.8    |
| Ellis   | Number     |  | 11,087  | 6,258  | 9,956   | 10,901  | 10,173  |
|         | Percentage |  | 58.0    | 49.3   | 49.7    | 50.1    | 47.7    |
| Fannin  | Number     |  | 2,223   | 1,268  | 1,712   | 1,888   | 1,851   |
|         | Percentage |  | 55.2    | 46.7   | 47.9    | 48.6    | 49.8    |
| Grayson | Number     |  | 9,395   | 5,501  | 6,337   | 7,151   | 7,280   |
|         | Percentage |  | 55.9    | 49.7   | 46.2    | 47.2    | 49.0    |
| Tarrant | Number     |  | 101,811 | 56,782 | 83,791  | 104,963 | 98,635  |
|         | Percentage |  | 57.0    | 50.0   | 50.5    | 50.7    | 51.8    |

Source: Texas Health Care Information Collection, public use emergency department data; NYU Wagner School Emergency Department Classification Taxonomy



The financial burden of avoidable ER visits is large.

most visits involved nonurgent cases not resulting in hospital admissions, indicating misuse of emergency services and missed preventive care opportunities. The role of freestanding emergency departments (FrEDs) complicates this, as a 2024 Texas A&M University study shows many treat nonurgent cases and may promote unnecessary ER use due to accessibility and billing incentives.<sup>7</sup> Texas has the most FrEDs in the nation, about 340 in 2023, mostly in higher-income areas offering low-acuity care. More than half of Dallas County and Tarrant County residents' ER visits in 2023 were considered avoidable, with other counties just below this

threshold. The two urban counties did show declines in nonemergency ER visits from 2019 to 2023. Cooke, Ellis, Fannin and Grayson counties also dropped over the same period, but levels still hovered close to the 50% mark in 2023.

Childhood Cancer Diagnoses

New cancer diagnoses for children and adolescents 19 and younger

Childhood cancer remains a rare but devastating burden for the children diagnosed with it and their families. Although it accounts for less than 1% of all new cancer diagnoses in the United States, pediatric cancers demand specialized, intensive treatment and long-term follow-up care.<sup>1</sup> Between 2018 and 2022, data from North Texas counties reveals uneven trends in new diagnoses.

Dallas County consistently reported the highest number of childhood cancer diagnoses from 2018 to 2022, though numbers fluctuated from 182 cases in 2018 to 160 in 2019, before rising again to 179 in 2022. This pattern may reflect delayed detection or disruptions in care during the COVID-19 pandemic, which significantly affected preventive care and screenings nationwide.<sup>2</sup> Denton County followed a similar trajectory, peaking at 77 cases in 2019 and then stabilizing at 70 cases in 2021 and 69 cases in 2022.

Suburban and rural counties presented mixed trends. Collin County saw a steady increase in diagnoses, from 65 to 79 cases, a rise that may be attributed to population growth and improved diagnostic coverage. In contrast, Cooke and Fannin counties maintained low counts, fluctuating with five or fewer diagnoses per year. Ellis County experienced a slight decline, from 18 cases in 2018 to 12 in 2022.

| County  | 2018 | 2019 | 2020 | 2021 | 2022 |
|---------|------|------|------|------|------|
| Collin  | 65   | 75   | 70   | 76   | 79   |
| Cooke   | 3    | 0    | 1    | 5    | 5    |
| Dallas  | 182  | 160  | 167  | 174  | 179  |
| Denton  | 51   | 77   | 64   | 70   | 69   |
| Ellis   | 18   | 14   | 14   | 15   | 12   |
| Fannin  | 2    | 2    | 2    | 0    | 1    |
| Grayson | 9    | 16   | 3    | 10   | 10   |
| Tarrant | 151  | 158  | 146  | 134  | 152  |

Source: Texas Department of State Health Services; Cancer Epidemiology and Surveillance Branch, Texas Cancer Registry

Nationally, the childhood cancer incidence rate has increased steadily, likely due to enhanced diagnostics and survivor trends. According to the National Cancer Institute, pediatric cancer remains the leading cause of disease-related death among U.S. children.<sup>3</sup> Fortunately, advances in treatments have led to survival rates exceeding 85% for many types of childhood cancer. Yet these outcomes are not universal, as underserved communities and rural populations remain disproportionately at risk.

Advocacy organizations such as the American Childhood Cancer Organization emphasize strengthening pediatric data systems, expanding Medicaid coverage and investing in psychosocial services as key policy initiatives.<sup>4</sup> The Texas Cancer Registry has become a central tool for guiding resource allocation and policy planning.<sup>5</sup>



Advances in treatments have led to survival rates exceeding 85% for many types of childhood cancer.

Ensuring equitable pediatric cancer outcomes requires expanding survivorship care plans, improving early detection infrastructure and broadening access to specialized pediatric oncology services statewide.

MENTAL HEALTH

Children with a Mental Health Diagnosis

Number of children with a mental health diagnosis under Medicaid managed care

| County  | 2019   | 2020   | 2021   | 2022   | 2023   |
|---------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|
| Collin  | 2,634  | 2,638  | 3,510  | 3,401  | 3,495  |
| Cooke   | 269    | 222    | 260    | 254    | 262    |
| Dallas  | 15,816 | 14,722 | 17,466 | 17,206 | 17,137 |
| Denton  | 2,625  | 2,487  | 3,149  | 3,135  | 3,211  |
| Ellis   | 1,627  | 1,464  | 1,646  | 1,802  | 1,913  |
| Fannin  | 272    | 295    | 301    | 255    | 260    |
| Grayson | 1,142  | 1,037  | 1,053  | 1,130  | 1,173  |
| Tarrant | 12,809 | 11,893 | 14,404 | 13,443 | 13,544 |

Source: Texas Department of State Health Services: Mental Health and Substance Abuse, Medicaid Services Unit

Emotional Disturbance and Addictive Disorders

Estimated number of children ages 9 to 17 diagnosed with emotional disturbance and addictive disorders

| County  |                                 | 2019   | 2020   | 2021   | 2022   | 2023   |
|---------|---------------------------------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|
| Collin  | Any disturbance or disorder     | 31,037 | 29,726 | 31,409 | 32,236 | 33,055 |
|         | Serious disturbance or disorder | 7,425  | 7,112  | 7,514  | 7,712  | 7,908  |
| Cooke   | Any disturbance or disorder     | 1,001  | 1,023  | 1,017  | 994    | 1,039  |
|         | Serious disturbance or disorder | 240    | 245    | 243    | 238    | 249    |
| Dallas  | Any disturbance or disorder     | 74,180 | 71,715 | 70,718 | 69,030 | 69,987 |
|         | Serious disturbance or disorder | 17,746 | 17,157 | 16,918 | 16,514 | 16,743 |
| Denton  | Any disturbance or disorder     | 23,577 | 23,283 | 25,352 | 25,154 | 26,037 |
|         | Serious disturbance or disorder | 5,640  | 5,570  | 6,065  | 6,018  | 6,229  |
| Ellis   | Any disturbance or disorder     | 5,161  | 5,391  | 6,399  | 6,440  | 6,638  |
|         | Serious disturbance or disorder | 1,235  | 1,290  | 1,531  | 1,541  | 1,588  |
| Fannin  | Any disturbance or disorder     | 871    | 835    | 840    | 849    | 863    |
|         | Serious disturbance or disorder | 208    | 200    | 201    | 203    | 206    |
| Grayson | Any disturbance or disorder     | 3,711  | 3,420  | 3,376  | 3,515  | 3,617  |
|         | Serious disturbance or disorder | 888    | 818    | 808    | 841    | 865    |
| Tarrant | Any disturbance or disorder     | 59,847 | 59,445 | 59,638 | 59,847 | 61,026 |
|         | Serious disturbance or disorder | 14,317 | 14,221 | 14,267 | 14,317 | 14,600 |

Source: U.S. Surgeon General report, U.S. Census Bureau

The number of children enrolled in Medicaid managed care with a mental health diagnosis grew in most North Texas counties between 2019 and 2023. Collin County rose from 2,634 to 3,495, Tarrant County increased from 12,809 to 13,544 and Dallas County grew from 15,816 to 17,137 children. Denton and Ellis counties also showed steady growth, while smaller counties such as Cooke and Fannin remained relatively stable with some fluctuations over the five-year period.

Similarly, estimates of children ages 9 to 17 with any emotional disturbance or addictive disorder showed varied but significant changes between 2019 and 2023. Collin County increased 6.5%, climbing from 31,037 to 33,055 children with any emotional disturbance or addictive disorder, while Denton County rose 10.4% from 23,577 to 26,037. Meanwhile, Ellis County moved from 5,161 in 2019 to 2023’s 6,638 children with any emotional disturbance or addictive disorder. Tarrant remained relatively stable, while Dallas County estimates declined 6% overall, from 74,180 to 69,987.

Emotional disturbances and addictive disorders saw an upward trend in most North Texas counties, although Dallas County had a decline from 17,746 cases in 2019 to 16,743 in 2023. Cooke, Fannin and Grayson counties were relatively stable or had modest reductions over the five years, while estimates for Ellis County jumped from 1,235 to 1,588 (a 28.5% increase).

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and the National Survey of Children’s Health, the prevalence of mental, emotional and behavioral disorders among children has steadily risen in recent years. Lifetime prevalence among children ages 3 to 17 increased from 25.3% in 2016 to 27.7% in 2021.<sup>1</sup> Among adolescents ages 12 to 17, more than 20% had a diagnosed mental or behavioral health condition by 2023, with noted increases in anxiety (16.1%) and depression (8.4%).<sup>2</sup> Meanwhile, a study reported the percentage of publicly insured children diagnosed with mental health or neurodevelopmental disorders rose significantly between 2010 and 2019.<sup>3</sup>

Together, these indicators underscore the critical role of Medicaid coverage in children’s mental health and the wider implications of rising disturbance and addiction risks. A longitudinal study found only 40% of students with emotional, behavioral and mental health disorders graduate from high school, compared to the 76% average graduation rate for all students nationwide.<sup>4</sup> Moreover, substance use disorders in youth are strongly linked to elevated dropout, criminal involvement and suicide risk. A national study of young adults (ages 18 to 25) reported high school dropouts are significantly more likely than graduates to exhibit substance use, mental health issues and criminal behavior as well as to have attempted suicide or been arrested.<sup>5</sup>

Counties are experimenting with varied responses to address the



Mental, emotional and behavioral disorders have been rising in children.

growing need. In Collin County, the Substance Abuse Program offers free adolescent assessments, community education and early intervention, collaborating with schools and the juvenile justice system to refer youth to appropriate services.<sup>6</sup> In Dallas and Tarrant counties, the Recovery Resource Council delivers mental health counseling, recovery support, prevention programming and housing assistance to more than 60,000 youth and young adults annually through in-person and telehealth services.<sup>7</sup> Overall, North Texas reflects national trends of rising youth mental health needs, with Medicaid playing a central role in providing care. While county responses vary, expanding local prevention, counseling and recovery programs remains vital to addressing growing risks and disparities.

Births to Adolescent Mothers

Number and rate per 1,000 population of hospital births to mothers ages 10 to 17

Pregnancies among those ages 10 to 17 remain a critical public health concern in North Texas. While national and state birth rates among teens have steadily declined over the past two decades,<sup>1</sup> regional data reveals uneven progress and disparities in adolescent reproductive health.

In 2023, Dallas County reported 652 births to adolescent mothers, with a birth rate of 4.43 per 1,000 youth ages 10 to 17. Although this shows a slight decrease from its 2019 rate of 4.97, Dallas County has consistently recorded the highest adolescent birth count in North Texas. Tarrant County, with 374 births and a rate of 2.91 in 2023, displays more fluctuation, including a peak of 395 births in 2020 and a drop to 308 in 2021. The suburban Denton County had a lower rate, which fluctuated little from 2019 to 2023, ending at 1.46.

The smaller counties Cooke, Fannin and Grayson often reported very low counts, making year-to-year trends hard to interpret, although Cooke County's rate of 7.99 in 2020, the highest in the region during the reporting period, indicates a need in rural areas.

Statewide, Texas recorded 20,856 births and a teen birth rate of 19.4 per 1,000 females ages 15 to 19 in 2023, compared to the national rate

| County  |        | 2019 | 2020 | 2021 | 2022 | 2023 |
|---------|--------|------|------|------|------|------|
| Collin  | Births | 58   | 65   | 45   | 82   | 73   |
|         | Rate   | 2.98 | 3.24 | 2.47 | 3.08 | 2.91 |
| Cooke   | Births | 13   | 16   | <10  | <10  | <10  |
|         | Rate   | 6.44 | 7.99 | N/A  | N/A  | N/A  |
| Dallas  | Births | 729  | 677  | 649  | 658  | 652  |
|         | Rate   | 4.97 | 4.55 | 4.29 | 4.48 | 4.43 |
| Denton  | Births | 75   | 72   | 75   | 83   | 77   |
|         | Rate   | 1.59 | 1.50 | 1.50 | 1.62 | 1.46 |
| Ellis   | Births | 42   | 33   | 26   | 26   | 23   |
|         | Rate   | 3.92 | 2.93 | 2.18 | 2.13 | 1.79 |
| Fannin  | Births | <10  | <10  | <10  | <10  | <10  |
|         | Rate   | N/A  | N/A  | N/A  | N/A  | N/A  |
| Grayson | Births | 28   | 27   | 27   | 12   | 27   |
|         | Rate   | 3.85 | 3.90 | 3.67 | 1.72 | 3.73 |
| Tarrant | Births | 357  | 395  | 308  | 386  | 374  |
|         | Rate   | 2.98 | 3.24 | 2.47 | 3.08 | 2.91 |

Source: Texas Health Care Information Collection public use hospital discharge data 2019 to 2023  
Note: Numbers are suppressed when fewer than 10 to protect the identity of the individuals

of 13.1.<sup>2</sup> Adolescent pregnancies are associated with increased health risks during childbirth, lower educational attainment and long-term economic instability for parent and child.<sup>3</sup> Communities with high rates often do not have adequate sex education, accessible pediatric health care or reliable family-support resources.<sup>4</sup>

The regional five-year data indicates that while progress has been made in some counties, adolescent pregnancy remains a public health concern. Social norms and stigma related to adolescent pregnancies can significantly influence how teenagers react to such situations.<sup>5</sup> Reducing teen pregnancy rates requires combating community



Teen pregnancy remains a public health concern.

norms that contribute to higher teen birth rates, combined with investments in prevention and culturally responsive care.<sup>6</sup>

Early Prenatal Care

Percentage of live births in which the mother received prenatal care during the first trimester of pregnancy

Early prenatal care – defined as care initiated during the first trimester of pregnancy – is a cornerstone of healthy pregnancies and improved infant outcomes. It enables timely screening for complications, nutritional guidance and early interventions that reduce risks for mother and child. Across North Texas, rates of early prenatal care vary by county, reflecting broader socioeconomic and health care access disparities.

Collin County consistently reported the highest rates of first-trimester care, peaking at 79.6% in 2020 and declining slightly to 78.4% in 2023. Denton County followed, although it experienced a decrease from 74.9% to 71.5% (a 3.4% dip) from 2019 to 2023. Dallas County experienced a more pronounced decline, dropping 7.5% from 60.2% to 55.7% and registered the lowest rates over the five-year period. Tarrant County dropped from 64.7% to 59.1% (an 8.6% decrease), while Ellis County decreased from 64% to 58.6% (an 8.4% decline). Grayson County showed a modest increase, rising from 68.5% in 2019 to 69.4% in 2023.

The declines observed in Dallas, Tarrant and Ellis counties align with COVID-19 pandemic-related disruptions, including reduced access to in-person care, economic instability and delays in Medicaid

| County  |        | 2019 | 2020 | 2021 | 2022 | 2023 |
|---------|--------|------|------|------|------|------|
| Collin  | Births | 77.8 | 79.6 | 79.5 | 79.1 | 78.4 |
|         | Rate   | N/A  | N/A  | N/A  | N/A  | N/A  |
| Cooke   | Births | 60.2 | 61.9 | 62.5 | 59.9 | 55.7 |
|         | Rate   | 74.9 | 75.5 | 75.9 | 74.0 | 71.5 |
| Dallas  | Births | 64.0 | 62.2 | 61.2 | 56.9 | 58.6 |
|         | Rate   | N/A  | N/A  | N/A  | N/A  | N/A  |
| Denton  | Births | 68.5 | 66.2 | 67.8 | 65.9 | 69.4 |
|         | Rate   | 64.7 | 62.0 | 62.6 | 61.1 | 59.1 |
| Ellis   | Births |      |      |      |      |      |
|         | Rate   |      |      |      |      |      |
| Fannin  | Births |      |      |      |      |      |
|         | Rate   |      |      |      |      |      |
| Grayson | Births |      |      |      |      |      |
|         | Rate   |      |      |      |      |      |
| Tarrant | Births |      |      |      |      |      |
|         | Rate   |      |      |      |      |      |

Source: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention WONDER natality data  
Note: Data is not available for counties with populations of less than 100,000

enrollment.<sup>1</sup> The higher rates in Collin and Denton reflect those counties' stronger socioeconomic conditions, greater provider density and broader insurance coverage.<sup>2</sup> Grayson's slight improvement may be attributed to targeted community health initiatives or expanded outreach efforts.

The pandemic had a major impact on prenatal care in 2021 and 2022, with telemedicine limitations, clinic closures and patient hesitancy contributing to reduced early care.<sup>3</sup> These disruptions can have direct clinical consequences. Early prenatal care is linked to lower rates of preterm birth, low birth weight and maternal complications such as gestational diabetes and hypertension. In Dallas County, an estimated 15,000 births annually don't get prenatal care. These gaps pose serious risks for adverse outcomes, especially in underserved communities.



Early prenatal care is linked to lower rates of preterm birth, low birth weight and maternal complications.

The state's early prenatal care rate declined from 62.1% in 2019 to 58.8% in 2023, well below the national rate, which dipped slightly from 77.9% to 76.2%. Dallas and Tarrant counties' rates remain below both state and national benchmarks, while Collin County is slightly above the national mark. Denton and Grayson counties outperform the state rate but trail the national rate.

BIRTH OUTCOMES

Premature Deliveries

Number and percentage of hospital deliveries occurring before 37 weeks of pregnancy

| County  |            | 2019  | 2020  | 2021  | 2022  | 2023  |
|---------|------------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|
| Collin  | Number     | 1,441 | 1,334 | 1,674 | 1,749 | 1,719 |
|         | Percentage | 13.6  | 12.6  | 15.0  | 13.4  | 13.0  |
| Cooke   | Number     | 59    | 45    | 75    | 68    | 70    |
|         | Percentage | 12.9  | 10.4  | 15.3  | 13.9  | 14.5  |
| Dallas  | Number     | 6,322 | 5,586 | 5,814 | 5,665 | 5,090 |
|         | Percentage | 16.1  | 14.8  | 15.8  | 15.0  | 13.8  |
| Denton  | Number     | 1,450 | 1,458 | 1,592 | 1,731 | 1,699 |
|         | Percentage | 13.6  | 13.8  | 14.1  | 14.6  | 14.1  |
| Ellis   | Number     | 371   | 323   | 376   | 374   | 415   |
|         | Percentage | 15.3  | 13.1  | 14.5  | 13.7  | 14.7  |
| Fannin  | Number     | 55    | 40    | 46    | 51    | 64    |
|         | Percentage | 16.5  | 11.6  | 14.4  | 14.8  | 17.0  |
| Grayson | Number     | 272   | 236   | 256   | 207   | 285   |
|         | Percentage | 16.3  | 15.9  | 16.2  | 14.2  | 15.6  |
| Tarrant | Number     | 4,215 | 4,160 | 4,523 | 4,770 | 4,573 |
|         | Percentage | 15.9  | 15.9  | 17.1  | 16.8  | 16.3  |

Source: Texas Health Care Information Collection, public use hospital discharge data

Low-birth-weight Babies

Number and percentage of hospital births in which newborns weigh less than 2,500 grams

| County  |                             | 2019  | 2020  | 2021  | 2022  | 2023  |
|---------|-----------------------------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|
| Collin  | Low birth weight            | 708   | 822   | 890   | 1,116 | 1,239 |
|         | Percentage low birth weight | 7.0   | 8.2   | 8.5   | 8.9   | 9.8   |
| Cooke   | Low birth weight            | 29    | 25    | 30    | 30    | 37    |
|         | Percentage low birth weight | 6.4   | 6.1   | 6.4   | 6.7   | 7.8   |
| Dallas  | Low birth weight            | 3,767 | 3,788 | 3,883 | 4,079 | 4,232 |
|         | Percentage low birth weight | 10.2  | 10.8  | 11.3  | 11.4  | 12.0  |
| Denton  | Low birth weight            | 829   | 877   | 927   | 1,128 | 1,097 |
|         | Percentage low birth weight | 8.1   | 9.0   | 9.0   | 9.9   | 9.6   |
| Ellis   | Low birth weight            | 226   | 192   | 271   | 294   | 298   |
|         | Percentage low birth weight | 9.6   | 8.0   | 10.6  | 10.9  | 10.8  |
| Fannin  | Low birth weight            | 27    | 24    | 24    | 22    | 27    |
|         | Percentage low birth weight | 9.0   | 8.1   | 8.5   | 6.9   | 8.0   |
| Grayson | Low birth weight            | 101   | 116   | 150   | 121   | 193   |
|         | Percentage low birth weight | 6.6   | 7.9   | 9.2   | 7.9   | 11.0  |
| Tarrant | Low birth weight            | 2,372 | 2,277 | 2,472 | 3,195 | 3,137 |
|         | Percentage low birth weight | 9.5   | 9.7   | 10.5  | 11.9  | 12.1  |

Source: Texas Health Care Information Collection, public use hospital discharge data

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) define a preterm birth as occurring before 37 weeks of pregnancy.<sup>1</sup> In 2023, the preterm birth rate in the United States was 10.4%;<sup>2</sup> however, Texas' 2023 preterm birth rate was 11.1%. Between 2021 and 2023, the average rate of preterm birth in Texas was highest for Black infants (15%) and lowest for Asian/Pacific Islanders (9.5%).<sup>3</sup>

From 2019 to 2023, preterm birth rates in North Texas counties exhibited varied trends. Dallas County experienced a steady decline in the number and percentage of preterm births, dropping from 6,322 births (16.1%) in 2019 to 5,090 (13.8%) in 2023. Grayson County maintained relatively stable rates, with a slight decrease from 16.3% to 15.6%. Collin County experienced a slight decrease in the percentage of preterm births, from 13.6% in 2019 to 13% in 2023, despite a small increase in numbers. Denton County experienced a gradual rise in numbers, yet its preterm birth rate remained fairly stable at around 14%.

Smaller counties, such as Fannin and Cooke, had more pronounced fluctuations. Fannin's rate increased from 11.6% in 2020 to 17% in 2023, while Cooke's rate rose from 10.4% to 14.5% over the same period. Overall, larger urban counties showed improving or stable trends, while some rural counties experienced more variability or rising rates.

Factors known to elevate the risk of preterm birth include a history of previous premature deliveries,

carrying multiple pregnancies or an interval of less than 18 months between pregnancies. Lifestyle factors such as smoking, drinking and using controlled substances also may increase the risk of preterm labor.<sup>4</sup>

The CDC defines a low-birth-weight baby as weighing less than 2,500 grams (about 5.5 pounds).<sup>5</sup> Preterm births account for the majority of low-birth-weight babies, as being born before 37 weeks often limits healthy growth. Another factor is intrauterine growth restriction (IUGR), when a baby does not develop properly in the womb due to issues with the placenta, maternal health complications or birth defects. Premature babies with IUGR are often very small and underdeveloped, while full-term babies with IUGR may appear mature but tend to be weak.<sup>6</sup> Preterm births are often linked to parental health issues like diabetes, preeclampsia and heart disease, particularly in low-income communities.<sup>7</sup> From 2021 to 2023, preterm babies in the United States

were more than twice as likely to be Black (14.7%) as white (7.1%). Babies from multiple births were around eight times more likely to have low birth weight compared to those from single births.<sup>8</sup> Similar to premature births, infants born to mothers who smoke, use recreational drugs or drink alcohol during pregnancy have a higher risk of being low birth weight.<sup>9</sup>

Between 2019 and 2023, the rates of low-birth-weight babies exhibited an



Smoking, drinking and using drugs may increase the risk of preterm labor.

overall upward trend across most North Texas counties. Dallas and Tarrant counties experienced the highest increases, with Dallas rising from 10.2% to 12% and Tarrant from 9.5% to 12.1%. Collin and Denton counties also recorded steady increases, reaching 9.8% and 9.6%, respectively, by 2023. Smaller counties had increasing rates, with Cooke rising from 6.4% to 7.8% and Ellis up from 9.6% in 2019 to 10.8% 2023. Grayson County had a large increase, from 6.6% in 2019 to 11% in 2023.

Infant Mortality

Number of deaths of infants under age 1 and the rate per 1,000 live births

Infant mortality remains a sensitive indicator of maternal health, health care quality and community well-being. Between 2020 and 2024, trends across North Texas counties revealed persistent disparities and emerging concerns.

Rates of infant deaths remain higher in the urban counties, Dallas and Tarrant, than in their suburban counterparts. Dallas County consistently reported the highest rate of infant deaths among North Texas counties, despite declining slightly from 2023 to 2024. Collin County saw a sharp increase in the number of infant deaths over five years, from 47 in 2020 to 68 in 2024, suggesting population growth may be putting a strain on the local maternity health infrastructure.

Rural counties, such as Cooke and Ellis, continue to exhibit statistical volatility due to their small population sizes.

The infant mortality rate in the United States stood at 5.61 deaths per 1,000 live births in 2023, unchanged from 2022, with 20,162 infant deaths reported.<sup>1</sup> Texas' 2022 rate was close to that at 5.7 per 1,000 births, according to the 2024 March of Dimes Report Card.<sup>2</sup>

Texas extended Medicaid and Children's Health Insurance Program

| County  |        | 2020 | 2021 | 2022 | 2023 | 2024 |
|---------|--------|------|------|------|------|------|
| Collin  | Number | 47   | 49   | 55   | 67   | 68   |
|         | Rate   | 4.1  | 4.0  | 4.3  | 5.1  | 5.0  |
| Cooke   | Number | <10  | <10  | <10  | <10  | <10  |
|         | Rate   | N/A  | N/A  | N/A  | N/A  | N/A  |
| Dallas  | Number | 228  | 223  | 248  | 251  | 216  |
|         | Rate   | 6.3  | 6.3  | 6.7  | 6.8  | 5.9  |
| Denton  | Number | 45   | 47   | 58   | 45   | 50   |
|         | Rate   | 4.4  | 5.0  | 4.6  | 3.9  | 4.1  |
| Ellis   | Number | <10  | <10  | <10  | 14   | 13   |
|         | Rate   | N/A  | N/A  | N/A  | N/A  | N/A  |
| Fannin  | Number | <10  | <10  | <10  | <10  | <10  |
|         | Rate   | N/A  | N/A  | N/A  | N/A  | N/A  |
| Grayson | Number | <10  | 13   | <10  | 11   | 10   |
|         | Rate   | N/A  | N/A  | N/A  | N/A  | N/A  |
| Tarrant | Number | 156  | 168  | 171  | 190  | 155  |
|         | Rate   | 5.9  | 6.2  | 6.0  | 6.9  | 5.6  |

Source: Texas Department of State Health Services; Center for Health Statistics, vital statistics annual reports  
Note: Number of deaths is suppressed when fewer than 10. Rates are not calculated when fewer than 20 deaths occur. Birth and death data for 2024 is provisional and subject to revision.

(CHIP) postpartum coverage from 60 days to 12 months in 2024 – a policy shift expected to support maternal and infant health though its impact on mortality rates is not yet discernible.<sup>3</sup>

The Kaiser Family Foundation found that state Medicaid programs in 2024 and 2025 responded to challenges exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic, including workforce shortages and inflationary cost pressures that influenced provider reimbursement rates. These pressures affect the availability of maternity-related services and prenatal care, contributing to adverse birth outcomes and delaying measurable improvements in infant mortality.<sup>4</sup>



Rates of infant deaths remain higher in the urban counties than in their suburban counterparts.

Children with Developmental Disabilities

Estimated number of children under 18 with developmental disabilities

The estimated number of children under 18 with developmental disabilities fluctuated across North Texas counties, mostly trending upward, between 2019 and 2023. In Collin County, numbers dropped from 39,900 in 2019 to 39,300 in 2020, then grew to 43,825 in 2023. Denton County increased from 32,405 to 34,880 during the five-year period, while Ellis County gained about 1,500 children. Dallas County declined 5%, from 102,296 in 2019 to 97,104 in 2023. Tarrant County was stable, while the smaller counties Cooke, Fannin and Grayson showed modest increases.

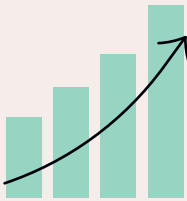
The Texas Health and Human Services Department estimates that about 485,000 children and adults in the state have intellectual or developmental disabilities as of 2025.<sup>1</sup> The prevalence of developmental disabilities among U.S. children has increased steadily, rising from 16.22% to 17.76% from 2009 to 2017.<sup>2</sup>

This indicator is an important public health policy tool as these lifelong conditions affect physical, learning, language and behavioral aspects of daily life.<sup>3</sup> Early identification and ongoing support<sup>4</sup> can substantially improve a child's educational outcomes, social integration and overall well-being.<sup>5</sup> Local providers such as LifePath Systems in Collin

| County  | 2019    | 2020    | 2021   | 2022   | 2023   |
|---------|---------|---------|--------|--------|--------|
| Collin  | 39,900  | 39,300  | 41,959 | 42,669 | 43,825 |
| Cooke   | 1,436   | 1,449   | 1,483  | 1,451  | 1,496  |
| Dallas  | 102,296 | 103,147 | 99,236 | 97,520 | 97,104 |
| Denton  | 32,405  | 31,959  | 33,578 | 34,059 | 34,880 |
| Ellis   | 7,323   | 7,194   | 8,073  | 8,335  | 8,847  |
| Fannin  | 1,101   | 1,116   | 1,137  | 1,150  | 1,173  |
| Grayson | 4,810   | 4,766   | 5,000  | 4,891  | 5,078  |
| Tarrant | 82,304  | 82,137  | 82,202 | 81,684 | 82,261 |

Source: American Academy of Pediatrics; U.S. Census Bureau, American Communities Survey five-year estimates

County<sup>6</sup> and MHMR Center in Denton County<sup>7</sup> play a pivotal role in screening, service coordination, family support and crisis interventions for these children.



The prevalence of developmental disabilities has increased steadily among U.S. children.

Childhood Immunizations

Percentage of kindergarten students with complete vaccinations at the time of enrollment

| County  |                | 2020  | 2021  | 2022  | 2023  | 2024  |
|---------|----------------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|
| Collin  | DTP/DTaP/DT/Td | 95.47 | 95.33 | 94.83 | 94.00 | 93.05 |
|         | Hepatitis A    | 94.78 | 95.13 | 94.16 | 93.49 | 92.29 |
|         | Hepatitis B    | 95.88 | 95.88 | 95.69 | 94.72 | 94.02 |
|         | MMR            | 95.55 | 95.37 | 94.97 | 94.17 | 93.31 |
|         | Polio          | 95.62 | 95.49 | 95.03 | 94.23 | 93.20 |
|         | Varicella      | 94.74 | 94.91 | 94.37 | 93.51 | 92.50 |
| Cooke   | DTP/DTaP/DT/Td | 97.89 | 95.72 | 93.89 | 92.35 | 91.91 |
|         | Hepatitis A    | 97.04 | 95.53 | 93.72 | 95.63 | 92.31 |
|         | Hepatitis B    | 98.52 | 97.08 | 95.81 | 96.72 | 94.48 |
|         | MMR            | 98.10 | 96.50 | 95.29 | 93.44 | 92.31 |
|         | Polio          | 97.67 | 95.53 | 94.59 | 92.90 | 91.91 |
|         | Varicella      | 97.67 | 95.91 | 94.76 | 93.08 | 91.32 |
| Dallas  | DTP/DTaP/DT/Td | 96.68 | 93.11 | 91.69 | 93.65 | 93.81 |
|         | Hepatitis A    | 96.73 | 94.36 | 93.18 | 94.38 | 94.28 |
|         | Hepatitis B    | 97.73 | 96.02 | 95.17 | 96.21 | 96.36 |
|         | MMR            | 97.19 | 93.52 | 92.01 | 94.22 | 94.26 |
|         | Polio          | 96.91 | 93.45 | 92.03 | 94.06 | 94.36 |
|         | Varicella      | 96.11 | 92.85 | 91.15 | 93.24 | 93.07 |
| Denton  | DTP/DTaP/DT/Td | 94.97 | 93.95 | 90.98 | 92.24 | 91.31 |
|         | Hepatitis A    | 94.54 | 94.26 | 91.15 | 92.18 | 91.07 |
|         | Hepatitis B    | 95.51 | 95.14 | 93.16 | 93.66 | 92.98 |
|         | MMR            | 95.25 | 94.07 | 91.18 | 92.57 | 91.69 |
|         | Polio          | 95.02 | 94.05 | 91.08 | 92.50 | 91.65 |
|         | Varicella      | 94.43 | 93.45 | 90.18 | 91.88 | 90.90 |
| Ellis   | DTP/DTaP/DT/Td | 96.20 | 96.35 | 94.81 | 94.22 | 93.50 |
|         | Hepatitis A    | 95.83 | 96.52 | 94.62 | 94.40 | 93.43 |
|         | Hepatitis B    | 97.00 | 97.26 | 96.03 | 95.38 | 94.40 |
|         | MMR            | 96.60 | 96.69 | 95.36 | 94.62 | 93.66 |
|         | Polio          | 96.47 | 96.69 | 95.39 | 94.68 | 93.53 |
|         | Varicella      | 96.20 | 96.52 | 94.84 | 94.34 | 93.27 |
| Fannin  | DTP/DTaP/DT/Td | 93.15 | 94.72 | 91.93 | 92.82 | 93.88 |
|         | Hepatitis A    | 95.11 | 95.17 | 92.45 | 92.55 | 93.35 |
|         | Hepatitis B    | 95.35 | 96.04 | 95.57 | 92.82 | 94.95 |
|         | MMR            | 95.11 | 95.41 | 93.23 | 92.82 | 94.15 |
|         | Polio          | 93.40 | 95.34 | 92.45 | 92.55 | 94.41 |
|         | Varicella      | 94.87 | 94.94 | 91.93 | 92.55 | 94.15 |
| Grayson | DTP/DTaP/DT/Td | 96.31 | 95.43 | 93.73 | 93.69 | 93.16 |
|         | Hepatitis A    | 94.89 | 94.92 | 94.00 | 94.07 | 92.79 |
|         | Hepatitis B    | 96.78 | 96.33 | 95.68 | 95.12 | 94.00 |
|         | MMR            | 96.52 | 95.43 | 93.94 | 94.24 | 93.37 |
|         | Polio          | 96.47 | 95.54 | 93.68 | 94.46 | 93.26 |
|         | Varicella      | 95.68 | 95.20 | 93.10 | 94.13 | 92.89 |
| Tarrant | DTP/DTaP/DT/Td | 95.16 | 94.22 | 91.84 | 91.81 | 90.69 |
|         | Hepatitis A    | 95.19 | 95.27 | 93.20 | 92.39 | 91.36 |
|         | Hepatitis B    | 96.55 | 96.64 | 95.36 | 94.51 | 94.20 |
|         | MMR            | 95.87 | 94.58 | 92.39 | 92.37 | 91.52 |
|         | Polio          | 95.70 | 94.60 | 92.30 | 92.40 | 91.30 |
|         | Varicella      | 94.96 | 94.11 | 91.52 | 91.34 | 90.17 |

Source: Texas Health and Human Services

Although the percentage of entering-kindergarten students with complete immunizations at enrollment remained high across all North Texas counties from 2020 to 2024, most counties saw a decline in rates for most vaccines.

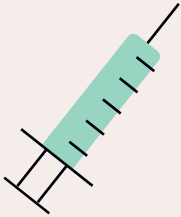
In Collin County, completion rates for all vaccines dropped from the approximately 94% to 96% range in 2020 to around 92% to 94% in 2024. Cooke County saw a steeper decline, with several vaccines falling by about 6 percentage points; notably, MMR (measles, mumps and rubella) coverage dropped from 98.10% to 92.31%. Dallas County's rates fluctuated modestly, dipping in 2021 and 2022 before recovering slightly. Denton and Tarrant counties experienced steady declines across all vaccine types over the five-year period, with Tarrant's DTP (diphtheria, tetanus and pertussis) and varicella (which prevents chicken pox) coverage falling to about 90%. Ellis, Fannin and Grayson counties maintained overall coverage above 90%, though most still trended downward, with Fannin showing slight rebounds in some vaccines in 2024.

Nationwide, kindergarten immunization coverage has been declining in recent years. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention data, during the 2024-2025 school year, coverage for several key vaccines fell to the 92.1% to 92.5% range, below pre-COVID-19 pandemic levels of about 95% and

under the threshold needed for community immunity.<sup>1</sup>

In Texas, kindergarten immunization rates during the 2023-2024 school year generally ranged between 93% and 95%.<sup>2</sup> According to the Texas Department of State Health Services, hepatitis B coverage was at 95.78%, while other categories – such as DTP, MMR and varicella – were slightly below 95%. However, most North Texas counties show similar, if not slightly bigger, declines. Collin County's DTP coverage fell from 95.47% to 93.05%, and Tarrant County's varicella coverage dropped to 90.17% from 94.96%, steeper reductions than the statewide average decrease of 1 to 2 percentage points.

The percentage of children entering kindergarten with complete immunizations is an important indicator of community-level protection. The World Health Organization estimates that immunization prevents 3.5 to 5 million deaths annually, highlighting its global public health significance.<sup>3</sup> In the United States, maintaining a 95% MMR vaccine coverage among kindergartners is a target of Healthy People 2030 (Department of Health and Human Services national health objectives), essential for preserving community immunity and preventing outbreaks of highly contagious diseases like measles.<sup>4</sup> However, vaccine coverage among U.S. kindergartners has remained below this threshold in recent years, and exemption rates have



95% immunization rate is the goal for community immunity.

risen, further eroding community immunity.<sup>5</sup> Tracking this indicator helps gauge the effectiveness of immunization programs and enables early detection of coverage gaps or vaccine hesitancy. It serves as a strategic tool for guiding community education, resource allocation and preventive interventions to mitigate outbreak risks.

The Back-to-School Immunization program aims to ensure Texas students receive required vaccines. The Texas Vaccines for Children program provides low-cost or free vaccines to eligible children from birth through 18 years of age. This program plays a critical role in reducing immunization gaps caused by financial and insurance-related barriers.<sup>6</sup>

Sexually Transmitted Infections (STIs) and Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV)

Number of cases in those 19 and younger

Sexually transmitted infections (STIs), commonly referred to as sexually transmitted diseases (STDs), are infections passed through sexual contact and can be caused by bacteria, viruses or parasites. Cases have increased across the nation in the past five years. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, more than 2.4 million cases of STIs, such as syphilis, gonorrhea and chlamydia, were reported in 2023 nationwide,<sup>1</sup> with those ages 15 to 24 representing nearly half of the cases.<sup>2</sup> Sexually transmitted infections also can be passed from mother to child during birth.

For people with human immunodeficiency virus (HIV), treating STIs can be harder. Regular testing, prevention and treatment are an important part of their care.<sup>3</sup>

In North Texas, syphilis cases in those ages 19 and younger increased 59% from 2020 to 2023, rising from 155 to 246 cases among youth. Cases of chlamydia were up 10% during the same period, from 8,136 in 2020 to 8,919 in 2023. Gonorrhea remained relatively stable with a slight decline from 2,779 to 2,721 cases. With just over one-third of the North Texas youth population, Dallas County accounted for about half of new STI diagnoses in 2023: 47% of chlamydia,

| County  |                             | 2020  | 2021  | 2022  | 2023  | 2024 |
|---------|-----------------------------|-------|-------|-------|-------|------|
| Collin  | New HIV diagnoses           | 6     | 5     | 4     | 9     | 4    |
|         | Persons living with HIV     | 14    | 13    | 12    | 16    | 12   |
|         | New diagnoses for chlamydia | 546   | 615   | 661   | 682   | N/A  |
|         | New diagnoses for gonorrhea | 138   | 175   | 173   | 153   | N/A  |
|         | New diagnoses for syphilis  | 8     | 18    | 17    | 24    | N/A  |
| Cooke   | New HIV diagnoses           | 0     | 0     | 0     | 0     | 0    |
|         | Persons living with HIV     | 0     | 0     | 0     | 0     | 0    |
|         | New diagnoses for chlamydia | 29    | 45    | 41    | 24    | N/A  |
|         | New diagnoses for gonorrhea | 4     | 6     | 10    | 2     | N/A  |
|         | New diagnoses for syphilis  | 1     | 1     | 0     | 0     | N/A  |
| Dallas  | New HIV diagnoses           | 30    | 27    | 33    | 34    | 36   |
|         | Persons living with HIV     | 77    | 66    | 81    | 76    | 79   |
|         | New diagnoses for chlamydia | 4,446 | 4,627 | 4,479 | 4,220 | N/A  |
|         | New diagnoses for gonorrhea | 1,531 | 1,671 | 1,563 | 1,388 | N/A  |
|         | New diagnoses for syphilis  | 98    | 140   | 130   | 130   | N/A  |
| Denton  | New HIV diagnoses           | 2     | 9     | 5     | 1     | 4    |
|         | Persons living with HIV     | 24    | 30    | 22    | 19    | 14   |
|         | New diagnoses for chlamydia | 499   | 598   | 619   | 676   | N/A  |
|         | New diagnoses for gonorrhea | 152   | 166   | 146   | 171   | N/A  |
|         | New diagnoses for syphilis  | 8     | 18    | 20    | 24    | N/A  |
| Ellis   | New HIV diagnoses           | 2     | 1     | 3     | 0     | 1    |
|         | Persons living with HIV     | 2     | 4     | 2     | 0     | 1    |
|         | New diagnoses for chlamydia | 199   | 224   | 215   | 222   | N/A  |
|         | New diagnoses for gonorrhea | 69    | 61    | 66    | 59    | N/A  |
|         | New diagnoses for syphilis  | 1     | 5     | 3     | 3     | N/A  |
| Fannin  | New HIV diagnoses           | 0     | 0     | 0     | 0     | 0    |
|         | Persons living with HIV     | 0     | 0     | 0     | 0     | 0    |
|         | New diagnoses for chlamydia | 22    | 19    | 27    | 21    | N/A  |
|         | New diagnoses for gonorrhea | 7     | 2     | 4     | 1     | N/A  |
|         | New diagnoses for syphilis  | 0     | 1     | 1     | 1     | N/A  |
| Grayson | New HIV diagnoses           | 0     | 1     | 0     | 0     | 0    |
|         | Persons living with HIV     | 1     | 1     | 0     | 1     | 1    |
|         | New diagnoses for chlamydia | 113   | 122   | 122   | 146   | N/A  |
|         | New diagnoses for gonorrhea | 37    | 35    | 29    | 23    | N/A  |
|         | New diagnoses for syphilis  | 2     | 3     | 9     | 5     | N/A  |
| Tarrant | New HIV diagnoses           | 25    | 17    | 21    | 17    | 18   |
|         | Persons living with HIV     | 70    | 54    | 51    | 52    | 50   |
|         | New diagnoses for chlamydia | 2,282 | 2,269 | 2,542 | 2,928 | N/A  |
|         | New diagnoses for gonorrhea | 841   | 850   | 894   | 924   | N/A  |
|         | New diagnoses for syphilis  | 37    | 57    | 75    | 59    | N/A  |

Source: Texas Department of State Health Services, HIV/STD Program, diagnoses by county  
Note: Data for chlamydia, gonorrhea and syphilis is not yet available for 2024

51% of gonorrhea and 53% of syphilis. Collin and Denton counties showed the largest increases in chlamydia and syphilis cases, with chlamydia

cases in both counties growing more than 25% and syphilis cases tripling.

Overweight and Obese Children and Teens

Percentage of children in third to 12th grade who are overweight or obese

Childhood obesity in Texas is monitored annually through FitnessGram® assessments, which use either body mass index (BMI) or body fat percentage to determine weight classifications. Students whose BMI falls at or above the 85th percentile for age and sex are identified as overweight or obese, a designation associated with long-term health risks. Beyond providing a snapshot of individual health, this data also serves as a critical tool for schools, policymakers and public health officials to track statewide trends, allocate resources and design targeted interventions aimed at reversing the trajectory of obesity and improving overall youth well-being.

Between 2018 and 2023, most North Texas counties experienced an increase in the percentage of overweight and obese young people. Dallas County had a steady rise from 39.4% in 2018 to 47.9% in 2022, followed by a slight improvement to 46.9% in 2023. Ellis County followed a similar path, peaking at 45.6% in 2021 before falling to 40.6% in 2023. Denton County rose from 30.4% to 37.6% over the five-year period, and Collin County, though historically lower, peaked at 35.9% in 2021 before dropping to 29.3% in 2023. Cooke County showed the most improvement, declining from 47.8% to 27.5% over the same period.

| County  | 2018 | 2019 | 2021 | 2022 | 2023 |
|---------|------|------|------|------|------|
| Collin  | 27.5 | 27.9 | 35.9 | 31.9 | 29.3 |
| Cooke   | 47.8 | 45.8 | 27.9 | 34.9 | 27.5 |
| Dallas  | 39.4 | 39.8 | 45.0 | 47.9 | 46.9 |
| Denton  | 30.4 | 30.3 | 33.8 | 38.2 | 37.6 |
| Ellis   | 38.2 | 39.6 | 45.6 | 42.7 | 40.6 |
| Fannin  | 31.3 | 33.6 | 40.8 | 32.2 | 38.7 |
| Grayson | 33.0 | 33.4 | 53.7 | 40.7 | 41.8 |
| Tarrant | 36.0 | 36.6 | 35.1 | 41.8 | 37.7 |

Source: Texas Education Agency: Physical Fitness Assessment initiative and FitnessGram, BMI students at some risk or high risk  
Note: Fitness data was not collected during the 2019-2020 school year

These rates exceed national benchmarks. According to National Health and Nutrition Examination Survey data, 28.1% of U.S. youth ages 2 to 19 were overweight or obese as of 2021 to 2023,<sup>1</sup> while Texas data indicates that about 39% to 40% of children in grades two through four were during the same time frame.<sup>2</sup>

The consequences of elevated childhood BMI extend beyond physical appearance. Research shows strong associations with Type 2 diabetes, hypertension, nonalcoholic fatty liver disease, orthopedic complications and psychosocial effects such as depression, poor self-image and anxiety.<sup>3</sup> Elevated weight in children can also reflect systemic inequities, ranging from limited access to nutritious food and recreational spaces to inconsistent school-based health support.<sup>4</sup>

To reverse these trends, public health advocates recommend county-level



Cooke County showed **the most improvement** in the percentage of students who are overweight or obese.

strategies that extend beyond clinical weight loss and address the environments where children learn, play and grow. Effective interventions include school nutrition programs that provide access to healthy meals, safe walking and biking opportunities, culturally sensitive education that resonates with a diverse population and consistent BMI surveillance to track progress.

DIABETES

Diabetes Prevalence Among Children

Estimated number of children under 18 diagnosed with or having Type 1 or Type 2 diabetes

| County  | 2020  | 2021  | 2022  | 2023  | 2024  |
|---------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|
| Collin  | 985   | 1,426 | 1,046 | 1,085 | 1,228 |
| Cooke   | 36    | 52    | 37    | 39    | 44    |
| Dallas  | 2,584 | 3,609 | 2,563 | 2,565 | 2,903 |
| Denton  | 801   | 1,149 | 842   | 871   | 986   |
| Ellis   | 180   | 267   | 198   | 209   | 237   |
| Fannin  | 28    | 40    | 29    | 30    | 34    |
| Grayson | 119   | 170   | 125   | 131   | 148   |
| Tarrant | 2,058 | 2,917 | 2,096 | 2,125 | 2,406 |

Source: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention; National Health Interview Survey, 2020 to 2024; U.S. Census Bureau, American Communities Survey five-year estimates  
Note: The prevalence estimate is determined by applying each year's prevalence estimate from the National Health Interview Survey to the Census Bureau's estimated population under 18; 2023 population data was used for 2024.

Diabetes Hospitalization

Number of hospitalizations of children with a primary or secondary diagnosis of Type 1 or Type 2 diabetes

| County  |        | 2019 | 2020 | 2021 | 2022 | 2023 |
|---------|--------|------|------|------|------|------|
| Collin  | Type 1 | 62   | 65   | 64   | 63   | 75   |
|         | Type 2 | <10  | <10  | <10  | <10  | <10  |
| Cooke   | Type 1 | <10  | <10  | <10  | <10  | <10  |
|         | Type 2 | 0    | 0    | 0    | 0    | 0    |
| Dallas  | Type 1 | 156  | 164  | 233  | 173  | 202  |
|         | Type 2 | 16   | 55   | 56   | 31   | 23   |
| Denton  | Type 1 | 60   | 45   | 65   | 49   | 40   |
|         | Type 2 | <10  | <10  | <10  | <10  | <10  |
| Ellis   | Type 1 | <10  | 13   | 13   | 11   | 20   |
|         | Type 2 | <10  | <10  | <10  | <10  | <10  |
| Fannin  | Type 1 | <10  | <10  | <10  | <10  | <10  |
|         | Type 2 | 0    | <10  | 0    | 0    | <10  |
| Grayson | Type 1 | 26   | 15   | 21   | <10  | 10   |
|         | Type 2 | <10  | <10  | 0    | 0    | <10  |
| Tarrant | Type 1 | 162  | 143  | 143  | 101  | 99   |
|         | Type 2 | 31   | 19   | 35   | 17   | <10  |

Source: Texas Department of State Health Services; Center for Health Statistics; Center for Health Statistics, Texas hospital inpatient discharge public use data files 2019 to 2023  
Note: Counts of fewer than 10 have been suppressed to protect the identity of the individual

The estimated number of children with diabetes (Type 1 or Type 2) increased in every North Texas county from 2020 to 2024. Applying the national prevalence rate to the population data for the year produces the estimated number of children with a diabetes diagnosis, which also indicates a steady rise nationally, from .38% prevalence in 2020 to .44% in 2024.

Hospitalizations for Type 1 (previously known as juvenile diabetes) consistently outnumbered Type 2 hospitalizations across North Texas. Dallas County had 233 Type 1 hospitalizations in 2021, before reporting 173 in 2022 and then 202 hospitalizations in 2023 (a 13.3% decrease over that three-year period). Tarrant County hospitalizations declined from 162 in 2019 to 99 in 2023 (a 38.9% drop). Denton County also decreased from 60 to 40 hospitalizations from 2019 to 2023, a 33.3% dip. In contrast, Collin County increased from 62 to 75 (a 21% rise) and Ellis County doubled from less than 10 to 20 hospitalizations.

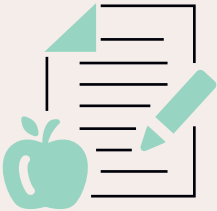
In Dallas, Type 2 hospitalizations went from 16 in 2019 to 56 in 2021, then fell to 23 in 2023; Tarrant peaked at 35 in 2021 and dropped below 10 in 2023. Other counties had Type 2 counts of less than 10, limiting trend analysis.

Rising childhood obesity, food insecurity and sedentary lifestyles, worsened by socioeconomic disparities, are causing the steady increase in diabetes.<sup>1</sup> The 2021 spike in hospitalizations, especially in Dallas County, reflects COVID-19 pandemic-

related disruptions, including delayed diagnoses, reduced access to primary care and stress-related poor glycemic control.<sup>2</sup> While hospitalization declines may reflect effective public health community programs, increases could indicate challenges from population growth, social factors or health inequities.<sup>3</sup> Rural counties like Grayson and Cooke experience underreporting due to limited access to pediatric endocrinologists and diagnostic facilities, masking the true extent of diabetes' impact.

Texas' 2022 pediatric diabetes hospitalization rate was higher than the national rate.<sup>4</sup> While the estimated 350,000 Texas children with diabetes in 2022 is in line with other states, Texas' higher hospitalization rate indicates worse management and access issues compared to other states.<sup>5</sup> In 2017, diabetes care in Texas cost an estimated \$25.6 billion.<sup>6</sup>

Pediatric diabetes demands lifelong management, as unmanaged cases can lead to serious complications like kidney damage, vision loss and heart disease, and disproportionately affects underserved communities.<sup>7</sup> About 1 in 10 people in the United States have diabetes, mostly Type 2, with increasing cases among children and teens.<sup>8</sup> The rise in Type 2 diabetes underscores the need for early intervention to reduce long-term health and economic impacts, especially for low-income and minority groups facing barriers to appropriate care. And it is costly,



**Pediatric diabetes demands lifelong management,**  
as unmanaged cases can lead to serious complications.

as diabetes care expenses reached \$412.9 billion nationally in 2022.<sup>9</sup>

Medical professionals also struggle to understand the aggressive progression of diabetes in young people. Recent studies show that young diabetics develop comorbidities faster than adults, and adult medications are less effective for them.<sup>10</sup> Such studies highlight the vital importance of prevention efforts and identifying at-risk populations before they develop the disease.<sup>11</sup>

To address pediatric diabetes, North Texas can expand school-based nutrition and physical activity programs, implement early screening initiatives in high-risk communities, encourage family involvement in healthy lifestyle choices and tackle food deserts.<sup>12</sup> Focused prevention, early detection and access to care are crucial to address the impact diabetes has on the health of North Texas children.

ASTHMA

Asthma Prevalence

Estimated number of children who have had asthma in their lifetime, have asthma currently or have suffered an asthma attack in the previous 12 months

| County  |               | 2020   | 2021   | 2022   | 2023   | 2024   |
|---------|---------------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|
| Collin  | Lifetime      | 24,626 | 27,353 | 26,776 | 28,917 | 27,074 |
|         | Current       | 15,182 | 17,397 | 16,915 | 18,716 | 18,304 |
|         | Asthma attack | 6,945  | 6,991  | 9,067  | 9,263  | 10,199 |
| Cooke   | Lifetime      | 908    | 1,003  | 951    | 1,027  | 962    |
|         | Current       | 560    | 638    | 601    | 665    | 650    |
|         | Asthma attack | 256    | 256    | 322    | 329    | 362    |
| Dallas  | Lifetime      | 64,635 | 69,216 | 65,618 | 68,338 | 63,984 |
|         | Current       | 39,847 | 44,024 | 41,451 | 44,232 | 43,258 |
|         | Asthma attack | 18,228 | 17,691 | 22,218 | 21,890 | 24,102 |
| Denton  | Lifetime      | 20,026 | 22,042 | 21,558 | 23,222 | 21,742 |
|         | Current       | 12,346 | 14,019 | 13,618 | 15,031 | 14,699 |
|         | Asthma attack | 5,648  | 5,634  | 7,299  | 7,439  | 8,190  |
| Ellis   | Lifetime      | 4,508  | 5,117  | 5,076  | 5,571  | 5,216  |
|         | Current       | 2,779  | 3,254  | 3,207  | 3,606  | 3,527  |
|         | Asthma attack | 1,271  | 1,308  | 1,719  | 1,785  | 1,965  |
| Fannin  | Lifetime      | 699    | 769    | 754    | 805    | 754    |
|         | Current       | 431    | 489    | 476    | 521    | 510    |
|         | Asthma attack | 197    | 197    | 255    | 258    | 284    |
| Grayson | Lifetime      | 2,987  | 3,269  | 3,206  | 3,486  | 3,264  |
|         | Current       | 1,841  | 2,079  | 2,025  | 2,256  | 2,207  |
|         | Asthma attack | 842    | 836    | 1,086  | 1,117  | 1,229  |
| Tarrant | Lifetime      | 51,469 | 55,940 | 53,671 | 56,634 | 53,025 |
|         | Current       | 31,731 | 35,580 | 33,904 | 36,656 | 35,849 |
|         | Asthma attack | 14,515 | 14,297 | 18,173 | 18,141 | 19,974 |

Source: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention; National Health Interview Survey, 2020 to 2024; U.S. Census Bureau, American Communities Survey five-year estimates  
Note: 2023 population data was used to produce 2024 estimates

Asthma represents one of the most prevalent chronic conditions in children. Although not curable, its symptoms can be effectively managed.<sup>1</sup> Premature birth is the strongest and most consistent perinatal risk factor, as infants born before 36 weeks face a heightened risk of developing asthma through adulthood due to incomplete lung development.<sup>2</sup> Asthma is a chronic

respiratory condition marked by airway inflammation and narrowing, which is concerning for children due to their smaller airways. The disease can restrict daily activities and is a leading cause of school absenteeism. Notably, low-income, minority and urban populations experience disproportionately higher rates of asthma-related hospitalizations, emergency visits and mortality.<sup>3</sup>

Indoor allergens and irritants can trigger asthma.<sup>4</sup> Air pollution increases the risk of asthma symptoms and may cause new cases in children, with about 13% of pediatric asthma each year linked to nitrogen dioxide (NO<sub>2</sub>) exposure.<sup>5</sup> In addition, exposure to secondhand smoke can slow lung growth, reduce lung function and increase the risk of respiratory illnesses and asthma.<sup>6</sup>

Asthma Hospitalizations

Hospitalizations of children with a primary or secondary asthma diagnosis

| County  | 2019 | 2020 | 2021 | 2022 | 2023 |
|---------|------|------|------|------|------|
| Collin  | 132  | 56   | 141  | 189  | 187  |
| Cooke   | <10  | <10  | <10  | <10  | <10  |
| Dallas  | 842  | 399  | 653  | 891  | 744  |
| Denton  | 138  | 69   | 112  | 146  | 167  |
| Ellis   | 35   | 18   | 41   | 47   | 52   |
| Fannin  | <10  | <10  | <10  | <10  | <10  |
| Grayson | 23   | 13   | 17   | 29   | 19   |
| Tarrant | 462  | 250  | 364  | 425  | 346  |

Source: Texas Department of State Health Services; Center for Health Statistics, Texas hospital inpatient discharge public use data files 2019 to 2023  
Note: For counts of 10 and less, data is suppressed for confidentiality

In 2024, an estimated 9.7% of children had received an asthma diagnosis at some point, down slightly from a peak of more than 10% in 2023.<sup>7</sup> An estimated 176,000 North Texas children are affected. Dallas County has more than 60,000 children diagnosed with asthma. National estimates show that of those children who were ever diagnosed with asthma, two-thirds have suffered symptoms within the past 12 months, up from about 62% in 2020.<sup>8</sup> In North Texas, more than 115,000 children suffer from current symptoms. National data also shows that among children who have been diagnosed, more than one-third have suffered an asthma attack in the past year. This number is up from a low of 25% in 2021.<sup>9</sup> In North Texas, this means more than 65,000 children suffered an asthma attack in 2024.

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 1 in 20 children with asthma are hospitalized yearly.<sup>10</sup> In 2023, the nation saw more than 109,000 emergency department visits and 8,500 hospitalizations for asthma at a cost of more than \$2.2 billion.<sup>11</sup> Between 2019 and 2023, asthma-related hospitalizations among children in North Texas counties showed notable variation, particularly during the COVID-19 pandemic. Dallas County consistently recorded the highest number of hospitalizations, with a significant drop in 2020 to 399 cases, likely due to pandemic-related disruptions. Dallas County's rate rose sharply to 891 in 2022 and then declined slightly to 744 in 2023. Tarrant County followed a similar pattern, decreasing from 462 in 2019 to 250 in 2020 and

then gradually rising to 425 in 2022 before declining again in 2023 to 346. Collin and Denton counties also had large decreases in 2020, with post-pandemic recoveries by 2022. Ellis County experienced a gradual and steady increase in hospitalizations over the years, whereas Grayson County showed modest fluctuations. Managing childhood asthma is essential, as uncontrolled asthma can harm lung development, reduce lung function and cause lasting respiratory problems. I



1 in 20  
children with  
asthma are  
hospitalized yearly.

Air Quality

Three-year average of the annual fourth-highest daily maximum eight-hour ozone concentration

From 2020 to 2024, North Texas communities experienced variable exposure to unhealthy ozone levels. The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) has established an ozone safety attainment standard based on the three-year average of the fourth-highest daily eight-hour ozone count. An average eight-hour count exceeding 70 parts per billion (ppb) is deemed unsafe.<sup>1</sup> In 2024, only Ellis County's Italy site attained safe levels among the 12 North Texas sites monitored.

Ozone Action Day forecasts provide a reliable alert to unhealthy air days triggered by high ground-level ozone, with most occurring between March and November when heat and sunlight intensify pollutants.<sup>2</sup> According to data from the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality, the Dallas-Fort Worth area recorded 28 Ozone Action Days in both 2020 and 2021. The situation worsened in 2022, with a spike to 61 days, before moderating to 58 in 2023 and further dropping to 43 in 2024.<sup>3</sup> These figures indicate ozone risk likely driven by weather patterns, air stagnation or increased pollutant emissions.

Air quality alerts appear frequently during summer heat waves. For example, the DFW area experienced 15 days of unhealthy air quality during the summer of 2025.<sup>4</sup>

| County  |                             | 2020 | 2021 | 2022 | 2023 | 2024 |
|---------|-----------------------------|------|------|------|------|------|
| Collin  | Frisco                      | 75   | 75   | 74   | 78   | 79   |
|         | Wylie                       | 75   | 75   | 74   | 78   | 79   |
| Dallas  | Dallas Executive Airport    | 69   | 68   | 71   | 75   | 78   |
|         | Dallas North                | 74   | 71   | 71   | 75   | 77   |
|         | Dallas Hinton Street        | 69   | 67   | 67   | 72   | 73   |
| Denton  | Pilot Point                 | 72   | 76   | 77   | 81   | 80   |
|         | Denton Airport              | 72   | 74   | 76   | 79   | 80   |
| Ellis   | Italy                       | 62   | 61   | 63   | 66   | 67   |
| Tarrant | Grapevine Fairway           | 76   | 74   | 76   | 79   | 81   |
|         | Fort Worth Northwest        | 72   | 72   | 77   | 80   | 83   |
|         | Arlington Municipal Airport | 69   | 67   | 72   | 74   | 77   |
|         | Keller                      | 73   | 72   | 72   | 75   | 80   |
|         | Eagle Mountain Lake         | 75   | 75   | 76   | 78   | 82   |

Source: Texas Commission on Environmental Quality: Compliance with eight-hour ozone standard



**Ozone Action Day alerts** mostly occur between March and November when heat and sunlight intensify pollutants.

Elevated ozone levels also triggered warnings of unhealthy conditions for sensitive groups in the metro region.<sup>5</sup>

Ground-level ozone is a hazardous air pollutant that can irritate the respiratory system, reduce lung function and exacerbate asthma, bronchitis and other respiratory conditions, particularly with children, older adults and those with preexisting lung disease. Early exposures significantly increase the risk of wheezing and asthma in young children. A recent cohort study found that modest ozone exposure in the first two years of life raised asthma risk 31% by ages 4 to 6, even at levels well below the EPA's 70 ppb threshold.<sup>6</sup>

Children in metropolitan areas face disproportionate exposure due to the interplay of urban heat islands,

vehicle emissions and demographic inequities. UNICEF highlights that air pollution can reduce a child's lung capacity by up to 20%, disrupt cognitive development and significantly increase the risk of pneumonia, the leading infectious killer of children under 5.<sup>7</sup>



Zayne, age 2, Collin County

Endnotes

Children Without Health Insurance

1 America’s Children: Health Insurance and Access to Care (National Academies Press, 1998), 6168, <https://doi.org/10.17226/6168>.  
2 Institute of Medicine (U.S.), ed., America’s Uninsured Crisis: Consequences for Health and Health Care (National Academies Press, 2009).  
3 Kim Krisberg, “Texas Has the Highest Rate of Uninsured Children, and It’s Getting Worse,” Public Health Watch, Feb. 26, 2025, <https://publichealthwatch.org/2025/02/26/texas-health-uninsured-children-medicaid/>.  
4 Jennifer Tolbert et al., “Key Facts about the Uninsured Population,” Kaiser Family Foundation, Dec. 18, 2024, <https://www.kff.org/uninsured/key-facts-about-the-uninsured-population/>.  
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economic security



Neveah, age 5, Tarrant County

**Between 2020 and 2024, economic insecurity was a defining challenge for children and families across North Texas.** While some indicators showed signs of recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic, the economic security working group of the Beyond ABC Advisory Board emphasized many families continue to face rising costs, limited access to support programs and structural barriers that threaten their long-term stability.

Food insecurity remained widespread. Dallas County reported more than 162,000 children – nearly 1 in 4 – lacking consistent access to nutritious food in 2023. Rural counties such as Cooke, Grayson and Fannin had similarly high rates. Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program enrollment declined sharply across the region during the past five years, with Denton and Cooke counties experiencing drops of 28.4% and 39.5%, respectively. Working group members cited long wait times, language barriers and fear of immigration enforcement as key deterrents to enrollment. Eligibility for school meals remained high in North Texas, with Dallas and Tarrant counties exceeding 60% of the student population.

Housing instability also increased. Dallas and Collin counties saw significant growth in the number of students without permanent housing, while overcrowded housing became more common as families doubled up to manage rising rents. Despite growth in subsidized housing in suburban counties, Dallas County saw a decline in the use of housing vouchers, driven in part by landlord reluctance to accept them. Members of the economic security working group noted some landlords now refuse to sign rent verification letters, limiting access to rental assistance and increasing the risk of eviction.

Child care access remained a major concern. While licensed child care slots increased in some counties, the number of licensed facilities declined, particularly in Dallas and Tarrant counties. Providers cited rising liability insurance costs and administrative burdens as barriers to operating, and a recent state system transition disrupted subsidy access, leading to enrollment losses. Employer-supported child care and public-private partnerships were highlighted as promising but not yet widespread.

Nearly 40% of children in Dallas County and one-third in Tarrant County lived in single-parent households in 2023. These families face higher poverty rates and greater barriers to employment, housing and care.



Advisory Board economic security working group members called for expanded outreach to communities in need, streamlined benefit program enrollments and stronger cross-sector collaboration, emphasizing that without targeted investments in housing, nutrition, child care and transportation, economic insecurity issues will continue to undermine the well-being and development of children across North Texas.

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Ellis County has the highest percentage

**74.5%**

of families with both parents working



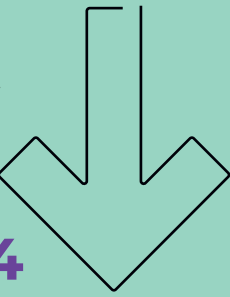
The number of families using housing vouchers **has been increasing across the region**



**1 in 5 Texas kids** suffer from food insecurity

Temporary Assistance for Needy Families enrollment for North Texas children

**dropped sharply from 2020 to 2024**



SNAP enrollment for children

**declined significantly** across North Texas from 2020 to 2024

**30.6% more** Dallas County students didn't have a permanent residence in 2024 than in 2020

Cooke County has the highest rate of children living in poverty:

**26%**



The number of licensed child care facilities **has declined regionally**



Children Living in Poverty

Number and percentage of children living in households earning less than the poverty level

Child poverty continues to shape the social and economic landscape of North Texas, with long-term consequences for health, academic achievement and intergenerational mobility of those affected. According to 2023 data, childhood poverty varied across the region.

While not the highest in North Texas, the Dallas County child poverty rate of 20.6% meant more than 135,000 children lived below the poverty line in 2023, the largest number of children in the region. Tarrant County followed with 82,647 children below the poverty line, or 15.3%. Both counties saw slight year-over-year declines in total numbers, but their volume underscores persistent challenges.

Suburban counties reported lower rates, reflecting potentially broader economic opportunity. Collin County's 7.1% child poverty rate was the lowest of all North Texas counties; Denton County had a slightly higher rate at 7.7%. Fewer than 20,000 children in each of these counties lived below the poverty line. In contrast, rural counties like Cooke and Fannin revealed disproportionate burdens. Cooke County's child poverty rate reached 26%, the highest in the region, while Fannin County reported a 16.8% rate.

| County  |            | 2019    | 2020    | 2021    | 2022    | 2023    |
|---------|------------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|
| Collin  | Number     | 17,875  | 17,488  | 19,246  | 18,927  | 19,760  |
|         | Percentage | 7.0     | 6.7     | 7.2     | 7.0     | 7.1     |
| Cooke   | Number     | 2,230   | 2,215   | 2,646   | 2,280   | 2,521   |
|         | Percentage | 24.6    | 24.0    | 27.6    | 24.3    | 26.0    |
| Dallas  | Number     | 158,902 | 149,035 | 142,988 | 136,235 | 135,136 |
|         | Percentage | 23.3    | 21.9    | 21.2    | 20.7    | 20.6    |
| Denton  | Number     | 17,390  | 17,629  | 17,236  | 18,182  | 17,111  |
|         | Percentage | 8.4     | 8.4     | 8.0     | 8.4     | 7.7     |
| Ellis   | Number     | 5,961   | 5,994   | 6,328   | 6,487   | 6,032   |
|         | Percentage | 13.0    | 12.7    | 12.7    | 12.7    | 11.3    |
| Fannin  | Number     | 993     | 923     | 1,008   | 1,012   | 1,286   |
|         | Percentage | 13.7    | 12.6    | 13.6    | 13.5    | 16.8    |
| Grayson | Number     | 5,729   | 5,599   | 5,474   | 5,071   | 5,171   |
|         | Percentage | 18.7    | 18.0    | 17.4    | 15.8    | 15.5    |
| Tarrant | Number     | 91,928  | 89,913  | 89,227  | 84,216  | 82,647  |
|         | Percentage | 17.1    | 16.6    | 16.4    | 15.7    | 15.3    |

Source: U.S. Census Bureau American Community Survey 2019 to 2023 five-year estimates

Nationally, the child poverty rate increased significantly from a historic low of 5.2% in 2021 to 15.3% in 2023, following the expiration of key COVID-19 pandemic policies such as the expanded Child Tax Credit.<sup>1</sup> These reversals have exposed children across the country, especially in vulnerable counties, to heightened food insecurity, housing instability and limited access to health care and early education.

According to the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering and Medicine, persistent exposure to poverty in early life is associated with developmental delays, chronic illness and diminished lifetime earnings.<sup>2</sup> The Children's Defense Fund also notes that



Black, Latino and Native children are twice as likely to experience poverty as white children.

Black, Latino and Native children are twice as likely to experience poverty compared to their white counterparts, due to longstanding disparities in income, employment and public investment.<sup>3</sup>

Children Receiving TANF

Average monthly number of children receiving basic and state program benefits under the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families program

The Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) program offers cash assistance to low-income families with children to cover basic needs, helping reduce risks to vulnerable children, such as food insecurity and poor health. Enrollment for children in North Texas dropped sharply from 2020 to 2024. Dallas County experienced the largest decline in numbers, decreasing from 2,680 in 2020 to 1,134 in 2024 (a 57.7% drop). Tarrant County also saw a significant reduction, falling from 1,867 to 757 (a 59.5% decrease). Collin County went from 301 to 198 (a 34.2% drop) and Denton from 267 to 166 (down 37.8%). Smaller counties faced even steeper declines during the past five years: Ellis from 111 to 47 (dropping 57.7%), Grayson from 116 to 44 (a 62.1% decrease), Fannin from 36 to 16 (down 55.6%) and Cooke from 30 to 10 (dipping 66.7%).

In most counties, enrollment reached its lowest point in 2023 before a slight rebound in 2024. The decline coincided with stricter eligibility requirements following the COVID-19 pandemic, and economic recovery efforts prompted fewer applications. The end of the continuous Medicaid enrollment provision in 2023 triggered a

| County  | *2020 | 2021  | 2022  | 2023 | 2024  |
|---------|-------|-------|-------|------|-------|
| Collin  | 301   | 255   | 162   | 170  | 198   |
| Cooke   | 30    | 36    | 20    | 8    | 10    |
| Dallas  | 2,680 | 1,841 | 1,108 | 927  | 1,134 |
| Denton  | 267   | 236   | 165   | 130  | 166   |
| Ellis   | 111   | 80    | 52    | 39   | 47    |
| Fannin  | 36    | 28    | 12    | 10   | 16    |
| Grayson | 116   | 91    | 60    | 48   | 44    |
| Tarrant | 1,867 | 1,340 | 857   | 676  | 757   |

Source: Texas Health and Human Services Commission, TANF annual reports  
\*Numbers for 2020 show a decrease compared to the previous Beyond ABC report, likely due to COVID-related data revisions

redetermination that resulted in the removal of some families due to procedural issues.<sup>1</sup>

These declines highlight possible gaps in support, especially in urban areas like Dallas and Tarrant counties, affecting thousands of children. The state's TANF enrollment for children decreased from 92,000 in 2020 to 62,000 in 2024 (a 32.6% drop).<sup>2</sup> Nationally, TANF caseloads fell from 1.1 million in 2020 to 900,000 in 2023 (an 18.2% reduction).<sup>3</sup> Stricter eligibility criteria in Texas and lower benefits partly explain the state's larger percentage decline.



Dallas County experienced a 57.7% decline in TANF enrollments from 2020 to 2024.

Housing Instability

Number of young people without a permanent residence

Housing instability continues to vary across North Texas. Dallas County had the most young people without permanent housing, rising from 7,248 in 2020 to 9,468 in 2024, a 30.6% increase. Tarrant County experienced fluctuations, dropping from 5,271 in 2020 to 4,308 in 2021 during the COVID-19 pandemic and then rising to 5,318 in 2024, reflecting a modest 0.9% overall increase. Collin County experienced a sharp rise from 1,071 to 1,493 over the five-year period (a 39.4% jump), while Denton County saw a slight decline from 1,556 to 1,529 (a 1.7% dip). Smaller counties presented mixed patterns. Ellis County declined from 449 to 384 (down 14.5%), suggesting possible localized improvements.

Grayson County peaked at 560 in 2023 before falling to 499 in 2024, while Fannin County rose from 93 to 110 (a 18.3% increase). Cooke County remained low but still increased slightly from 25 to 28 during the five years.

These shifts reflect broader socioeconomic forces, including rising housing costs, uneven recovery from the pandemic and limited affordable housing.<sup>1</sup> The upward trends in Dallas and Collin counties are particularly concerning. Post-pandemic evictions and escalating rent prices have disproportionately affected low-income families, pushing more children into unstable

| County  | 2020  | 2021  | 2022  | 2023  | 2024  |
|---------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|
| Collin  | 1,071 | 833   | 1,122 | 1,223 | 1,493 |
| Cooke   | 25    | 20    | 16    | 26    | 28    |
| Dallas  | 7,248 | 6,596 | 7,030 | 8,559 | 9,468 |
| Denton  | 1,556 | 1,379 | 1,344 | 1,474 | 1,529 |
| Ellis   | 449   | 341   | 360   | 389   | 384   |
| Fannin  | 93    | 55    | 61    | 89    | 110   |
| Grayson | 498   | 370   | 474   | 560   | 499   |
| Tarrant | 5,271 | 4,308 | 5,068 | 5,501 | 5,318 |

Source: Texas Education Agency Texas Academic Performance Reports, 2020 to 2024

living situations. The increases observed in 2023 and 2024 suggest pandemic recovery efforts did not adequately address the causes of housing insecurity.

Housing instability can create major challenges for pediatric care, as children in unstable housing are more likely to miss routine checkups, experience delays in immunizations and depend on emergency departments for nonurgent care. Care providers report difficulty managing chronic conditions, such as asthma and diabetes, when families lack steady shelter, refrigeration or transportation. Mental health issues (anxiety, depression and behavioral disorders) are also more common, often worsened by frequent school changes and family stress.<sup>2</sup> These disruptions strain hospital systems and make care coordination harder, especially for children with complex medical needs.



Texas student homelessness rate is higher than the national rate.

Texas reported 114,000 homeless students in 2022, with North Texas contributing significantly: Dallas and Tarrant counties accounted for an estimated 12% to 15% of the total.<sup>3</sup> The Texas student homelessness rate of 1.5% surpasses the national average of 1.2%, or 1.4 million children nationwide.<sup>4</sup>

Subsidized Housing

Number of families using housing choice vouchers

| County  |                                   | 2020   | 2021   | 2022   | 2023   | 2024   |
|---------|-----------------------------------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|
| Collin  | Number of families using vouchers | 2,242  | 2,477  | 2,602  | 2,963  | 3,434  |
|         | Number of authorized vouchers     | 2,806  | 2,975  | 3,293  | 3,704  | 4,093  |
| Cooke   | Number of families using vouchers | 175    | 213    | 233    | 248    | 248    |
|         | Number of authorized vouchers     | 398    | 390    | 386    | 382    | 382    |
| Dallas  | Number of families using vouchers | 21,107 | 20,908 | 20,245 | 19,669 | 19,992 |
|         | Number of authorized vouchers     | 25,138 | 24,554 | 24,109 | 23,280 | 22,374 |
| Denton  | Number of families using vouchers | 2,787  | 3,350  | 3,385  | 3,699  | 3,947  |
|         | Number of authorized vouchers     | 3,297  | 3,671  | 3,824  | 4,123  | 4,253  |
| Ellis   | Number of families using vouchers | 381    | 380    | 400    | 427    | 465    |
|         | Number of authorized vouchers     | 636    | 635    | 616    | 517    | 498    |
| Fannin  | Number of families using vouchers | 126    | 383    | 307    | 371    | 414    |
|         | Number of authorized vouchers     | 198    | 547    | 448    | 516    | 522    |
| Grayson | Number of families using vouchers | 585    | 753    | 734    | 751    | 780    |
|         | Number of authorized vouchers     | 863    | 1,050  | 1,065  | 1,005  | 989    |
| Tarrant | Number of families using vouchers | 12,397 | 12,850 | 12,854 | 13,172 | 13,445 |
|         | Number of authorized vouchers     | 13,753 | 13,996 | 14,371 | 14,904 | 15,111 |

Source: U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development Assisted Housing: National and local data, 2024

The Housing Choice Voucher (HCV) program supports low-income families by subsidizing rent in the private market, aiming to provide housing stability, reduce homelessness, improve health disparities and support child development.

The number of families using vouchers in Collin County increased 53.2% from 2020 to 2024, from 2,242 to 3,434 families, with the number of authorized vouchers rising from 2,806 to 4,093. The number of Denton County families rose 41.7%, with authorized vouchers growing 29%. Tarrant County saw more modest growth, with the number of families rising less than 5%. Smaller counties also saw gains: Ellis families grew 22%, Grayson by 33%, Cooke by

42% and Fannin by a significant 229%. The number of families in Dallas County declined 5%, with authorized vouchers dropping to 22,374 in 2024 from 25,138 in 2020. Utilization rates (families using vs. authorized vouchers) remained high, averaging 80% to 95% across the region.

Growth in Collin, Denton and Fannin counties reflects suburban expansion and rising housing costs, which in turn increase demand. Dallas County's decline aligns with landlord reluctance, with only 9% accepting vouchers in 2020.<sup>1</sup> In Dallas County, 19,992 families (about 46,000 people, assuming 2.3 per household) are using vouchers, demonstrating significant coverage, but unmet demand persists due to voucher shortages.<sup>2</sup>



The majority of housing voucher recipients are households with children, older adults or people with disabilities.

Texas had 285,000 voucher-assisted households in 2024, reaching 634,800 people. The majority of these households included children, older adults or people with disabilities.<sup>3</sup>

Child Food Insecurity

Number and percentage of children who lack access to enough food for an active, healthy life

Hunger can have numerous adverse effects on children’s growth and well-being, as it can raise the risk of anemia, asthma and other chronic conditions<sup>1</sup> and hamper healthy brain and body development, affecting thinking, learning and behavior.<sup>2</sup> Food-insecure children are more likely to perform poorly in school due to a lack of focus and increased stress levels.<sup>3</sup>

Child food insecurity in the United States results from poverty, unemployment and low wages, making it hard for families to afford nutritious food. High housing costs also force many to choose between rent and groceries. Discrimination can worsen food insecurity, putting children in low-income and marginalized communities at higher risk of hunger and its long-term effects.<sup>4</sup> Geography matters: 90% of the most food-insecure counties in the United States are rural, with limited access to groceries, transportation and well-paying jobs.<sup>5</sup>

Feeding America reports nearly 5.4 million Texans face food insecurity, the highest number in the country, and children make up an estimated one-third of that amount. The Dallas-Fort Worth area ranks third nationally for food insecurity after New York City and Los Angeles. About 1.3 million North Texas

| County  |            |  | 2019    | 2020    | 2021    | 2022    | 2023    |
|---------|------------|--|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|
| Collin  | Number     |  | 34,000  | 31,040  | 27,330  | 40,060  | 43,210  |
|         | Percentage |  | 13.3    | 11.9    | 10.2    | 14.7    | 15.4    |
| Cooke   | Number     |  | 2,050   | 2,030   | 1,900   | 2,320   | 2,450   |
|         | Percentage |  | 21.5    | 21.1    | 19.2    | 24.0    | 24.6    |
| Dallas  | Number     |  | 139,800 | 161,260 | 134,560 | 166,590 | 162,390 |
|         | Percentage |  | 20.3    | 23.5    | 19.8    | 25.0    | 24.5    |
| Denton  | Number     |  | 28,860  | 27,910  | 23,620  | 34,320  | 35,980  |
|         | Percentage |  | 13.8    | 13.1    | 10.9    | 15.7    | 16.0    |
| Ellis   | Number     |  | 7,840   | 7,780   | 7,060   | 9,970   | 10,140  |
|         | Percentage |  | 16.8    | 16.3    | 14.0    | 19.4    | 18.8    |
| Fannin  | Number     |  | 1,400   | 1,220   | 1,200   | 1,640   | 1,770   |
|         | Percentage |  | 19.2    | 16.5    | 15.9    | 21.5    | 22.7    |
| Grayson | Number     |  | 6,660   | 6,170   | 5,570   | 7,390   | 7,870   |
|         | Percentage |  | 21.4    | 19.5    | 17.3    | 22.7    | 23.3    |
| Tarrant | Number     |  | 100,290 | 108,870 | 93,320  | 119,460 | 120,050 |
|         | Percentage |  | 18.4    | 19.9    | 17.0    | 21.9    | 21.9    |

Source: Feeding America, hunger research, Map the Meal Gap

residents are affected, with more than 60% of them living in Dallas and Tarrant counties.<sup>6</sup>

About 18% to 25% of North Texas children are estimated to be food insecure as compared to approximately 14% to 19% of U.S. children.<sup>7</sup> Dallas County reported 162,390 children (24.5%) were food insecure, well above the national rate. Collin and Denton counties have lower percentage estimates, 15.4% and 16% respectively, while Tarrant County’s 21.9% estimate is more in line with that of Dallas County. Rural counties had some of the highest regional percentage estimates of food-insecure children: Cooke at 24.6%, Grayson at 23.3%, Fannin at 22.7% and Ellis at 18.8%.



1.3 million North Texans are affected by food insecurity.

These high estimates highlight the need for coordinated community-based interventions to address child food insecurity across the region.

SNAP Enrollment

Average monthly enrollment of children under 18 in the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program

Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) enrollment for children under 18 declined significantly across North Texas from 2020 to 2024. SNAP provides vital nutritional support to low-income families, ensuring children have access to sufficient food to promote better health, cognitive development and academic performance.<sup>1</sup>

Dallas County’s enrollment dropped from 186,146 to 147,979 (a 20.5% dip), and Tarrant County went from 120,951 to 101,828 (a 15.8% decrease). Collin and Denton counties experienced sharper declines, from 22,552 to 17,621 (down 21.9%) and 23,205 to 16,622 (a 28.4% decline), respectively. Cooke County experienced the largest enrollment decline, from 2,353 to 1,424 (a 39.5% drop).

Higher enrollments in 2020 reflected federal responses to the COVID-19 pandemic, including emergency SNAP allotments and relaxed eligibility criteria under the Families First Coronavirus Response Act,<sup>2</sup> which expanded access and boosted participation. The declines in North Texas between 2022 and 2024 align with the termination of emergency allotments in March 2023 and the reintroduction of stricter eligibility

| County  | 2020    | 2021    | 2022    | 2023    | 2024    |
|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|
| Collin  | 22,552  | 20,601  | 21,634  | 20,952  | 17,621  |
| Cooke   | 2,353   | 2,109   | 2,100   | 1,966   | 1,424   |
| Dallas  | 186,146 | 164,711 | 171,188 | 164,208 | 147,979 |
| Denton  | 23,205  | 20,983  | 22,383  | 21,675  | 16,622  |
| Ellis   | 8,549   | 7,625   | 8,293   | 8,116   | 7,711   |
| Fannin  | 1,647   | 1,490   | 1,491   | 1,506   | 1,463   |
| Grayson | 7,307   | 6,413   | 6,767   | 6,375   | 5,649   |
| Tarrant | 120,951 | 106,872 | 112,972 | 109,712 | 101,828 |

Source: Texas Health and Human Services Commission, research and statistics: Texas TANF and SNAP Enrollment Statistics

requirements.<sup>3</sup> Economic recovery and rising employment may have reduced perceived need, but procedural barriers, such as complex paperwork and limited outreach, can present significant enrollment barriers. Rural counties, such as Cooke and Fannin, faced challenges due to inadequate access to enrollment support and digital resources.

Texas SNAP enrollment dropped from 1.9 million in 2020 to 1.6 million in 2024, a 15.8% decline. Nationally, SNAP enrollment for children fell from 17.2 million to 15.1 million during that period, a 12.2% decrease.<sup>4</sup>

To address declining enrollments, Texas could streamline SNAP application processes by leveraging automated systems<sup>5</sup> and expanding outreach through community partnerships and



15.8% drop in Texas SNAP enrollment from 2020 to 2024.

multilingual resources. Mobile enrollment units, digital processes and targeted outreach with simplified enrollment are crucial to ensure vulnerable children receive vital nutritional support.<sup>6</sup>

School Meal Eligibility

Number and percentage of children eligible to receive free or reduced-priced meals in public schools

Food insecurity happens when families lack consistent access to affordable, nutritious food. Key drivers of food insecurity and hunger include financial hardship, high living costs and rising food prices, which make it hard to balance food with other essentials like housing, child care and health care.<sup>1</sup> Childhood hunger and malnutrition can cause weaker school performance and elevate risks of cardiovascular disease, certain cancers, diabetes and developmental issues. Programs offering free or low-cost meals at school to at-risk children are vital in fighting food insecurity.<sup>2</sup>

Between 2020 and 2024, the percentage of students eligible for school meals in Dallas County stayed stable, from 73.1% to 74.8%. Dallas had the highest number and percentage of eligible children in North Texas, with nearly 363,500 enrolled in 2024. Tarrant County reported 62.4% of students were eligible for free or reduced-fee meals in 2024. Collin County had a much lower percentage, 25.5%, than surrounding counties. Denton County's eligibility percentage increased from 34.7% in 2020 to 38.2% in 2024, while Ellis County's eligible students grew from 51.2% to 56.7%. Rural counties like Fannin, Grayson and Cooke reported more

| County  |            | 2020    | 2021    | 2022    | 2023    | 2024    |
|---------|------------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|
| Collin  | Number     | 52,824  | 53,957  | 53,563  | 59,959  | 62,576  |
|         | Percentage | 23.8    | 24.2    | 23.2    | 25.0    | 25.5    |
| Cooke   | Number     | 3,672   | 3,497   | 3,287   | 3,457   | 3,697   |
|         | Percentage | 54.7    | 52.8    | 48.1    | 50.5    | 53.9    |
| Dallas  | Number     | 375,786 | 363,765 | 360,980 | 363,940 | 363,489 |
|         | Percentage | 73.1    | 73.1    | 73.2    | 74.3    | 74.8    |
| Denton  | Number     | 47,163  | 45,713  | 49,433  | 53,614  | 55,098  |
|         | Percentage | 34.7    | 34.3    | 35.7    | 37.7    | 38.2    |
| Ellis   | Number     | 20,543  | 20,077  | 23,452  | 23,257  | 25,308  |
|         | Percentage | 51.2    | 50.0    | 56.4    | 53.3    | 56.7    |
| Fannin  | Number     | 3,152   | 2,867   | 2,860   | 3,094   | 3,206   |
|         | Percentage | 56.8    | 53.3    | 52.4    | 57.2    | 58.8    |
| Grayson | Number     | 13,107  | 12,948  | 14,220  | 14,078  | 14,197  |
|         | Percentage | 54.9    | 54.7    | 58.1    | 56.1    | 55.8    |
| Tarrant | Number     | 212,703 | 204,578 | 203,975 | 212,862 | 211,524 |
|         | Percentage | 59.2    | 59.2    | 59.3    | 61.8    | 62.4    |

Source: Texas Academic Reports 2020 to 2024, Economically Disadvantaged Students

than half of students were eligible for school meals from 2020 to 2024.

Texas has the largest food-insecure population in the nation, and 1 in 5 children in the state are affected.<sup>3</sup> Nationally, nearly 14 million children experience food insecurity.<sup>4</sup>

In addition to offering the school meal program, the U.S. Department of Agriculture supports child nutrition via the National School Lunch Program (NSLP) and Summer Food Service Program, offering free meals in low-income areas. Many children lose access to nutritious school meals when the school year ends.<sup>5</sup> Through NSLP and other programs, eligible children have access to snacks or meals



Texas: the largest food-insecure population in the nation.

when participating in after-school activities. Additionally, the Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Program supplies elementary students with free or reduced-price meals, allocating \$50 to \$75 per child each year.<sup>6</sup>

Children Living in Single-parent Families

Number and percentage of children living in families with one parent

In 2023, approximately 23.5 million U.S. children lived in single-parent families, accounting for about 1 in 3 children nationwide.<sup>1</sup> Both this number and percentage have steadily increased over the past 50 years due to an increase in single mothers having children and a decline in marriage rates.<sup>2</sup> In Texas, an estimated 34% of children live in single-parent homes.<sup>3</sup> Dallas County has the highest proportion of children residing in single-parent households in North Texas over the five-year period, with an estimated 39.2% in 2023.

Tarrant County saw a slight decline, from 34.8% in 2019 to 33.1% of children living with one parent in 2023. Collin and Denton remained relatively stable, with Collin at 19.6% and Denton at 22.4% in 2023. Rural counties Cooke and Grayson similarly showed gradual declines in numbers and percentages, with Cooke falling from 2,891 (33.9%) children living in single-parent homes in 2019 to 2,642 (28.4%) in 2023, as Grayson moved from 34% to 31%. Conversely, Ellis and Fannin counties experienced increases, with Ellis rising from 25.6% in 2019 to 29.6% in 2023 and Fannin moving upward from 21.4% to 29.8%.

U.S. Census Bureau data shows more than 70% of the nearly 10 million single-parent families with children

| County  |            | 2019    | 2020    | 2021    | 2022    | 2023    |
|---------|------------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|
| Collin  | Number     | 48,836  | 50,672  | 50,522  | 50,118  | 53,476  |
|         | Percentage | 19.6    | 19.9    | 19.3    | 19.0    | 19.6    |
| Cooke   | Number     | 2,891   | 2,886   | 3,012   | 2,741   | 2,642   |
|         | Percentage | 33.9    | 33.2    | 32.7    | 30.4    | 28.4    |
| Dallas  | Number     | 264,375 | 264,485 | 260,525 | 251,566 | 247,179 |
|         | Percentage | 40.3    | 40.4    | 40.1    | 39.5    | 39.2    |
| Denton  | Number     | 46,029  | 45,364  | 46,236  | 47,877  | 48,971  |
|         | Percentage | 22.8    | 22.0    | 22.0    | 22.5    | 22.4    |
| Ellis   | Number     | 11,329  | 12,387  | 13,564  | 14,522  | 15,429  |
|         | Percentage | 25.6    | 27.1    | 28.0    | 29.2    | 29.6    |
| Fannin  | Number     | 1,463   | 1,598   | 1,748   | 1,885   | 2,113   |
|         | Percentage | 21.4    | 22.9    | 24.9    | 26.9    | 29.8    |
| Grayson | Number     | 9,862   | 10,324  | 9,826   | 9,754   | 9,768   |
|         | Percentage | 34.0    | 34.7    | 32.8    | 31.8    | 31.0    |
| Tarrant | Number     | 181,274 | 181,891 | 178,936 | 174,512 | 173,664 |
|         | Percentage | 34.8    | 34.8    | 34.0    | 33.5    | 33.1    |

Source: U.S. Census Bureau American Community Survey, five-year data

under 18 are led by single mothers, and about one-third live in poverty. These households face greater economic and social vulnerabilities than two-parent families.<sup>4</sup> In 2023, single-mother families faced a poverty rate of 32.2%, almost six times higher than the 5.7% rate for married-couple families.<sup>5</sup> In the long term, this can perpetuate generational poverty.<sup>6</sup> Compared to children who grow up in two-parent households, those from single-parent families have been more likely to drop out of high school, become teenage parents and be unemployed.<sup>7</sup>

Comprehensive policies supporting single-headed households are vital for reducing poverty and enhancing child well-being. These policies



34% of Texas children live in single-parent homes.

can include refundable tax credits, affordable housing and access to nutritious food.<sup>8</sup> Workforce programs that offer skill development and paid leave can help parents secure better-paying jobs and manage parenting alongside work.

Families with All Parents Working

Number and percentage of families with children with both present parents employed or serving in the armed forces

The number of families with both parents in the labor force increased across most North Texas counties from 2019 to 2023, reflecting demographic shifts and economic recovery following the COVID-19 pandemic. In Collin County, about two-thirds of households with children had both parents working in 2023, a relatively unchanged proportion from 2019, but increasing in number by 10.8% due to population growth. Denton County saw a larger rise, from 69.8% to 70.3%. Ellis County experienced the most significant growth, climbing from 69.8% of households with children to 74.5% over that period. Tarrant County’s numbers grew modestly, from 67.4% of families to 69%, while Grayson County rose from 70.5% to 71.3%. Cooke County decreased from 71.5% to 69.2%, a slight percentage dip despite growth in numbers, while Fannin County saw a similar decrease, from 66.1% to 64.3%. Notably, Dallas County saw a decline in numbers, dropping from 182,398 (63.7%) in 2019 to 178,297 (64.7%) in 2023 due to population decline, despite a marginal percentage uptick.

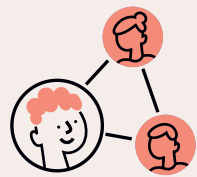
Families with both parents working contribute significantly to regional productivity, yet they face steep child care costs averaging \$10,000 annually, placing pressure on

| County  |            | 2019    | 2020    | 2021    | 2022    | 2023    |
|---------|------------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|
| Collin  | Number     | 88,748  | 90,998  | 92,167  | 94,652  | 98,324  |
|         | Percentage | 66.0    | 66.1    | 64.7    | 65.2    | 66.0    |
| Cooke   | Number     | 3,100   | 3,212   | 3,518   | 3,579   | 3,517   |
|         | Percentage | 71.5    | 71.5    | 70.9    | 71.5    | 69.2    |
| Dallas  | Number     | 182,398 | 183,786 | 180,219 | 178,754 | 178,297 |
|         | Percentage | 63.7    | 64.2    | 63.8    | 64.2    | 64.7    |
| Denton  | Number     | 72,386  | 74,130  | 79,632  | 81,402  | 84,985  |
|         | Percentage | 69.8    | 69.8    | 70.1    | 69.9    | 70.3    |
| Ellis   | Number     | 14,210  | 15,265  | 16,666  | 17,875  | 18,338  |
|         | Percentage | 69.8    | 71.1    | 72.7    | 75.4    | 74.5    |
| Fannin  | Number     | 2,080   | 2,030   | 2,004   | 2,167   | 2,295   |
|         | Percentage | 66.1    | 66.0    | 63.2    | 63.3    | 64.3    |
| Grayson | Number     | 9,640   | 10,184  | 10,562  | 10,424  | 10,514  |
|         | Percentage | 70.5    | 73.5    | 73.4    | 72.4    | 71.3    |
| Tarrant | Number     | 161,714 | 161,635 | 163,033 | 163,404 | 165,950 |
|         | Percentage | 67.4    | 67.9    | 67.4    | 68.1    | 69.0    |

Source: U.S. Census Bureau: American Communities Survey, five-year estimates

household budgets.<sup>1</sup> The high percentage of working families in Ellis County (74.5%) suggests strong workforce integration, while Dallas’ lower rate (64.7%) underscores persistent barriers that can affect child development and family stability.<sup>2</sup>

Texas reported 67% of families with all parents of children working between 2021 and 2023, which is slightly below the national average of 68%.<sup>3</sup> Dallas County (64.7%) lags the state rate, while suburban and rural counties, such as Denton (70.3%) and Cooke (69.2%), mostly meet or exceed the state level. Expanding access to affordable child care and implementing flexible workplace policies remain possible



Families with both parents working contribute significantly to regional productivity.

solutions to supporting these families and increasing labor force participation.<sup>4</sup>

Eligible Children in Subsidized Child Care

Number of children receiving free or reduced-price child care

Subsidized child care in Texas is predominantly funded by the federal Child Care and Development Fund, with the Texas Workforce Commission (TWC) serving as the central administrative agency for the funds.<sup>1</sup> Through local Workforce Solutions offices, eligible low-income families with children under 13 can receive subsidized child care to support parents’ employment, education or training. They may choose care from licensed centers, private homes or family members.<sup>2</sup> Across Texas, about 60% of child care providers receive subsidies through TWC. Yet families who qualify for subsidies often struggle to find quality providers, as more than 90,000 children were on the waitlist in September 2024. In total, more than half a million low-income children ages 5 and under with working parents still lack access to affordable care.<sup>3</sup>

Participation in the Texas Rising Star quality rating and improvement system for early childhood programs has grown, with a 41% increase in providers from 2023 to 2024. Even though daily capacity for subsidized care is around 100,000, nearly 485,000 eligible young children remain unserved.<sup>4</sup>

Access to affordable child care often determines whether parents, especially mothers, can return to work or increase their working

| County                    | 2020   | 2021   | 2022   | 2023   | 2024   |
|---------------------------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|
| Collin, Denton and Ellis  | 7,123  | 5,817  | 5,522  | 6,096  | 8,241  |
| Cooke, Fannin and Grayson | 1,284  | 1,462  | 1,846  | 1,757  | 1,680  |
| Dallas                    | 21,940 | 20,863 | 22,102 | 24,810 | 22,933 |
| Tarrant                   | 10,883 | 9,918  | 13,944 | 15,486 | 12,224 |

Source: Workforce Solutions for North Central Texas, Workforce Solutions Greater Dallas, Tarrant Workforce Solutions, Texoma Workforce Solutions

hours. Affordable child care also reduces poverty and boosts long-term earnings. Research shows that removing child care costs could lower child poverty from 11% to 7.4% and increase lifetime earnings for mothers.<sup>5</sup> Early childhood is crucial for developing the social, emotional and academic skills needed to succeed later in life.<sup>6</sup> Children who participate in early childhood education have longer attention spans, higher test scores and increased productivity as adults.<sup>7</sup>

Subsidized child care enrollment in North Texas reflected declines and rebounds between 2020 and 2024. Collin, Denton and Ellis counties saw an early decline but recovered by 2024, growing above 2020 levels. Meanwhile, the smaller counties Cooke, Fannin and Grayson peaked in 2022 and reported slight declines afterward.

Dallas County maintained the highest number of enrolled eligible children in subsidized care for all five years. Enrollment in Dallas and Tarrant counties declined in 2021 due to COVID-19 pandemic-related



Affordable child care often determines whether parents can return to work.

economic disruptions but recovered in 2022. Similar patterns were seen elsewhere in the region. By 2022, most counties had recovered, and overall enrollment across the region remained above pre-pandemic levels in 2024.

ACCESS TO CHILD CARE

Licensed Child Care Slots

Number of slots that meet standards and are licensed, registered or listed under the child care licensing program within the Texas Department of Family and Protective Services

| County  | 2020   | 2021   | 2022   | 2023   | 2024   |
|---------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|
| Collin  | 70,475 | 71,767 | 75,203 | 78,408 | 75,369 |
| Cooke   | 1,259  | 1,170  | 1,233  | 1,241  | 1,473  |
| Dallas  | 95,283 | 92,106 | 95,537 | 98,282 | 99,663 |
| Denton  | 45,053 | 43,572 | 44,876 | 46,159 | 45,127 |
| Ellis   | 7,846  | 7,561  | 7,642  | 8,141  | 8,044  |
| Fannin  | 719    | 704    | 644    | 644    | 653    |
| Grayson | 3,608  | 3,723  | 3,814  | 4,064  | 4,011  |
| Tarrant | 84,441 | 81,911 | 83,323 | 88,689 | 89,802 |

Source: Texas Health and Human Services Commission Child Care Licensing Data Book, 2020 to 2024

Licensed Child Care Facilities

Number of child care operations that meet standards and are licensed, registered or listed under the child care licensing program within the Texas Department of Family and Protective Services

| County  | 2020  | 2021  | 2022  | 2023  | 2024  |
|---------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|
| Collin  | 735   | 698   | 683   | 688   | 697   |
| Cooke   | 30    | 31    | 28    | 25    | 25    |
| Dallas  | 1,417 | 1,310 | 1,275 | 1,264 | 1,221 |
| Denton  | 593   | 547   | 523   | 526   | 525   |
| Ellis   | 108   | 105   | 102   | 111   | 114   |
| Fannin  | 13    | 11    | 12    | 12    | 11    |
| Grayson | 81    | 83    | 87    | 89    | 84    |
| Tarrant | 1,306 | 1,198 | 1,157 | 1,186 | 1,151 |

Source: Texas Health and Human Services Commission Child Care Licensing Data Book, 2020 to 2024



Dallas has actively advanced **employer-supported child care** initiatives.

The Dallas Regional Chamber reports employer child care benefits are gaining traction at the state and county levels, including a Dallas County pilot program that gives incentives to employers to provide child care subsidies to employees, with the county matching those contributions. The public-private collaboration not only enhances affordability for families but also strengthens the sustainability of the child care system.<sup>3</sup>

Additionally, the YMCA of Metropolitan Dallas, in partnership with ChildCareGroup, is constructing a two-story child care center in downtown Dallas that will serve 304 children from 6 months to 6 years of age, offering care near workplaces. Dallas County has contributed partial funding to the project.<sup>4</sup> Workforce Solutions for North Central Texas administers the Child Care Services for low-income families to assist with child care costs. It also promotes quality improvement through the Texas Rising Star rating system and Public PreK Partnerships to integrate educational continuum with care services.<sup>5</sup>

Between 2020 and 2024, licensed child care slots remained at relatively high levels, though counties displayed differing trends. Collin County increased steadily from 70,475 slots to a peak of 78,408 in 2023, then declined to 75,369 in 2024. Dallas County grew consistently, from 95,283 to 99,663 slots, making it the county with the largest capacity and the most stable growth. Tarrant County also expanded significantly, from 84,441 to 89,802 slots. In contrast, Denton County fluctuated modestly, reaching 46,159 in 2023 before decreasing to 45,127 in 2024. Smaller counties such as Cooke, Ellis and Grayson experienced gradual increases, while Fannin County remained relatively small, decreasing from 719 to 653 slots during the period.

In terms of facilities, the number of licensed child care operations declined overall from 2020 to 2024. Dallas County saw the largest decrease, dropping from 1,417 facilities in 2020 to 1,221 in 2024. Tarrant County decreased from 1,306 to 1,151, while Denton County fell from 593 to 525. Collin County reported 735 facilities in 2020, declining to 683 in 2022 before recovering slightly to 697 in 2024. By contrast, Ellis County increased from 108 to 114 facilities, and Grayson County rose from 81 to 84, while Fannin County remained stable, moving from 13 to 11 throughout the period.

A child care facility is the physical building or location where care is

provided, while a child care program is the organized set of activities, services and supervision offered within that facility.

The child care sector experienced a severe national contraction in slot availability during the COVID-19 pandemic. According to Child Care Aware, between 2019 and 2021, 8,899 licensed child care centers and 6,957 family child care programs closed permanently, eliminating thousands of child care slots and disproportionately affecting low-income families and rural areas. The report highlights staffing shortages and financial strain combined to create major supply gaps, leaving families with fewer stable and affordable options for care.<sup>1</sup> Child Care Aware data shows that while the number of child care centers largely returned to pre-pandemic levels by 2023, child care programs have continued to decline since 2022, exacerbating access inequities.<sup>2</sup> In comparison, major counties in North Texas have generally seen child care slots rebound and expand, yet the number of licensed facilities has continued to decline, particularly in larger counties, reflecting the contraction observed nationwide.

Licensed child care slots and facilities are essential indicators for assessing whether early childhood education and care (ECEC) systems achieve equity and inclusiveness. Monitoring slots highlights system capacity and participation potential, while tracking facilities reflects the distribution and coverage of care.

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Ethan, age 13, Dallas County

**A complex interplay of environmental, systemic and interpersonal factors shapes the safety of children in North Texas.** While some indicators in this section show progress, others reveal persistent or emerging threats to the well-being of the region’s children. They face risks from abuse and neglect, unintentional injuries, gun violence and substance use – each with long-term consequences for their health, development and opportunities as adults.

Hospitalizations for traumatic injuries remain high, particularly in urban counties, with falls, vehicle crashes and firearms among the leading causes. Gunfire-related emergency department visits among children have risen steadily in Dallas and Tarrant counties, underscoring the need for firearm safety education and secure storage practices. Substance-related risks are also growing: Pediatric emergency department visits for drug use have climbed, and school-based disciplinary actions for possession of controlled substances have more than doubled in some counties since 2020.

Child abuse and neglect, while declining in confirmed cases, remain deeply concerning. Beyond ABC Advisory Board members report changes in Child Protective Services definitions and privatization of programs have created service gaps, especially for children with complex needs. Emergency shelter placements have spiked in some counties, and rising foster care caseloads and limited placement options strain foster care systems. Meanwhile, youth commitments to the Texas Juvenile Justice Department have rebounded post-pandemic, prompting calls for expanded diversion and restorative justice programs.

The Advisory Board’s safety working group emphasized the growing mental health burden on children and families, exacerbated by economic stress, social isolation and trauma. Parents often lack the tools or support to navigate their children’s behavioral health needs, especially in the face of rapidly evolving digital threats. Internet exploitation, grooming and trafficking – often by individuals known to the child – are increasingly common yet difficult to detect and disrupt. In response to these challenges, safety group members stressed the need for trauma-informed care, cross-sector collaboration and culturally responsive education.

Despite these concerns, promising practices are emerging. Community-based programs, school partnerships and advocacy centers are working to fill systemic gaps. However, without stable funding, coordinated protocols and a shared commitment to prevention, the safety net remains fragile. Ensuring every child’s safety requires not only vigilance, but also sustained investment in the systems and relationships that protect them.



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Cooke County has the **highest rate** of child abuse victims in the region

**4 of 5** North Texas children killed with a gun are children of color

Child mortality rose in Collin County **from 2020 to 2024**

**10% increase** in unintentional deaths of Texans 20 and under since 2020

Child Protective Services worker caseloads are **declining across the region**

Alcohol/controlled-substance discipline cases at North Texas public schools **increased from 2020 to 2024**

**21%+** of Texas youth have seriously considered suicide

North Texas commitments to Texas Juvenile Justice Department **dropped 17% from 2019 to 2023**

CHILD ABUSE AND NEGLECT

Confirmed Victims of Child Abuse and Neglect

Number of Child Protective Services confirmed cases and rate per 1,000 children

| County  |        | 2020  | 2021  | 2022  | 2023  | 2024  |
|---------|--------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|
| Collin  | Number | 1,149 | 1,278 | 1,096 | 1,094 | 998   |
|         | Rate   | 4.50  | 4.90  | 4.10  | 4.08  | 3.66  |
| Cooke   | Number | 210   | 148   | 163   | 116   | 97    |
|         | Rate   | 23.40 | 16.50 | 18.20 | 12.96 | 10.70 |
| Dallas  | Number | 7,145 | 6,679 | 5,818 | 5,702 | 4,888 |
|         | Rate   | 9.80  | 9.10  | 7.80  | 7.61  | 6.47  |
| Denton  | Number | 1,568 | 1,480 | 1,088 | 1,148 | 1,148 |
|         | Rate   | 7.40  | 6.90  | 5.00  | 5.22  | 5.13  |
| Ellis   | Number | 336   | 278   | 260   | 285   | 328   |
|         | Rate   | 7.49  | 6.15  | 5.69  | 6.16  | 7.02  |
| Fannin  | Number | 117   | 84    | 75    | 57    | 51    |
|         | Rate   | 16.80 | 12.10 | 10.80 | 8.28  | 7.43  |
| Grayson | Number | 464   | 356   | 268   | 258   | 176   |
|         | Rate   | 15.20 | 11.50 | 8.60  | 8.26  | 5.62  |
| Tarrant | Number | 6,203 | 6,511 | 5,506 | 5,332 | 4,719 |
|         | Rate   | 11.50 | 11.90 | 10.00 | 9.65  | 8.48  |

Source: Texas Department of Family and Protective Services: Annual reports and data books, 2020 to 2024

Deaths from Child Abuse and Neglect

Number of deaths confirmed by the Department of Family and Protective Services

| County  |  | 2020 | 2021 | 2022 | 2023 | 2024 |
|---------|--|------|------|------|------|------|
| Collin  |  | 7    | 2    | 1    | 7    | 2    |
| Cooke   |  | 1    | 0    | 0    | 0    | 0    |
| Dallas  |  | 24   | 18   | 7    | 13   | 4    |
| Denton  |  | 3    | 3    | 7    | 1    | 0    |
| Ellis   |  | 2    | 1    | 2    | 3    | 1    |
| Fannin  |  | 0    | 0    | 1    | 0    | 1    |
| Grayson |  | 2    | 1    | 1    | 0    | 1    |
| Tarrant |  | 15   | 12   | 13   | 14   | 6    |

Source: Texas Department of Family and Protective Services: Annual reports and data books, 2020 to 2024

Child abuse trends in North Texas reveal both encouraging progress and ongoing challenges. While confirmed cases of abuse and neglect have decreased in most North Texas counties, this decline does not tell the whole story. Geographic disparities exist, particularly in rural and rapidly growing suburban areas, where gaps in access to protective services, trauma care and long-term support place vulnerable children at heightened risk.

In 2024, Dallas County reported 4,888 confirmed cases, down from 5,702 in 2023 and 7,145 in 2020. Tarrant County followed a similar pattern, with 4,719 cases in 2024 compared to 5,332 in 2023. Denton County reported 1,148 cases in 2024, down from 1,568 in 2020, while Collin County saw a decline from 1,149 in 2020 to 998 in 2024.

Smaller counties, like Cooke and Fannin, remain disproportionately affected. Cooke County reported 10.7 confirmed victims per 1,000 children in 2024, the highest rate in the region, with Fannin at 7.43 per 1,000.<sup>1</sup>

Ellis County has shown a steady increase in recent years in the number of reported child abuse and neglect cases. As with many rural and semirural areas, infrastructure for protective services often struggles to keep pace with population growth and rising service demands. These counties frequently lack the investigative and child protection personnel, transportation access and trauma-informed systems needed

to ensure timely intervention. As a result, children and families may not receive the resources they need during and after investigations.

Fewer confirmed cases do not always reflect reduced harm. Children’s Advocacy Centers of Texas reports significant delays in access to trauma services, especially in rural communities, where wait times for counseling or forensic interviews can stretch for weeks.<sup>2</sup> These delays contribute to underreporting and incomplete investigations, leaving some children unprotected and without timely support. The gap between confirmed harm and real harm underscores the need for better service access in underserved areas.

Meanwhile, child fatalities due to abuse and neglect continue, although from 2020 to 2024, child deaths in North Texas dropped from 54 to 15. Child deaths in Dallas County declined from 24 to four and Tarrant County went from 15 to six. In Denton County, deaths decreased from three in 2020 to zero in 2024, after jumping to seven in 2022. These trends suggest that while prevention may be improving in some counties, others remain vulnerable due to capacity or oversight gaps, particularly those experiencing rapid suburban expansion without a proportional increase in services.

State-level policy reforms have played a role in driving positive change. The Family First Prevention Services Act enabled funding shifts from child removal to in-home, evidence-based services that prioritize keeping



Fewer confirmed cases of child abuse and neglect do not always reflect reduced harm.

families together safely.<sup>3</sup> Additionally, House Bill 63 expanded support for families under investigation where children remain in the home. These services include mental health care, parenting education and substance-use treatment.<sup>4</sup> Such interventions are critical, as nearly 80% of abuse-related child deaths involve children under age 3, and parental stress, isolation and untreated mental health conditions remain strong predictors of harm.<sup>5</sup>

Yet access to these resources remains uneven. The Child Maltreatment Fatalities Report from the Texas Department of Family and Protective Services highlights that families in many rural counties must travel more than one hour for specialized support. This burden often leads to missed appointments or prevents getting help altogether. North Texas has made substantial progress in reducing confirmed child maltreatment cases and deaths. Still, many of these gains are precarious, particularly in areas facing population growth or infrastructure limitations.

CPS Family Violence Investigations

Number and percentage of Child Protective Services investigations in which family violence was reported

The number of Child Protective Services (CPS) investigations involving family violence in North Texas decreased 26% from 2020 to 2024, from almost 11,000 to just over 8,000. The proportion of investigations involving family violence, however, increased from 33% to 35% of overall CPS cases. Most counties saw this percentage decrease from 2021 through 2023, but increase in 2024. Collin County led the region in the proportion of CPS investigations involving family violence at 42%. The remaining counties had percentages ranging from 26% to 37%, except for Grayson and Fanning counties, at 22.2% and 18.2% respectively, indicating that fewer than 1 in 4 investigations pertained to family violence.

Monitoring the proportion of CPS investigations involving family violence is needed, as children exposed to family violence face significantly higher risks of developmental delays, emotional trauma and long-term behavioral problems.<sup>1</sup> These children are also more likely to experience school-related difficulties such as learning disabilities, language delays, social competency issues and post-traumatic stress symptoms.<sup>2</sup> Early identification of problems through CPS investigations can enable timely mental health interventions,

| County  |            | 2020  | 2021  | 2022  | 2023  | 2024  |
|---------|------------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|
| Collin  | Number     | 735   | 827   | 711   | 685   | 648   |
|         | Percentage | 36.5  | 31.3  | 33.6  | 34.0  | 42.0  |
| Cooke   | Number     | 119   | 88    | 97    | 77    | 68    |
|         | Percentage | 37.0  | 27.3  | 33.0  | 29.9  | 26.5  |
| Dallas  | Number     | 4,447 | 4,198 | 3,819 | 3,694 | 3,156 |
|         | Percentage | 34.4  | 32.8  | 32.1  | 31.7  | 34.0  |
| Denton  | Number     | 981   | 968   | 719   | 749   | 716   |
|         | Percentage | 32.3  | 32.9  | 33.1  | 35.2  | 34.5  |
| Ellis   | Number     | 227   | 195   | 191   | 189   | 218   |
|         | Percentage | 27.8  | 24.1  | 28.8  | 34.9  | 37.6  |
| Fannin  | Number     | 76    | 57    | 51    | 38    | 33    |
|         | Percentage | 13.2  | 19.3  | 27.5  | 15.8  | 18.2  |
| Grayson | Number     | 288   | 247   | 181   | 170   | 117   |
|         | Percentage | 21.2  | 21.1  | 20.4  | 28.2  | 22.2  |
| Tarrant | Number     | 3,909 | 4,052 | 3,622 | 3,411 | 3,047 |
|         | Percentage | 32.6  | 34.1  | 35.4  | 34.1  | 36.7  |

Source: Texas Department of Family and Protective Services data books 2018 to 2022

educational support and family services to mitigate developmental harm and interrupt the cycle of violence before the problems become entrenched.

Across North Texas, county-level responses have increasingly embraced multidisciplinary, colocated models with centralized services to streamline investigations and support child victims. The Speese Campus of the Children’s Advocacy Center of Collin County opened in McKinney in October 2022. It houses Texas Department of Family and Protective Services (DFPS) investigators, law enforcement personnel, prosecutors and therapists, enabling forensic

interviews, counseling and case coordination in one location.<sup>3</sup>

Meanwhile, Tarrant County’s Alliance for Children, serving more than 2,500 children annually, works with more than 40 law enforcement agencies and DFPS from its three centers to coordinate forensic investigations and healing services in a child-centered, multidisciplinary framework.<sup>4</sup> The coordinated community response model has shown effectiveness, and now all eight counties are served by a children’s advocacy center, dramatically reducing the repeated trauma that can often accompany child abuse and family violence investigations.<sup>5</sup>

CPS Caseloads

Average monthly caseload for Child Protective Services caseworkers

Texas Child Protective Services (CPS) caseloads declined in all North Texas counties except Ellis from 2020 to 2024, though the rate of change varied. Fannin County experienced the largest decline, both in actual caseload (down 17.9 cases per caseworker) and in percentage (a drop of 70%). Denton County started at 27.9 cases per worker in 2020 and dropped steadily to 11.8 in 2024. Collin County followed a consistent downward trend, from 17.5 in 2020 to 10.6 in 2024, while Tarrant County saw a sharp drop in 2021, then stabilized.

In contrast, Cooke County dropped to 9.2 in 2022 but increased slightly in the two years following. Dallas County improved from 20.2 in 2020 to 12.5 in 2023 but rose again to 14.4 in 2024. Ellis County had a similar pattern, ending higher than 2020 at 13.4 after an earlier decline.

The North Texas patterns echo state and national trends, showing progress in reducing caseloads. The Texas Department of Family and Protective Services (DFPS) reports that average caseloads statewide have declined into single digits in many regions, falling below the agency’s benchmark of 14.5 cases per worker.<sup>1</sup>

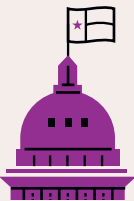
High monthly caseloads can hinder child welfare outcomes by weakening caseworker capacity, increasing burnout and reducing time spent with children and families. A 2019

| County  | 2020 | 2021 | 2022 | 2023 | 2024 |
|---------|------|------|------|------|------|
| Collin  | 17.5 | 15.3 | 14.3 | 13.4 | 10.6 |
| Cooke   | 20.6 | 17.2 | 9.2  | 10.3 | 10.8 |
| Dallas  | 20.2 | 16.3 | 14.6 | 12.5 | 14.4 |
| Denton  | 27.9 | 20.7 | 12.6 | 11.5 | 11.8 |
| Ellis   | 13.1 | 11.5 | 8.0  | 9.2  | 13.4 |
| Fannin  | 25.7 | 18.3 | 13.6 | 11.7 | 7.8  |
| Grayson | 17.5 | 14.4 | 14.3 | 11.2 | 9.0  |
| Tarrant | 18.2 | 8.6  | 6.4  | 8.5  | 7.6  |

Source: Texas Department of Family and Protective Services: Data books and annual reports 2018 to 2024

review based on Child Welfare League of America and Council on Accreditation standards found that manageable workloads, around 12 to 18 cases per worker, support better quality of service, whereas excessive caseloads impede thorough investigations, delay follow-ups and raise staff turnover rates.<sup>2</sup>

Pilot programs in North Texas have directly influenced recent legislative efforts to reduce CPS caseloads in Texas. One of the most influential was the Foster Care Redesign initiative, launched in 2014 by ACH Child and Family Services, which serves Tarrant and other counties. This pilot marked the beginning of Texas’ Community-Based Care (CBC) model, shifting case management responsibilities from state staff to local nonprofit agencies while maintaining state oversight.<sup>3</sup> The Texas Standard reported the model led to a 20% increase in foster family recruitment, improved placement stability and created stronger integration with community services.<sup>4</sup>



North Texas pilot programs have influenced legislative efforts to **improve CPS caseloads.**

The early success of this regional approach laid the foundation for Senate Bill 11 in 2017, which enabled statewide expansion of CBC.<sup>5</sup> Lawmakers have explicitly credited the North Texas pilot as proof that decentralized case management can reduce caseload pressure and improve outcomes for children and families. As CBC continues a multiyear plan to expand into new regions, these reforms reflect a broader policy commitment to sustainable workloads and community-aligned service delivery.

Availability of Foster Care

Number and percentage of CPS removals to emergency shelters and the number of children in foster care

| County  |                                              | 2020  | 2021  | 2022 | 2023 | 2024 |
|---------|----------------------------------------------|-------|-------|------|------|------|
| Collin  | Number of removals to emergency shelters     | 20    | 6     | 7    | 6    | 5    |
|         | Percentage of removals to emergency shelters | 14.1  | 3.7   | 6.7  | 5.0  | 4.1  |
|         | Number of children in foster care            | 160   | 117   | 108  | 113  | 131  |
| Cooke   | Number of removals to emergency shelters     | 8     | 0     | 0    | 0    | 0    |
|         | Percentage of removals to emergency shelters | 16.7  | 0     | 0    | 0    | 0    |
|         | Number of children in foster care            | 42    | 36    | 28   | 18   | 19   |
| Dallas  | Number of removals to emergency shelters     | 131   | 79    | 40   | 43   | 42   |
|         | Percentage of removals to emergency shelters | 12.2  | 6.9   | 5.4  | 5.9  | 5.4  |
|         | Number of children in foster care            | 1,318 | 1,199 | 869  | 770  | 858  |
| Denton  | Number of removals to emergency shelters     | 25    | 16    | 16   | 21   | 17   |
|         | Percentage of removals to emergency shelters | 8.4   | 4.8   | 10.2 | 11.5 | 8.6  |
|         | Number of children in foster care            | 322   | 270   | 204  | 181  | 162  |
| Ellis   | Number of removals to emergency shelters     | 1     | 1     | 1    | 3    | 3    |
|         | Percentage of removals to emergency shelters | 2.4   | 4.2   | 2.8  | 7.9  | 6.8  |
|         | Number of children in foster care            | 34    | 29    | 28   | 30   | 33   |
| Fannin  | Number of removals to emergency shelters     | 0     | 0     | 3    | 0    | 0    |
|         | Percentage of removals to emergency shelters | 0     | 0     | 21.4 | 0    | 0    |
|         | Number of children in foster care            | 47    | 31    | 22   | 15   | 7    |
| Grayson | Number of removals to emergency shelters     | 15    | 6     | 4    | 4    | 6    |
|         | Percentage of removals to emergency shelters | 14.9  | 6.7   | 7.1  | 8.5  | 19.4 |
|         | Number of children in foster care            | 103   | 97    | 80   | 65   | 54   |
| Tarrant | Number of removals to emergency shelters     | 38    | 34    | 45   | 27   | 82   |
|         | Percentage of removals to emergency shelters | 5.9   | 5.1   | 8.1  | 5.4  | 12.7 |
|         | Number of children in foster care            | 1,017 | 945   | 884  | 814  | 786  |

Source: Texas Department of Family and Protective Services: Annual reports and data books, 2020 to 2024

The foster care system is engaged when children cannot reside safely at home and lack suitable noncustodial parents, relatives or close family friends who are willing and able to care for them.<sup>1</sup> When a child is removed from their home, the judicial system may grant Child Protective Services (CPS) temporary legal custody.<sup>2</sup> CPS then temporarily places these children in various foster care settings, including foster family homes, foster family group homes, residential group care facilities or facilities overseen by another state agency. Foster care is a short-term solution until a permanent living

arrangement is secured. In some cases, it may become permanent when a foster parent adopts or assumes permanent managing conservatorship of a child. Collin and Dallas counties have reduced reliance on emergency shelters since 2020. Collin dropped from 20 to five removals, with the percentage of removals to emergency shelters falling from 14.1% to 4.1%. Dallas decreased from 131 to 42 removals, though it still reports the highest total. In contrast, Tarrant County saw a sharp increase in 2024,

with emergency removals jumping from 27 to 82, raising the rate to 12.7%. Grayson County saw its emergency removal rate spike to 19.4% despite a low case count. Denton and Ellis counties remained relatively stable, while Cooke and Fannin had no emergency removals in 2024. Foster care caseloads have declined in all North Texas counties since 2020. Dallas dropped from 1,318 children in 2020 to 858 in 2024, and Tarrant from 1,017 to 786. Fannin reported only seven children in care, down from 47.

Children in Conservatorship

Number of children under the legal responsibility of the Texas Department of Family and Protective Services and the rate per 1,000 children

The Texas Department of Family and Protective Services (DFPS) uses conservatorship as a vital tool to aid children in neglectful, abusive or otherwise hazardous living situations. Conservatorship refers to assigning parental decision-making rights for the child – often dealing with their health, education and safety – to a party other than the child’s biological parents.<sup>1</sup> While many DFPS conservatorships are facilitated through the foster care system, other types of care exist. Children can be placed under the custody of a family relative through kinship care, adoption or volunteer care.<sup>2</sup> Substitute care in Texas has a strong emphasis on maintaining family connections whenever possible.<sup>3</sup>

Children in state conservatorship have often experienced unstable living conditions, which can lead to significant mental and emotional struggles that disrupt their education, well-being and overall development.<sup>4</sup> Plus, foster children with severe disabilities face a heightened risk of extreme abuse, including physical harm and sexual assault, and are sometimes unable to express when they are in unsafe environments.<sup>5</sup>

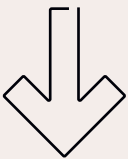
Since 2020, the number and rate of children in Texas legal

| County  |        | 2020  | 2021  | 2022  | 2023  | 2024  |
|---------|--------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|
| Collin  | Number | 603   | 504   | 458   | 399   | 371   |
|         | Rate   | 2.4   | 1.9   | 1.7   | 1.5   | 1.3   |
| Cooke   | Number | 196   | 156   | 120   | 88    | 66    |
|         | Rate   | 20.5  | 16.2  | 12.2  | 9.1   | 6.6   |
| Dallas  | Number | 4,568 | 3,768 | 3,329 | 2,845 | 2,186 |
|         | Rate   | 6.6   | 5.5   | 4.9   | 4.3   | 3.3   |
| Denton  | Number | 1,064 | 1,010 | 934   | 716   | 533   |
|         | Rate   | 5.1   | 4.8   | 4.3   | 3.3   | 2.4   |
| Ellis   | Number | 120   | 107   | 79    | 95    | 98    |
|         | Rate   | 2.6   | 2.2   | 1.6   | 1.8   | 1.8   |
| Fannin  | Number | 107   | 125   | 105   | 69    | 38    |
|         | Rate   | 14.6  | 16.8  | 13.9  | 9.0   | 4.9   |
| Grayson | Number | 308   | 279   | 282   | 225   | 187   |
|         | Rate   | 9.9   | 8.8   | 8.8   | 6.9   | 5.5   |
| Tarrant | Number | 2,005 | 2,048 | 2,044 | 1,943 | 1,770 |
|         | Rate   | 3.7   | 3.8   | 3.7   | 3.6   | 3.2   |

Source: Texas Department of Family and Protective Services: Data books and annual reports 2020 to 2024  
Note: Rates are expressed as a rate per 1,000 children in the population

conservatorship have decreased consistently across all eight North Texas counties. This declining trend reflects a possible improvement in family preservation and reunification efforts. Dallas County experienced a substantial decrease, with the number of children in conservatorship declining more than 50%, from 4,568 in 2020 to 2,186 in 2024. Tarrant County showed a more gradual decline, maintaining one of the lowest rates across all five years, with a slight reduction in removal rate, from 3.7 to 3.2 per 1,000 children. Rural counties had higher rates in 2020, indicating a more severe conservatorship challenge relative to their smaller populations.

Since 2020, the number of children in Texas legal conservatorship has decreased across all eight counties. By 2024, rates in these counties had fallen in line with their urban contemporaries. Collin and Denton counties stayed among the lowest conservatorship rates, despite their growing populations.



Child-related Sex Crimes

Number of cases filed for information or indictment for indecency with a child or aggravated sexual assault with a child and the number of confirmed victims of sexual abuse

Across North Texas, prosecutions for child-related sex crimes have risen while confirmed victim counts have fallen. In Collin County, filings increased from 115 in 2020 to 264 in 2024, while confirmed victims dropped from 137 to 83. Tarrant County saw indictments climb from 419 to 453, but victim numbers declined from 550 to 362. Denton County reached a peak of 179 filings in 2023 before falling to 130 in 2024, and its victim count dropped from 156 in 2021 to 86 in 2024.

| County  |                   | 2020 | 2021 | 2022 | 2023 | 2024 |
|---------|-------------------|------|------|------|------|------|
| Collin  | Indictments       | 115  | 117  | 171  | 260  | 264  |
|         | Confirmed victims | 137  | 155  | 129  | 109  | 83   |
| Cooke   | Indictments       | 11   | 15   | 9    | 15   | 2    |
|         | Confirmed victims | 22   | 11   | 25   | 11   | 7    |
| Dallas  | Indictments       | 425  | 392  | 458  | 200  | 0*   |
|         | Confirmed victims | 583  | 643  | 583  | 489  | 399  |
| Denton  | Indictments       | 101  | 118  | 155  | 179  | 130  |
|         | Confirmed victims | 126  | 156  | 126  | 112  | 86   |
| Ellis   | Indictments       | 52   | 44   | 48   | 56   | 45   |
|         | Confirmed victims | 47   | 41   | 53   | 32   | 30   |
| Fannin  | Indictments       | 11   | 18   | 12   | 11   | 11   |
|         | Confirmed victims | 21   | 14   | 18   | 13   | 8    |
| Grayson | Indictments       | 23   | 26   | 37   | 24   | 19   |
|         | Confirmed victims | 44   | 60   | 42   | 44   | 37   |
| Tarrant | Indictments       | 419  | 324  | 425  | 409  | 453  |
|         | Confirmed victims | 550  | 546  | 566  | 492  | 362  |

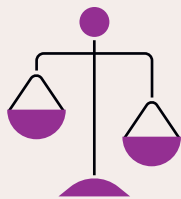
Source: Texas Office of Court Administration: Court activity reporting and directory system. Texas Department of Family and Protective Services, CPI completed investigations: Alleged and confirmed types of abuse  
\* Data for Dallas County is missing from the Office of Courts Administration database for part of 2023 and all of 2024.

The 2023 Child Maltreatment Report shows a continued national decline in identified victims, with 546,159 children confirmed as victims of abuse or neglect in 2023, a slight drop from prior years.<sup>1</sup> In Texas, confirmed allegations of child sexual abuse decreased 4.2%, from 7,645 in 2022 to 7,323 in 2023.<sup>2</sup> By contrast, the combined number of confirmed victims across the eight North Texas counties fell by about 34%, from 1,542 in 2022 to 1,012 in 2024, showing a steeper regional decline than the national and statewide trends.

Child sexual abuse is one of the most prevalent and damaging forms of child maltreatment: At least 1 in 4 girls and 1 in 20 boys in the United States experience it before age 18.<sup>3</sup> Survivors face lifelong effects, with

up to a threefold increased risk of post-traumatic stress disorder, schizophrenia, substance misuse, anxiety and depression.<sup>4</sup>

Collin County's Sexual Assault Response Team convenes monthly with representatives from law enforcement, advocacy groups, victim services, the district attorney's office, forensic nurses, laboratories and mental-health providers to coordinate investigations and deliver trauma-informed care to victims.<sup>5</sup> In Dallas County, the Crimes Against Children Division fields 17 specialized prosecutors and 12 investigators trained in the dynamics of child abuse; it handles



Prosecutions for child-related sex crimes have risen while confirmed victim counts have fallen.

all cases of child sexual assault, child pornography and trafficking, working with Child Protective Services to secure evidence and support victims through the prosecution of those indicted.<sup>6</sup>

Traumatic Injuries

Hospitalizations of children with a primary or secondary diagnosis of physical injury or a complication of a physical injury

Traumatic injuries remain the leading cause of death for children in the United States,<sup>1</sup> a trend that continues in Texas. These injuries – from falls to firearms to motor vehicle crashes – accounted for more than 48,000 pediatric trauma cases in Texas between 2019 and 2021, according to the Emergency Medical Services and Trauma Registries.<sup>2</sup>

For young children, trauma often occurs at home through falls, burns or accidental head injuries. Adolescents, by contrast, are more likely to be injured in public spaces, with motor vehicle crashes and firearm-related incidents topping the list of fatal causes. Even among nonfatal incidents, falls account for over 45% of pediatric trauma statewide.<sup>3</sup>

Recent data from North Texas counties indicates both progress and persistent challenges. Between 2019 and 2023, Dallas and Collin counties remained relatively stable, with Dallas County pediatric trauma hospitalizations going from 563 in 2019 to 568 in 2023. Collin County decreased slightly, with 164 trauma hospitalizations in 2019 and 154 in 2023. Tarrant County saw a 22% decline, moving from 358 to 279 pediatric trauma hospitalizations over the same period.

| County  | 2019 | 2020 | 2021 | 2022 | 2023 |
|---------|------|------|------|------|------|
| Collin  | 164  | 136  | 149  | 153  | 154  |
| Cooke   | 12   | 12   | <10  | 11   | <10  |
| Dallas  | 563  | 487  | 496  | 500  | 568  |
| Denton  | 149  | 113  | 128  | 98   | 120  |
| Ellis   | 26   | 17   | 39   | 28   | 42   |
| Fannin  | <10  | 14   | <10  | <10  | <10  |
| Grayson | 37   | 41   | 35   | 22   | 35   |
| Tarrant | 358  | 315  | 280  | 303  | 279  |

Source: Texas Department of State Health Services; Center for Health Statistics, Texas hospital inpatient discharge public use data files  
Note: Counts of 1 to 9 are suppressed to protect the identity of individuals in confidential data

Denton County experienced a notable drop, from 149 in 2019 to 98 in 2022, before rising to 120 in 2023. Ellis County saw a sharp increase, from 26 in 2019 to 42 in 2023, a 62% jump. Meanwhile, Grayson reported similar numbers, with 35 hospitalizations in 2023. Suppressed counts in Fannin and Cooke counties suggest low volume and do not allow for trend analysis.

The long-term consequences of these injuries can be profound. Beyond the initial physical damage, children may face years of rehabilitation, mental health challenges and social stigma, which can contribute to a poorer quality of life and significant family burdens. The staggering economic toll of childhood injuries nationally totaled \$396 billion in medical costs and productivity loss in 2019 alone.<sup>4</sup>

Risk isn't spread equally. Boys are nearly twice as likely as girls to experience fatal injuries, and rural



Trauma for young children often occurs at home through falls, burns or accidental head injuries.

children face higher mortality rates due to delayed access to trauma care.<sup>5</sup> Other factors – including limited parental education, large household size and younger caregivers – also raise the risk of injury, particularly when adult supervision is limited.<sup>6</sup>

Keeping Texas children safe means looking beyond emergency response. It requires community-wide education, trauma-informed schools and equitable access to care. Every injury prevented is one more protected future.

Child Homicide

Number of deaths from intentional injury of those under 20

North Texas recorded at least 69 child homicides in 2024, a significant decrease from the region's peak of more than 108 in 2021. Child homicide is a statistically rare event, as shown by the number of counties with none or fewer than 10. Among the larger counties, Tarrant County had the largest decline, dropping from 45 in 2021 to 25 in 2024. Dallas County experienced a similar, though less pronounced, decrease. These reductions suggest progress following the alarming spike from 2021 to 2022, when child homicides rose sharply from 2020 levels across North Texas.

Between 2000 and 2023, the United States consistently had the highest overall homicide rate among the Group of Seven major industrialized democratic countries. In 2023, the rate stood at 5.76 per 100,000 people, down from a peak of 6.78 in 2021.<sup>1</sup> Boys in the United States are more likely than girls to become homicide victims, starting as early as ages 10 to 14. A U.S. study on filicide (the killing of a child by their parent) found that a parent or guardian is most likely to kill a child, stepparents are more likely than biological parents to be perpetrators and men are more likely than women to kill older children.<sup>2</sup>

Research shows that from 2014 through 2023, the prevalence of firearms in child homicides increased, while the overall rate of homicide

| County  | 2020 | 2021 | 2022 | 2023 | 2024 |
|---------|------|------|------|------|------|
| Collin  | <10  | <10  | <10  | 13   | <10  |
| Cooke   | <10  | 0    | 0    | 0    | 0    |
| Dallas  | 52   | 63   | 55   | 57   | 41   |
| Denton  | <10  | <10  | <10  | <10  | <10  |
| Ellis   | <10  | 0    | 0    | <10  | <10  |
| Fannin  | 0    | 0    | <10  | 0    | 0    |
| Grayson | 0    | 0    | <10  | 0    | 0    |
| Tarrant | 37   | 45   | 49   | 31   | 25   |

Source: Texas death certificate data, Texas Department of State Health Services, Center for Health Statistics  
Note: Counts of 1 to 9 are suppressed to prevent the identification of individuals in confidential data

decreased.<sup>3</sup> Four out of every 5 children killed with a gun in North Texas were children of color.<sup>4</sup> More than one-half of child and adolescent homicide victims are nonwhite, with higher victimization rates for African American and Hispanic and/or Latino youth.<sup>5</sup> The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention reports a homicide rate of 7 per 100,000 births among infants (children under the age of 1). While U.S. infanticide rates are relatively low, infants born to mothers native to the country have a homicide rate four times higher than that of those born to mothers from outside the United States.<sup>6</sup>

Sustaining the recent decline in child homicides will require coordinated action across public health, criminal justice and child welfare systems. Efforts to prevent child homicide in North Texas increasingly focus on firearm safety, domestic violence intervention and early family support services. Local programs aim to address risk factors such as parental

A parent or guardian is most likely to kill a child, and men are more likely than women to kill older children.

stress, substance abuse and lack of access to mental health care. Community-based outreach and violence interruption models have gained traction in some urban neighborhoods.

Adolescent Suicide

Number of intentional deaths by suicide and other self-inflicted injury among those 19 and younger

Adolescent suicide continues to be a public health concern across Texas. In 2024, North Texas had experienced 49 adolescent suicides, down 29% from 2020. The region's 66 suicides in 2023 (the most recent year of final data) show a 4% decrease from 2020.<sup>1</sup> Adolescent suicides in Dallas County peaked at 26 in 2022 and dropped to 13 in 2024's provisional data. Tarrant County's post-pandemic surge reached 35 in 2021, falling to 22 in 2024. (Note that totals may not be reflected in the data table due to suppression for fewer than 10 events in a given county.)

Suppressed counts in smaller counties make detailed trend analyses more difficult. Comparing the eight-county total of 49 suicides in 2024 to the total of 35 presented in the table suggests that the remaining six counties combined had 14 suicides. A similar comparison for 2020 suggests that the three counties with suppressed event counts had only three suicides. While the regional total may be declining, suicide is becoming more prevalent in more North Texas counties.

These county trends mirror state and national challenges. In 2024, the adolescent suicide rate in Texas was 11 per 100,000 for ages 15 to 19, exceeding the national average of 9.5 per 100,000.<sup>2</sup> The Centers for Disease

| County  | 2020 | 2021 | 2022 | 2023 | 2024 |
|---------|------|------|------|------|------|
| Collin  | 10   | 13   | 13   | <10  | <10  |
| Cooke   | <10  | 0    | 0    | <10  | 0    |
| Dallas  | 23   | 20   | 26   | 24   | 13   |
| Denton  | <10  | <10  | <10  | <10  | <10  |
| Ellis   | <10  | <10  | <10  | <10  | <10  |
| Fannin  | 0    | <10  | <10  | 0    | <10  |
| Grayson | 0    | <10  | 0    | <10  | <10  |
| Tarrant | 30   | 35   | 19   | 18   | 22   |

Source: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention; Texas Department of State Health Services, Center for Health Statistics; Texas death certificate data  
Note: Counts of 1 to 9 are suppressed to prevent identification of individuals in confidential data

Control and Prevention report that suicide is now the second leading cause of death among Americans ages 10 to 34.<sup>3</sup>

Adolescent suicide disproportionately affects vulnerable groups. The 2024 Trevor Project survey revealed 39% of LGBTQ+ youth had seriously considered suicide; the rate was higher among transgender and nonbinary teens.<sup>4</sup> The Texas Youth Risk Behavior Survey reported 21.1% of Texas youth had seriously considered suicide. For Black students, the percentage rose to 24.6%, and for others (including Asian and multiracial), the percentage was 29.8%, underscoring the role of cultural stigmas and social pressure.<sup>5</sup>

The COVID-19 pandemic likely worsened these risks. Social isolation, disrupted schooling and family stress increased mental health issues for many teens. Adolescent suicide is

21.1% of Texas youth have seriously considered suicide; for Black students, the percentage rises to 24.6%.

more than a personal tragedy – it highlights gaps in public health, education and social support systems. Efforts to address this must go beyond mere awareness. Schools, families and policymakers need to work together to increase access to mental health resources, normalize conversations about psychological well-being and create inclusive, trauma-informed care throughout North Texas.

Child Mortality

Number of those ages 19 and under who died due to any cause

From 2020 to 2024, child mortality in North Texas fluctuated. Dallas County, the largest in the region, reported the highest number of deaths of those 19 and under, peaking at 506 in 2022 (with a rate of 70.7 per 100,000 children), before decreasing to 394 in 2024 (rate 55.2). Tarrant County's deaths increased from 321 (rate 53) in 2020 to 365 (rate 60.2) in 2021, then stabilized at 328 (rate 54) by 2024. Collin County experienced a steady rise from 96 deaths (rate 32.2) in 2020 to 144 (rate 44.4) in 2024. Denton County's deaths grew from 83 (rate 34.0) to 101 (rate 39.2), from 2020 to 2024. Ellis County reached a peak of 35 deaths (rate 57.3) in 2022, then dropped to 22 (rate 34.1) in 2024. Grayson County's deaths varied, reaching 30 (rate 77.0) in 2024. Cooke and Fannin counties had rates that were suppressed or unreliable due to low counts.

Child mortality rates peaked in 2022 across many counties.<sup>1</sup> Urban counties like Dallas and Tarrant saw elevated rates in 2021 to 2022, likely due to increased exposure to gun violence and substance use, exacerbated by pandemic-related stress.<sup>2</sup> The 2024 decline in Dallas and Ellis counties suggests improved interventions, such as community violence programs. However, the rising trends in Collin County and Grayson County's peak rate in 2024 (rate 77) indicate persistent challenges, particularly in rural areas

| County  |        | 2020 | 2021 | 2022 | 2023 | 2024 |
|---------|--------|------|------|------|------|------|
| Collin  | Deaths | 96   | 108  | 111  | 120  | 144  |
|         | Rate   | 32.2 | 35.3 | 35.1 | 37.0 | 44.4 |
| Cooke   | Deaths | <10  | <10  | <10  | <10  | 12   |
|         | Rate   | -S-  | -S-  | -S-  | -S-  | -U-  |
| Dallas  | Deaths | 437  | 430  | 506  | 493  | 394  |
|         | Rate   | 58.9 | 59.1 | 70.7 | 69.0 | 55.2 |
| Denton  | Deaths | 83   | 97   | 111  | 104  | 101  |
|         | Rate   | 34.0 | 38.9 | 44.2 | 40.4 | 39.2 |
| Ellis   | Deaths | 25   | 25   | 35   | 31   | 22   |
|         | Rate   | 45.1 | 42.5 | 57.3 | 48.0 | 34.1 |
| Fannin  | Deaths | <10  | <10  | <10  | 12   | <10  |
|         | Rate   | -S-  | -S-  | -S-  | -U-  | -S-  |
| Grayson | Deaths | 16   | 25   | 16   | 24   | 30   |
|         | Rate   | -U-  | 68.1 | -U-  | 61.6 | 77.0 |
| Tarrant | Deaths | 321  | 365  | 337  | 348  | 328  |
|         | Rate   | 53.0 | 60.2 | 56.0 | 57.3 | 54.0 |

Source: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention provisional mortality data on the WONDER database Note: Counts of 1 to 9 are suppressed, as are rates for those counts (-S-). When counts are fewer than 20, rates are suppressed as unreliable (-U-). Data from 2024 is provisional and subject to change.

with limited health care access and mental health resources.<sup>3</sup> Child mortality data is crucial for identifying preventable deaths and effectively directing resources. Firearms remain the leading cause of child mortality in Texas and nationwide.<sup>4</sup> Rural disparities in Grayson County reveal health care access gaps, emphasizing the need for targeted prevention programs that address violence, substance abuse and mental health.<sup>5</sup>

Texas' provisional child mortality rate was 54.2 in 2024, on par with Tarrant County's provisional rate of 54 and Dallas County's rate of 55.2. With the exception of Grayson County (at 77), all other counties fell below the Texas rate. Collin, Denton and Ellis counties also fell below the nation's provisional rate of 50.6. Nationally, the rate was



Firearms remain a leading cause of child mortality.

50.4 in 2022, which is lower than in most counties in North Texas.<sup>6</sup> Texas' higher rates reflect socioeconomic challenges, including poverty and limited safety nets, compared to states with broader health policies.<sup>7</sup>

Unintentional Deaths

Number and rates of unintentional deaths of those 19 and younger

In 2024, 932 Texas children under age 20 died of unintentional injuries, reports the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. This is a 10% increase from 2020. The rate of unintentional deaths rose as well from 10.3 per 100,000 children in 2020 to 11.1 in 2024. Over the same period, unintentional deaths among U.S. children under 20 decreased from 8,567 (a rate of 10.5 per 100,000) in 2020 to 8,243 (a rate of 10.1) in 2024.<sup>1</sup>

Between 2020 and 2024, Dallas County consistently had the highest counts, peaking at 91 deaths in 2023 before dropping to 67 in 2024, with a corresponding rate decrease from 12.7 to 9.4. Tarrant County followed an opposite trend, with deaths rising from 44 in 2022 to 67 in 2024 and the rate increasing to 11, the county's highest during the five years. Collin County showed a sharp rise in 2024, reaching 26 deaths and a rate of 8. Denton County's data fluctuated, with unreliable rates in most years, though it reached a high of 8.9 in 2023. The rising trends in Tarrant and Collin counties in 2024 raise concerns, possibly indicating emerging safety issues or gaps in preventive measures.

In contrast, rural counties such as Cooke, Fannin and Ellis had suppressed data throughout the period, reflecting either low case numbers or data confidentiality. Grayson County reported 10 deaths

| County  |        | 2020 | 2021 | 2022 | 2023 | 2024 |
|---------|--------|------|------|------|------|------|
| Collin  | Deaths | 18   | 17   | 20   | 17   | 26   |
|         | Rate   | -U-  | -U-  | 6.3  | -U-  | 8    |
| Cooke   | Deaths | <10  | <10  | <10  | <10  | <10  |
|         | Rate   | <10  | <10  | <10  | <10  | <10  |
| Dallas  | Deaths | 83   | 69   | 86   | 91   | 67   |
|         | Rate   | 11.2 | 9.5  | 12.0 | 12.7 | 9.4  |
| Denton  | Deaths | 16   | 20   | 18   | 23   | 17   |
|         | Rate   | -U-  | 8.0  | -U-  | 8.9  | -U-  |
| Ellis   | Deaths | 11   | <10  | <10  | <10  | <10  |
|         | Rate   | -U-  | <10  | <10  | <10  | <10  |
| Fannin  | Deaths | <10  | <10  | <10  | <10  | <10  |
|         | Rate   | <10  | <10  | <10  | <10  | <10  |
| Grayson | Deaths | <10  | <10  | <10  | <10  | 10   |
|         | Rate   | <10  | <10  | <10  | <10  | -U-  |
| Tarrant | Deaths | 53   | 58   | 44   | 51   | 67   |
|         | Rate   | 8.8  | 9.6  | 7.3  | 8.4  | 11.0 |

Source: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, provisional mortality statistics on WONDER database; American Community Survey five-year estimates 2020 to 2024 Note: Counts of 1 to 9 are suppressed to protect the identity of individuals in confidential data. When counts are fewer than 20, rates are suppressed as unreliable (-U-).

in 2024, the first numbers it reported since 2020.

Texas has experienced increased attention to unintentional and accidental child deaths. A flash flood that struck Camp Mystic and communities along the Guadalupe River in July 2025 killed at least 37 children and more than 135 adults.<sup>2</sup> Public safety advocates are urging for more funding for weather-warning systems to prevent such disasters again, which made it a key agenda item for a special summer 2025 legislative session. As usually happens during summer months, increased attention is focused on the danger of children overheating in locked cars, as well as drowning deaths.<sup>3</sup>



Texans paid increased attention to accidental child deaths following the flash floods that struck communities along the Guadalupe River in July 2025.

ALCOHOL AND SUBSTANCE ABUSE

Alcohol-related Motor Vehicle Deaths

Number of alcohol-related motor vehicle deaths of those under 21

| County  | 2020 | 2021 | 2022 | 2023 | 2024* |
|---------|------|------|------|------|-------|
| Collin  | 4    | 1    | 4    | 0    | 3     |
| Cooke   | 0    | 0    | 1    | 0    | 3     |
| Dallas  | 13   | 8    | 16   | 7    | 7     |
| Denton  | 1    | 2    | 0    | 0    | 0     |
| Ellis   | 1    | 0    | 2    | 1    | 0     |
| Fannin  | 0    | 0    | 1    | 1    | 1     |
| Grayson | 0    | 0    | 0    | 1    | 1     |
| Tarrant | 4    | 5    | 4    | 3    | 6     |

Source: Texas Department of Transportation: Texas motor vehicle crash statistics 2011 to 2024  
\* 2024 data is provisional

Alcohol and Substance Abuse ER Visits

Number of alcohol- or drug-related emergency department visits by those under 18

| County  |         | 2019 | 2020 | 2021 | 2022 | 2023 |
|---------|---------|------|------|------|------|------|
| Collin  | Alcohol | 45   | 46   | 58   | 60   | 54   |
|         | Drugs   | 66   | 65   | 81   | 120  | 124  |
| Cooke   | Alcohol | <10  | <10  | <10  | <10  | <10  |
|         | Drugs   | <10  | <10  | <10  | <10  | <10  |
| Dallas  | Alcohol | 108  | 93   | 92   | 90   | 123  |
|         | Drugs   | 211  | 283  | 256  | 332  | 418  |
| Denton  | Alcohol | 42   | 24   | 20   | 27   | 38   |
|         | Drugs   | 41   | 33   | 37   | 46   | 93   |
| Ellis   | Alcohol | <10  | <10  | <10  | 11   | <10  |
|         | Drugs   | 20   | 18   | <10  | 17   | 26   |
| Fannin  | Alcohol | 0    | <10  | <10  | 0    | <10  |
|         | Drugs   | 0    | <10  | 0    | <10  | <10  |
| Grayson | Alcohol | <10  | <10  | <10  | 11   | <10  |
|         | Drugs   | 20   | <10  | <10  | <10  | 14   |
| Tarrant | Alcohol | 82   | 75   | 56   | 86   | 87   |
|         | Drugs   | 183  | 173  | 104  | 233  | 183  |

Source: Texas Department of State Health Services: Center for Health Statistics, Texas hospital emergency discharge public use data files 2019 to 2023  
Note: Counts of 1-9 are suppressed to prevent identification of individuals in confidential data



Pediatric emergency department visits for substance abuse increased significantly from 2019 to 2023.

and addiction support, with early exposure increasing risks of long-term substance use disorders, academic decline and developmental issues.<sup>7</sup> Addressing these challenges promotes safer communities and healthier outcomes for youth.

A coordinated response is needed to address alcohol-related crashes and rising substance-related emergency visits. Between 2020 and 2024, Dallas and Tarrant counties saw troubling patterns in youth traffic fatalities involving alcohol, while Denton achieved sustained improvements through targeted prevention. These trends reveal the importance of strengthening local interventions, such as public-private partnerships that offer safe transportation alternatives and school-based outreach programs to deter impaired driving. Expanding such initiatives region-wide could accelerate progress in reducing teen motor-vehicle deaths.

The number of alcohol-related motor vehicle fatalities and substance-related emergency department visits among North Texas youth under 18 reveals overlapping challenges in public safety and adolescent health. Together, these indicators highlight the consequences of impaired decision-making, inadequate prevention and limited access to care – underscoring the need for coordinated strategies to protect young people across the region.

From 2020 to 2024, alcohol-related motor-vehicle deaths among North Texas youth declined slightly. Dallas and Tarrant counties recorded the highest number of fatalities in the region, with seven and six, respectively. While Dallas County is down from a peak of 16 deaths in 2022, Tarrant County has risen beyond its previous peak of five in 2021. Alcohol-related collision deaths in Collin County have remained relatively stable since 2020. Denton County showed improvement, reporting no alcohol-related traffic fatalities from 2022 to 2024.

From 2019 to 2023, Texas accounted for 11% of U.S. teen crash deaths (1,463 of 13,135), exceeding its proportion of the nation's youth population; meanwhile, 19.4% of teens reported riding with impaired drivers.<sup>1</sup> Crash deaths peaked in 2022, driven by increased teen drinking and driving during the COVID-19 pandemic, resulting from social isolation, reduced parental supervision and risk-taking behaviors.<sup>2</sup> The 2024 declines in Dallas and Denton

counties reflect prevention efforts that include Denton's school outreach initiative DWI Free Denton and Dallas' discounted rides programs with AAA and Lyft.<sup>3</sup>

Pediatric emergency department visits for substance abuse increased significantly from 2019 to 2023 (the most recent year for which data is available). Dallas County's drug-related visits nearly doubled, rising from 211 to 418, while alcohol-related visits grew from 108 to 123. Tarrant County's drug visits peaked at 233 in 2022 and then returned to the county's previous high of 183 in 2023, with alcohol visits remaining stable at 86 in 2022 and 87 in 2023. Collin County's drug visits rose too, from 66 in 2019 to 124 in 2023, and Denton's more than doubled, increasing from 41 to 93. The smaller counties Cooke, Fannin and Grayson reported very low counts (<10), making it harder to track rural vulnerabilities.

Increases in emergency department visits align with national trends in pediatric mental health challenges, driven by school closures, synthetic opioid availability, vaping trends and family stressors like economic insecurity.<sup>4</sup> Rural underreporting, as in Cooke and Grayson counties, stems from limited health care infrastructure.<sup>5</sup>

These indicators underscore preventable risks. Motor vehicle crashes, the second leading cause of teen mortality, highlight the need for DUI prevention.<sup>6</sup> Substance-related emergency department visits signal gaps in mental health

## Students Disciplined for Possessing Alcohol or Controlled Substances

Number of public school students disciplined for possessing alcohol or controlled substances on school grounds

From 2020 to 2024, public school discipline cases for alcohol or controlled substances on school grounds rose sharply across North Texas. Discipline for controlled substances has risen 85% since 2000 and is up 31% from 2022, the first full year returning to school after COVID-19. Grayson County had the most significant increase in disciplinary cases since 2022, with controlled-substance incidences rising 148%; Ellis County also saw a significant increase in controlled-substance cases, with cases up 74% since 2022. Cases rose in all counties over 2022 rates, with a majority of counties seeing increases of 20% to 50%.

| County  |                       | 2020  | 2021 | 2022  | 2023  | 2024  |
|---------|-----------------------|-------|------|-------|-------|-------|
| Collin  | Alcohol               | 78    | 0    | 66    | 87    | 77    |
|         | Controlled substances | 382   | 209  | 597   | 892   | 781   |
| Cooke   | Alcohol               | 0     | 0    | 0     | 0     | 0     |
|         | Controlled substances | 0     | 0    | 0     | 0     | 0     |
| Dallas  | Alcohol               | 97    | 0    | 135   | 159   | 173   |
|         | Controlled substances | 2,611 | 630  | 3,885 | 5,149 | 4,807 |
| Denton  | Alcohol               | 48    | 25   | 60    | 89    | 62    |
|         | Controlled substances | 508   | 276  | 632   | 962   | 631   |
| Ellis   | Alcohol               | 13    | 0    | 13    | 33    | 14    |
|         | Controlled substances | 94    | 110  | 191   | 364   | 332   |
| Fannin  | Alcohol               | 0     | 0    | 0     | 0     | 0     |
|         | Controlled substances | 0     | 0    | 0     | 12    | 0     |
| Grayson | Alcohol               | 0     | 0    | 0     | 0     | 0     |
|         | Controlled substances | 48    | 31   | 42    | 173   | 104   |
| Tarrant | Alcohol               | 71    | 0    | 46    | 87    | 83    |
|         | Controlled substances | 1,146 | 435  | 1,420 | 2,125 | 2,201 |

Source: Texas Education Agency discipline reports  
Note: Data on students disciplined for controlled-substance violations are taken from the Texas Education Agency's (TEA) student discipline data. Each disciplinary action is recorded with a reason code, which includes "misdemeanor alcohol violation," "felony controlled-substances violation" and similar. Beginning in the 2020-2021 school year, TEA abandoned the "tobacco use" reason code and these offenses are now reported with other code-of-conduct violations. As such, they are no longer reported here.

Substance use remains prevalent among Texas students in grades seven to 12, with alcohol being the most reported substance since 2016, according to the Texas School Survey. Other frequently used substances include marijuana, tobacco products (cigarettes, smokeless tobacco and e-cigarette products) and prescription drugs (such as codeine syrup and oxycodone). Among Texas secondary students, 36.8% reported using alcohol at least once, while 17.5% reported having used tobacco. Another 13.8% reported using marijuana, and 7.5% reported abusing prescription drugs.<sup>1</sup>

In 2024, 10.4% of Texas students reported using a tobacco product in the last 30 days, and 22% reported having tried it at least once. Nine percent stated they consumed alcohol in the past month, and 16% had at some point previously. Use of electronic vapor products stood at 8% for the past month and 19% at any other time. Students who consumed alcohol missed an average of 5.6 school days per year, compared to 4.2 days for nonusers, and reported more disciplinary incidents (2.9 vs. 1.2). Among 12th-graders, 11.5% obtained alcohol from friends and 11.2% consumed it at parties.<sup>2</sup>



Alcohol remains the most-used substance among Texas students in grades seven to 12.

## Gunfire-related ER Visits

Number of gunfire-related emergency department visits for those under 18

Firearm injuries are now the leading cause of unintentional death for children and adolescents in the United States, surpassing motor vehicle accidents, according to Centers for Disease Control and Prevention data.<sup>1</sup> Texas consistently ranks among the states with the highest rates of pediatric gunshot hospitalizations, and urban centers such as Dallas and Houston drive a disproportionate share of that. North Texas reflects these broader patterns: concentrated violence in dense urban areas, minimal data transparency in rural regions and steady increases despite public policy dialogue about prevention.

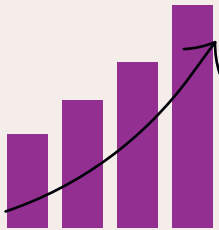
The widespread availability of firearms in Texas homes may be a significant factor in these unintentional deaths, as studies show a strong correlation between gun ownership rates and firearm-related injuries among children.<sup>2</sup> Texas laws may exacerbate this risk as they do not require firearm owners to lock or safely store guns in homes, although statutes prohibit leaving firearms accessible to minors under age 17.<sup>3</sup>

Gun-related injuries in children under 18 are an escalating public health issue in North Texas. Emergency department data from 2019 to 2023 shows a steady rise

| County  | 2019 | 2020 | 2021 | 2022 | 2023 |
|---------|------|------|------|------|------|
| Collin  | 25   | 22   | 18   | 16   | 18   |
| Cooke   | <10  | <10  | <10  | <10  | <10  |
| Dallas  | 192  | 187  | 230  | 242  | 275  |
| Denton  | 10   | 19   | 18   | <10  | 18   |
| Ellis   | 10   | <10  | <10  | 12   | <10  |
| Fannin  | <10  | <10  | <10  | <10  | <10  |
| Grayson | <10  | <10  | <10  | <10  | <10  |
| Tarrant | 103  | 147  | 139  | 110  | 116  |

Source: Texas Department of State Health Services; Center for Health Statistics, Texas hospital inpatient discharge public use data files 2019 to 2023  
Note: Counts of 1 to 9 are suppressed to prevent identification of individuals in confidential data

in youth gunfire-related visits and injuries in urban counties. Dallas County's pediatric gunfire-related emergency visits increased from 192 in 2019 to 275 in 2023, a nearly 43% rise. The biggest increase occurred between 2020 and 2021, coinciding with the COVID-19 pandemic. Subsequent years show an upward trend continuing through 2023, indicating ongoing community exposure to firearm violence. Between 2019 and 2023, Dallas County led the North Texas area with more than 1,100 gun-related emergency department visits for children under age 18. Tarrant County data varied over the five years, with 116 visits in 2023. Suburban counties like Collin and Denton show significantly lower totals and reported 18 gun-related injury visits each in 2023. Rural counties such as Ellis, Cooke, Fannin and Grayson reported fewer than 10 cases each annually, which may reflect fewer



ER data shows a steady rise in youth gunfire-related visits and injuries in urban counties.

incidences, underreporting or data collection challenges from rural emergency departments.

Each child injured by gunfire can carry the lifelong burden of physical trauma, emotional stress and education disruption.<sup>4</sup> These incidents often disproportionately affect marginalized communities with limited access to trauma-informed care.<sup>5</sup>

# Commitments to the Texas Juvenile Justice Department

## Number of adjudicated youth subsequently committed to the Texas Juvenile Justice Department

North Texas commitments to the Texas Juvenile Justice Department (TJJD) from 2019 to 2023 dropped 17%, from 180 to 150. Most counties showed moderate fluctuations and a few experienced notable declines or increases. Tarrant County consistently reported the highest number of commitments in the region: Although commitments dropped sharply from 79 in 2019 to 22 in 2020, likely reflecting pandemic-related disruptions, they rebounded to 61 by 2023, matching pre-pandemic levels. Dallas County followed a similar pattern, declining from 59 commitments in 2019 to 42 in 2022, then increasing to 51 in 2023.

Collin County reported lower volumes but a steady upward trend since 2020, rising from four commitments to 11 in 2023, nearly reaching its 2019 level of 14. Denton County remained relatively stable across the five years, peaking at 32 in 2022 but returning to 21 in 2023, matching its 2019 and 2021 totals.

Cooke, Ellis, Fannin and Grayson counties each reported zero to two commitments annually. Grayson County, which had five commitments in 2019, reported only one in 2023. Ellis and Fannin counties reported no commitments in 2020 through 2022 but recorded two each in 2023.

Monitoring TJJD commitments is important because secured

| County  | 2019 | 2020 | 2021 | 2022 | 2023 |
|---------|------|------|------|------|------|
| Collin  | 14   | 4    | 6    | 7    | 11   |
| Cooke   | 1    | 0    | 1    | 0    | 1    |
| Dallas  | 59   | 50   | 50   | 42   | 51   |
| Denton  | 21   | 24   | 21   | 32   | 21   |
| Ellis   | 0    | 1    | 0    | 0    | 2    |
| Fannin  | 1    | 1    | 0    | 0    | 2    |
| Grayson | 5    | 2    | 3    | 0    | 1    |
| Tarrant | 79   | 22   | 61   | 57   | 61   |

Source: State of Juvenile Probation Activity in Texas, statistical and other data, Texas Juvenile Justice Department

confinement often does more harm than good. Research has shown that pretrial detention greatly increases the likelihood that young people will be sentenced to residential custody. Once confined, they face significantly higher rates of rearrest and reincarceration compared with youth diverted to probation or community programs.<sup>1</sup> Also, evidence indicates that home- and community-based programs typically yield equal or better recidivism at far lower social and fiscal costs, underscoring the need to track commitment rates as a barometer of reliance on incarceration versus investing in proven prevention and diversion strategies.<sup>2</sup>

In response to rising commitments, Denton County implemented a four-hour Juvenile Impact Program that confronts youth with the real-world consequences of delinquent behavior. The county also created a pretrial diversion option for first-



Denton County implemented a program that confronts youth with the real-world consequences of delinquency.

time, low-risk offenders through its district attorney's office. Both programs have helped reduce formal commitments.<sup>3</sup> Dallas County's Evening Reporting Center provides a nonresidential alternative to secured detention for referred males ages 14 to 17, offering structured educational activities, recreational programming, independent living skills and emotional and social skills development four days a week.<sup>4</sup>

## Endnotes

### Child Abuse and Neglect

- 1 Texas Department of Family and Protective Services, CPI Completed Investigations: Victims, Texas Department of Family and Protective Services Data Book, 2024, [https://www.dfps.texas.gov/About\\_DFPS/Data\\_Book/Child\\_Protective\\_Investigations/Investigations/Victims.asp](https://www.dfps.texas.gov/About_DFPS/Data_Book/Child_Protective_Investigations/Investigations/Victims.asp).
- 2 Children's Advocacy Centers of Texas, 2023 Impact Report, Children's Advocacy Centers of Texas, 2024), [https://cactx.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/11/Impact-Report\\_Final.pdf](https://cactx.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/11/Impact-Report_Final.pdf).
- 3 Texas Department of Family and Protective Services, Family First Prevention Services Act, web documents - undefined, Child Protective Services, accessed July 31, 2025, [https://www.dfps.texas.gov/Child\\_Protection/Family\\_First/default.asp](https://www.dfps.texas.gov/Child_Protection/Family_First/default.asp).
- 4 Relating to Reports of Child Abuse or Neglect and Certain Preliminary Investigations of those Reports, HB 63, Texas House of Representatives 88th Regular, Family Code (2023). Enrolled May 19, 2023, <https://capitol.texas.gov/BillLookup/History.aspx?LegSess=88R&Bill=HB63>.
- 5 Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Risk and Protective Factors, Child Abuse and Neglect Prevention, July 11, 2024, <https://www.cdc.gov/child-abuse-neglect/risk-factors/index.html>.

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Titus, age 11, Denton County

Between 2020 and 2024, North Texas counties demonstrated mixed progress across key indicators of educational performance.

High school completion rates remained strong, with most counties exceeding 90% and Collin and Cooke counties consistently above 97%. However, Dallas County lagged, reflecting the region’s urban/suburban disparities. College readiness, as measured by Texas Education Agency (TEA) standards, improved across all counties, with notable gains observed in Dallas and Tarrant counties. Yet, SAT and ACT standardized college-entrance test scores remained significantly lower overall, suggesting TEA benchmarks may be more attainable than national college-entrance standards.

Early education indicators revealed concerning trends. Kindergarten readiness declined across most counties after peaking in 2021, with only Collin County maintaining rates above 60% in 2024. Similarly, third-grade reading proficiency dropped in 2024, with only Collin exceeding 65% of students meeting grade-level standards. These declines were attributed to COVID-19 pandemic-related learning disruptions and limited access to early learning, especially in rural and low-income areas.

Enrollment in Head Start and public prekindergarten rebounded from 2021 lows, with Dallas and Tarrant counties leading in total numbers. However, Head Start enrollment declined in urban counties in the past couple of years, raising concerns about access for low-income families. The Beyond ABC Advisory Board education working group emphasized the importance of early childhood education and highlighted funding instability as a barrier to its accessibility.

The percentage of English language learners (ELLs) increased steadily across all counties, with Dallas reaching nearly 40% in 2024. This growth, while reflective of demographic shifts, has put a strain on school resources. The education working group noted a rise in long-term ELLs and called for expanded bilingual education and culturally responsive curricula.

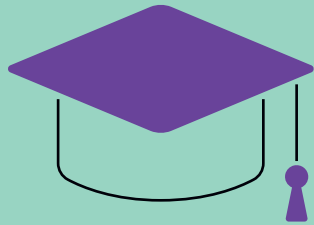
Special education enrollment also rose sharply, with a 21% increase in Dallas County and more than 40% in Denton. This trend aligns with improved identification efforts, but it has outpaced the available resources. The education working group cited teacher shortages, compliance gaps and a \$1.7 billion statewide funding shortfall as critical challenges.

Performance on State of Texas Assessments of Academic Readiness (STAAR) exams showed modest gains from 2021 to 2023 but plateaued or declined in 2024. Collin County led with 68.1% of students passing all subjects, while Cooke and Dallas remained below 45%. The education working group cited the impact of social media, behavioral health needs and teacher burnout as factors affecting academic outcomes. Initiatives such as reset rooms (a designated space to help students calm down and refocus after stressful situations), magnetic pouches to secure and store mobile devices (to reduce smartphone distractions) and restorative practices (strategies to build community) were highlighted as promising but underfunded.



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**90.3%**

of Texas high school students graduated on time in 2023, the state’s highest recorded rate

Pre-K enrollment has **rebounded** from the 2021 pandemic low

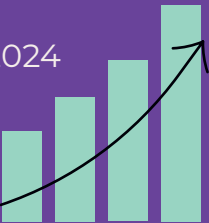
Most North Texas counties **have fewer students passing STAAR exams**



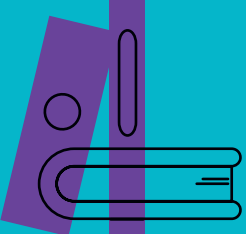


Kindergarten-readiness rates **improved across the region from 2023 to 2024**

Denton County special education enrollment **rose 41%** from 2020 to 2024



**Almost 40%** of Dallas County students are English language learners



Third-grade reading proficiency **declined in 2024 across North Texas**

**Dallas County jumped from 46% in 2019 to 63% in 2023** in TEA-measured college readiness

Kindergarten Readiness

Percentage of assessed kindergarteners demonstrating readiness on an approved assessment

A child's health and development – particularly in the formative preschool years – have a significant impact on their future academic success. These years exert a marked influence on a child's journey into adulthood and shape how they navigate life as adults.<sup>1</sup> Moreover, a deeply engaged family is central to preparing a child for school and creating a solid foundation for future academic development and success.<sup>2</sup>

Several factors influence a student's readiness for school. The Texas Education Agency considers numerous areas of development: physical, literacy, numeracy, language and communication, and health and wellness. The progress of children is evaluated on an individual basis to ascertain their preparedness for kindergarten.

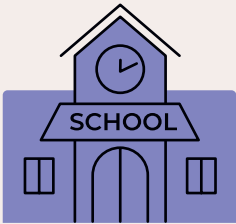
In Texas, 52% of assessed children met school-readiness benchmarks in 2024.<sup>3</sup> This represents a modest rebound from pandemic-era lows, but Texas still lags behind pre-COVID levels. County-level data reveal significant disparities: Collin County led the region with 63.9% readiness in 2024, while Grayson County had the lowest rate at 41.3%. Urban counties, such as Dallas (53.1%) and Tarrant (53.8%), have improved since 2023 but

| County  | 2020 | 2021 | 2022 | 2023 | 2024 |
|---------|------|------|------|------|------|
| Collin  | 64.6 | 74.9 | 69.8 | 61.1 | 63.9 |
| Cooke   | 56.0 | 61.8 | 51.3 | 42.1 | 43.5 |
| Dallas  | 63.3 | 71.4 | 59.6 | 48.7 | 53.1 |
| Denton  | 54.7 | 64.4 | 78.4 | 57.1 | 57.5 |
| Ellis   | 59.3 | 71.3 | 64.3 | 49.8 | 55.6 |
| Fannin  | 45.2 | 73.7 | 59.5 | 52.3 | 49.2 |
| Grayson | 49.0 | 49.2 | 45.1 | 39.7 | 41.3 |
| Tarrant | 59.2 | 61.7 | 55.0 | 49.5 | 53.8 |

Source: Texas Education Agency (TEA) Texas Academic Performance Report (TAPR)

remain below their 2021 peaks. Similarly, Ellis and Denton counties experienced declines after earlier peaks. More rural counties, such as Cooke, Fannin and Grayson, generally reported lower readiness rates from 2020 to 2024.

These readiness gaps are deeply intertwined with socioeconomic inequality: More than 1 in 3 Texas children under age 6 live in or near poverty. Black and Hispanic and/or Latino families are three times more likely to be affected.<sup>4</sup> Compounding these issues is limited access to early learning: 57,000 eligible 4-year-olds and 225,000 eligible 3-year-olds do not participate in public pre-K.<sup>5</sup> The COVID-19 pandemic intensified readiness challenges, particularly in digital learning. One in 12 Texas families lacked reliable internet access, and as a result, young children in these families missed



52% of assessed children in Texas met school-readiness benchmarks in 2024.

out on virtual learning.<sup>6</sup> Nationally, 78% of kindergarten teachers believe children are entering school less prepared than in prior years, showing delays in motor skills, social/emotional development and literacy.<sup>7</sup>

Head Start and Public School Prekindergarten Enrollment

Number of children enrolled in Head Start and public school prekindergarten

Public prekindergarten and Head Start programs play a crucial role in equipping children for academic and lifelong success by helping them develop essential social, emotional and cognitive skills. These programs establish proficiency in math, phonics and reading, with Head Start participants 6% more likely to graduate from high school and pursue college, according to a 2023 study.<sup>1</sup> Educators and many policymakers have long advocated for these programs as a means to provide equitable access to education.<sup>2</sup>

In 2024, eight North Texas counties enrolled 54,914 children in public pre-K and 8,373 in Head Start. Dallas County had the most, with 27,171 pre-K and 2,639 Head Start students, followed by Tarrant (15,345 pre-K, 1,443 Head Start), Collin (5,267 pre-K, 1,074 Head Start) and Denton (4,265 pre-K, 193 Head Start). Ellis and Grayson counties both enrolled 1,087 in Head Start in 2024.

Pre-K enrollment has rebounded from the COVID-19 pandemic lows of 2021, with Collin County showing 58% growth and Denton County experiencing a 13% increase since 2020.

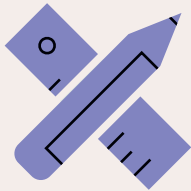
Head Start enrollment data reveals growth in Ellis and Grayson (31% combined since 2021), as well as

| County  |              | 2020*  | 2021   | 2022   | 2023   | 2024   |
|---------|--------------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|
| Collin  | Head Start   | —      | 978    | 1,117  | 1,143  | 1,074  |
|         | Public pre-K | 3,336  | 3,177  | 3,926  | 4,661  | 5,267  |
| Cooke   | Head Start   | —      | 698    | 704    | 697    | 721    |
|         | Public pre-K | 229    | 273    | 307    | 296    | 278    |
| Dallas  | Head Start   | —      | 2,363  | 2,726  | 2,687  | 2,639  |
|         | Public pre-K | 27,372 | 22,316 | 25,298 | 26,485 | 27,171 |
| Denton  | Head Start   | —      | 179    | 193    | 193    | 193    |
|         | Public pre-K | 3,769  | 2,849  | 3,443  | 3,840  | 4,265  |
| Ellis   | Head Start   | —      | 827    | 945    | 981    | 1,087  |
|         | Public pre-K | 1,378  | 1,139  | 1,373  | 1,140  | 1,538  |
| Fannin  | Head Start   | —      | 109    | 130    | 132    | 129    |
|         | Public pre-K | 365    | 304    | 318    | 308    | 317    |
| Grayson | Head Start   | —      | 827    | 945    | 981    | 1,087  |
|         | Public pre-K | 831    | 711    | 755    | 827    | 733    |
| Tarrant | Head Start   | —      | 1,510  | 1,489  | 1,570  | 1,443  |
|         | Public pre-K | 14,954 | 11,841 | 14,017 | 15,607 | 15,345 |

Source: Texas Education Agency (TEA) Texas Academic Performance Reports (TAPR), U.S. Department of Health and Human Services  
\* Head Start data was not collected in 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Cooke (a 3% increase) and Fannin (up 18%). However, Head Start enrollments in Dallas and Tarrant counties were lower in 2024 from previous years, indicating possible access challenges in urban areas with higher poverty rates.<sup>3</sup>

Head Start's focused assistance for low-income families helps decrease behavioral problems, enhances academic performance and supports local economies by facilitating parents' ability to work.<sup>4</sup> In North Texas, addressing urban-rural disparities is critical to closing achievement gaps.<sup>5</sup> Texas enrolled 248,371 in public pre-K and about 35,000 in Head Start in 2024, with North Texas contributing 22% and 24% of state totals, respectively.<sup>6</sup> Statewide, 15% of eligible children are unserved, better than North Texas'



North Texas pre-K enrollment has rebounded from the COVID-19 pandemic lows of 2021.

20% gap, particularly in rural counties like Fannin.<sup>7</sup> Nationally in 2022, about 4.7 million 3- and 4-year-olds attended preschool (51% in public pre-K programs) and 650,000 in Head Start, with a 10% unserved rate, underscoring North Texas' funding and outreach hurdles.<sup>8</sup>

Third-grade Reading

Percentage of third-graders meeting STAAR standards in reading

Third-grade reading proficiency across North Texas counties declined in 2024, indicating persistent challenges in early literacy. Only Collin County maintained relatively high performance in the State of Texas Assessments of Academic Readiness (STAAR) tests, with 65.1% of third-grade students meeting or exceeding grade-level standards. All other counties fell below 55%, including Denton (53.1%), Tarrant (45.8%) and Dallas (41%). Cooke County dropped to 31%, the only county with fewer than one-third of students meeting grade-level standards.

| County  |                        | 2020* | 2021 | 2022 | 2023 | 2024 |
|---------|------------------------|-------|------|------|------|------|
| Collin  | Approaches grade level | —     | 80.7 | 87.7 | 87.3 | 85.2 |
|         | Meets grade level      | —     | 54.3 | 67.5 | 67.8 | 65.1 |
| Cooke   | Approaches grade level | —     | 69.2 | 67.3 | 70.2 | 60.0 |
|         | Meets grade level      | —     | 41.6 | 43.7 | 41.0 | 31.0 |
| Dallas  | Approaches grade level | —     | 60.5 | 70.0 | 70.0 | 67.0 |
|         | Meets grade level      | —     | 33.0 | 44.5 | 44.2 | 41.0 |
| Denton  | Approaches grade level | —     | 73.9 | 80.4 | 80.8 | 77.4 |
|         | Meets grade level      | —     | 45.9 | 56.8 | 56.8 | 53.1 |
| Ellis   | Approaches grade level | —     | 72.4 | 77.8 | 78.0 | 74.3 |
|         | Meets grade level      | —     | 41.0 | 50.2 | 48.8 | 44.2 |
| Fannin  | Approaches grade level | —     | 70.1 | 78.8 | 80.5 | 80.6 |
|         | Meets grade level      | —     | 39.2 | 50.4 | 49.6 | 45.7 |
| Grayson | Approaches grade level | —     | 73.4 | 75.5 | 74.4 | 73.0 |
|         | Meets grade level      | —     | 41.2 | 48.5 | 45.5 | 42.9 |
| Tarrant | Approaches grade level | —     | 66.4 | 75.4 | 73.8 | 71.0 |
|         | Meets grade level      | —     | 38.1 | 50.6 | 48.1 | 45.8 |

Source: Texas Education Agency (TEA) Texas Academic Performance Report (TAPR)  
\* Data unavailable for 2020 due to the cancellation of the STAAR exams during the COVID-19 pandemic

While STAAR and National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) assessments differ in structure, the national benchmark offers valuable context. In 2022, the NAEP fourth-grade reading assessment found 33% of U.S. students reached the “proficient” level, a decline from 35% in 2019, reflecting continued learning loss since the pandemic.<sup>1</sup> In Texas, the percentage was slightly lower, with 30% achieving the NAEP proficient level.<sup>2</sup> However, most North Texas counties performed better than the national and state levels.

Reading at grade level is a strong predictor of future academic success.<sup>3</sup> Students who do not read proficiently by the end of third grade are four times more likely to drop out of high

school compared to their peers. Reading proficiency also identifies early learning gaps, making it a key indicator in state-level accountability and education policy.

North Texas school districts are responding. Dallas ISD launched the Texas Reading Academies to train kindergarten through third-grade teachers in reading education. More than 1,300 educators completed the program in its first year. The initiative aims to close early literacy gaps across the district.<sup>4</sup> Fort Worth ISD is adjusting its budget to address early literacy gaps: Through its 2025-2026 redesign, the district will reinvest \$22.7 million into reading and math instruction, including demonstration teacher roles focused on reading in



Reading at grade level is a strong predictor of future academic success.

kindergarten through second grade.<sup>5</sup> The district is also implementing phonics-based instruction.<sup>6</sup>

English Language Learners

Percentage of students enrolled in public school districts who are English language learners

English language learners (ELL) continue to be one of the fastest-growing student populations in U.S. public schools, according to the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES). Texas had the highest percentage of English learners at 20.2%, with California (18.9%) and New Mexico (18.8%) following.<sup>1</sup> The Texas percentage is nearly double the national average of 10.3%.<sup>2</sup> According to the Texas Education Agency (TEA), 99% of the state’s school districts serve identified emergent bilingual students.<sup>3</sup>

From 2020 to 2024, all eight North Texas counties showed steady increases in ELL enrollments. Notably, Dallas County reached a new peak in 2024, with 39.9% of students classified as English learners, a 33.6% increase since 2020 and the highest amount in the region. Tarrant County followed, increasing from 20.8% in 2020 to 25% in 2024. Suburban counties like Collin (16.7%), Denton (18.1%) and Ellis (16%) have experienced some of the fastest proportional growth in recent years. Rural counties also experienced steady growth between 2020 and 2024, with Cooke increasing from 14.4% to 18.7% and Grayson from 11.4% to 14.2%. Fannin County, while still below the state average, has risen steadily from 8.3% in 2020 to

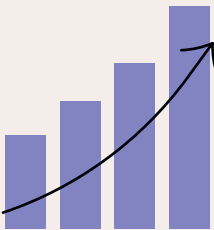
| County  | 2020 | 2021 | 2022 | 2023 | 2024 |
|---------|------|------|------|------|------|
| Collin  | 11.2 | 11.2 | 12.5 | 14.5 | 16.7 |
| Cooke   | 14.4 | 14.9 | 15.9 | 17.3 | 18.7 |
| Dallas  | 33.6 | 34.3 | 35.9 | 38.0 | 39.9 |
| Denton  | 14.2 | 14.5 | 15.3 | 16.5 | 18.1 |
| Ellis   | 13.5 | 13.4 | 14.3 | 15.1 | 16.0 |
| Fannin  | 8.3  | 9.0  | 10.1 | 10.5 | 11.1 |
| Grayson | 11.4 | 11.8 | 12.5 | 13.2 | 14.2 |
| Tarrant | 20.8 | 21.2 | 22.3 | 23.4 | 25.0 |

Source: Texas Education Agency (TEA) Texas Academic Performance Report (TAPR)

11.1% in 2024, surpassing the national average for the first time.

English learners who have not reached language proficiency after five years in school are known as long-term English learners (LTELs). About 36% of ELL students who began first grade in 2000 were later categorized as LTELs. That number is over 67% among students who began first grade in 2014.<sup>4</sup> One recent report highlighted Texas as being in the top quartile of states whose English learners moved to long-term status.<sup>5</sup>

As the English learner population grows, the need for targeted educational resources increases. Texas schools face increasing pressure to recruit bilingual and English-as-a-second-language-certified educators, provide linguistically and culturally responsive curricula and invest in language-learning technologies.<sup>6</sup>



All eight counties showed **steady increases** in ELL enrollments.

Another concern is providing access to culturally sensitive testing and family engagement resources to help bridge the achievement gap between ELL students and their English-fluent peers. Research consistently shows a performance disparity: English learners often experience lower standardized test scores, graduation rates, college readiness and more.<sup>7</sup> Social factors compound these challenges, as most ELL students are also racial or ethnic minorities, primarily Hispanic and/or Latino.<sup>8</sup>

Students Receiving Special Education

Number of students receiving special education in public schools

North Texas counties experienced a steady and significant increase in the number of students receiving special education services from 2020 to 2024, with 173,181 students accessing these services in 2024. Dallas County saw its special education enrollment rise 21%, from 48,956 in 2020 to 59,454 in 2024. Similarly, Collin County grew 32%, from 24,880 to 32,878 students, while Denton County rose 41%, from 16,439 to 23,221. Even in smaller counties like Cooke and Fannin, special education counts increased by more than 30% over this five-year period.

| County  | 2020   | 2021   | 2022   | 2023   | 2024   |
|---------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|
| Collin  | 24,880 | 25,812 | 27,230 | 29,988 | 32,878 |
| Cooke   | 705    | 752    | 818    | 994    | 1,069  |
| Dallas  | 48,956 | 48,899 | 50,023 | 54,660 | 59,454 |
| Denton  | 16,439 | 17,311 | 19,050 | 21,003 | 23,221 |
| Ellis   | 4,893  | 5,238  | 5,665  | 6,325  | 6,848  |
| Fannin  | 698    | 701    | 782    | 898    | 992    |
| Grayson | 2,983  | 3,114  | 3,453  | 3,982  | 4,488  |
| Tarrant | 35,013 | 35,293 | 37,370 | 40,890 | 44,231 |

Source: Texas Education Agency (TEA) Texas Academic Performance Report (TAPR)

While Texas now aligns closely with the national average of 15%, as reported by the National Center for Education Statistics, longstanding access and quality challenges remain.<sup>2</sup> A University of Texas Education Research Lab report found nearly 1 in 5 Texas districts remained noncompliant with IDEA requirements, especially in the timely evaluation of and support for bilingual and low-income students.<sup>3</sup>

Adding to the pressure is a growing teacher shortage. Learning Disabilities Association of America (LDA) ranks Texas among the top five states for special education teacher vacancies, leaving many students without consistent Individualized Education Program (IEP) support.<sup>4</sup> The U.S. Department of Education further notes that recruitment pipelines in special education remain underfunded and underutilized.<sup>5</sup>

Meanwhile, the financial burden on school districts is growing. School



14%  
of Texas public  
school students  
received special  
education  
services in 2024.

districts are facing an estimated \$1.7 billion funding gap in special education for 2025, according to a Houston news media report.<sup>6</sup> Without funding changes, rising enrollments may continue to outpace a system struggling to provide equitable services.<sup>7</sup>

These trends align with the statewide shift toward enhanced identification efforts and more active enforcement of the Child Find mandate under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). The Child Find mandate requires public schools to identify, locate and evaluate all children with disabilities (regardless of severity or income level) who may need special education services. This obligation applies to children starting at age 3 and includes proactive outreach so no child is overlooked.<sup>1</sup>

Texas reported 775,318 students statewide receiving special education services in 2024, representing 14% of all public school students, according to the Texas Education Agency. This marks a rise from 12.8% in 2022.

High School Completion Rates

Percentage of ninth-graders who graduated from high school in four years

High school completion rates in North Texas have reached new highs in the past few years, reflecting the combined impact of policy reforms and targeted academic support programs. In 2023, 90.3% of Texas students graduated on time, the highest rate ever recorded for the state, according to the Texas Education Agency (TEA).<sup>1</sup> This trend is mirrored across several North Texas counties. Frisco ISD in Collin County reported a four-year completion rate of 98.8%, while Denton ISD posted 97.6%. In contrast, Dallas ISD, serving a more economically disadvantaged population, reported a lower rate of 82.6%.<sup>2</sup> These figures indicate a gap between suburban and urban areas in educational attainment.

The national graduation rate stood at 87% in 2022,<sup>3</sup> placing Texas above the national average and among the highest-performing states. However, the United States still lags behind global leaders in education. According to the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), Finland and South Korea maintain upper-secondary completion rates above 95%; however, the United States ranks higher than the 82% average completion rate (within six years) across member countries.<sup>4</sup>

| County  | 2020 | 2021 | 2022 | 2023 | 2024 |
|---------|------|------|------|------|------|
| Collin  | 97.5 | 97.6 | 97.4 | 97.2 | 97.7 |
| Cooke   | 95.6 | 96.5 | 97.2 | 97.2 | 99.1 |
| Dallas  | 85.1 | 84.0 | 83.9 | 83.3 | 85.0 |
| Denton  | 96.2 | 96.4 | 96.9 | 96.4 | 95.9 |
| Ellis   | 93.8 | 95.0 | 94.6 | 93.9 | 95.8 |
| Fannin  | 97.6 | 97.0 | 97.5 | 98.3 | 97.6 |
| Grayson | 93.7 | 95.9 | 96.0 | 96.4 | 96.7 |
| Tarrant | 92.5 | 93.2 | 91.5 | 90.8 | 91.5 |

Source: Texas Education Agency (TEA) Texas Academic Performance Reports (TAPR)

Graduating from high school is a key factor in achieving long-term success. In 2024, those without a diploma had an unemployment rate of 6.2%, compared to 4.2% for high school graduates, who earned about 26% more than those without a diploma.<sup>5</sup> These gaps highlight the importance of ensuring students not only earn a diploma but also are equipped for life after graduation.

Although Texas has achieved record graduation rates, some researchers caution that pandemic-era policy changes may have contributed to inflated outcomes. Temporary waivers of end-of-course exams and revised accountability metrics allowed more students to graduate despite unfinished learning. A 2025 Brookings report noted many of these students were less prepared for postsecondary success, which contributed to lower college enrollment rates and delayed federal student aid submissions.<sup>6</sup>

North Texas  
high school  
graduation rates  
have reached new  
highs in the past  
few years.

Still, progress is being made. The share of Texas students earning an industry-based certification increased from 10.7% in 2019 to 33.4% in 2023, reflecting a growing alignment between secondary education and workforce readiness.<sup>7</sup> These advancements, if scaled equitably, could help close the opportunity gap for underserved communities in North Texas.

Students Passing STAAR Tests

Percentage of children meeting STAAR standards in all subjects for all public school grades

After experiencing improvements from 2021 to 2023, most North Texas counties saw their percentage of students passing all State of Texas Assessments of Academic Readiness (STAAR) exams dip in 2024.

Collin County recorded the highest rate at 68.1% in 2024, continuing to significantly outperform other counties. Denton County was next at 54.1%, while Tarrant County dropped slightly to 46.8%, which is just below the regional median of 47%. Cooke County remained the lowest at 40.2%. Six of the eight counties had percentages under 50%, suggesting nearly half of students in these areas are not meeting grade-level expectations across multiple academic subjects.

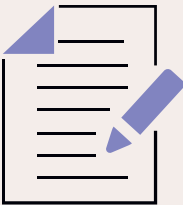
Statewide third-grade reading proficiency increased from 46% to 49% in 2025, according to the Texas Education Agency, and science scores rose slightly, while math continues to lag.<sup>1</sup> In this context, North Texas counties’ “pass all” rates, ranging from 40.2% to 68.1%, align broadly with statewide trends. While some counties outperform the state, others remain well below average.

Passing all STAAR tests is a strong indicator of students’ mastery in core subjects and overall academic readiness, as well as a gauge for Texas students’ competitiveness

| County  | 2020* | 2021 | 2022 | 2023 | 2024 |
|---------|-------|------|------|------|------|
| Collin  | —     | 62.1 | 67.1 | 69.3 | 68.1 |
| Cooke   | —     | 43.3 | 45.8 | 43.6 | 40.2 |
| Dallas  | —     | 34.5 | 41.9 | 43.9 | 43.2 |
| Denton  | —     | 49.8 | 54.5 | 55.7 | 54.1 |
| Ellis   | —     | 43.4 | 46.2 | 47.6 | 46.3 |
| Fannin  | —     | 42.3 | 46.6 | 49.5 | 47.2 |
| Grayson | —     | 46.3 | 48.7 | 50.2 | 47.8 |
| Tarrant | —     | 40.5 | 47.2 | 48.0 | 46.8 |

Source: Texas Education Agency (TEA) Texas Academic Performance Report (TAPR)  
\* Data unavailable for 2020 because STAAR exams were cancelled during the COVID-19 pandemic.

compared to others nationally.<sup>2</sup> STAAR results provide a consistent way to compare performance across districts and identify where support is most needed.<sup>3</sup>



Six of eight counties had STAAR exam passing percentages under 50%.

Student achievement in reading, math and science will play a role in shaping the state’s long-term economic future. Fewer than half of Texas students currently perform at grade level in math and science, and only a quarter of fifth graders meet state science benchmarks, raising concerns about the state’s ability to meet future workforce demands in health care, skilled trades and STEM.<sup>4</sup>

Dallas ISD has implemented a robust accelerated learning program in response to a Texas House bill that mandates supplemental instruction for students who did not pass STAAR exams. The district has hired vetted tutors, provided high-quality curricula and matched tutoring

providers to campus needs – actions that exceed state requirements.<sup>5</sup> Also, Dallas ISD has partnered with the Dallas Education Foundation to distribute literacy kits featuring STEM concepts and culturally relevant text to students in kindergarten through fifth grade. The initiative aims to strengthen foundational skills and promote reading engagement.<sup>6</sup>

College Readiness

Percentage of public high school graduates who met the TEA college-readiness standard or scored above the criterion on SAT/ACT tests

College readiness is a critical benchmark for student success, shaping access to higher education and long-term career outcomes.<sup>1</sup> The Texas Education Agency (TEA) reports college readiness using two standards: The first standard rates students who score at or above the criterion score on STAAR exams or the SAT or ACT as college-ready (referred to as the TEA standard), while the second considers those students who score at or above the SAT or ACT criterion only.

Between 2019 and 2023, North Texas counties showed mixed progress. Dallas County made a dramatic leap in TEA standard college readiness, rising from 46% in 2019 to 63% in 2023. Collin County consistently led the region, reaching 70.7% in 2023. Denton and Cooke counties were relatively stable, while Fannin County surged from 39.4% to 61.8%, a 22.4 percentage point increase. Tarrant and Ellis counties followed that upward trend, increasing by more than 13 percentage points each.

However, the SAT/ACT readiness paints a different picture. Across all eight counties, readiness rates based on SAT/ACT scores only were significantly lower than TEA benchmarks. In 2023, only Collin County surpassed 50% (50.9%), while

| County  |                  | 2019 | 2020 | 2021 | 2022 | 2023 |
|---------|------------------|------|------|------|------|------|
| Collin  | TEA standard     | 69.2 | 67.4 | 67.5 | 66.2 | 70.7 |
|         | SAT/ACT standard | 55.7 | 55.4 | 52.6 | 51.0 | 50.9 |
| Cooke   | TEA standard     | 52.6 | 50.0 | 49.4 | 54.5 | 53.2 |
|         | SAT/ACT standard | 20.5 | 22.9 | 21.0 | 15.2 | 20.0 |
| Dallas  | TEA standard     | 46.0 | 49.2 | 49.9 | 50.0 | 63.0 |
|         | SAT/ACT standard | 23.9 | 24.8 | 20.8 | 19.7 | 19.3 |
| Denton  | TEA standard     | 58.6 | 56.2 | 53.3 | 51.5 | 56.5 |
|         | SAT/ACT standard | 41.4 | 40.9 | 36.3 | 34.8 | 34.4 |
| Ellis   | TEA standard     | 52.5 | 54.2 | 48.3 | 47.5 | 63.2 |
|         | SAT/ACT standard | 25.0 | 23.9 | 19.6 | 19.8 | 18.6 |
| Fannin  | TEA Standard     | 39.4 | 39.8 | 50.0 | 47.2 | 61.8 |
|         | SAT/ACT standard | 19.4 | 16.8 | 17.4 | 13.1 | 13.9 |
| Grayson | TEA standard     | 49.9 | 52.4 | 46.3 | 48.6 | 59.0 |
|         | SAT/ACT standard | 26.8 | 25.0 | 21.4 | 23.6 | 21.2 |
| Tarrant | TEA standard     | 49.8 | 50.8 | 50.0 | 53.0 | 65.2 |
|         | SAT/ACT standard | 29.4 | 30.4 | 25.9 | 24.9 | 24.6 |

Source: Texas Education Agency (TEA) Texas Academic Performance Report (TAPR)

Dallas, Tarrant and Ellis counties were below 25%. The higher TEA readiness standard can be attributed to a more easily attainable STAAR criterion score, while the ACT/SAT criterion has remained stable.

Texas trails the national average in postsecondary attainment. As of 2023, 46.9% of Texans ages 25-34 held an associate degree or higher, compared to 51.3% nationally.<sup>2</sup> College readiness is a key predictor of whether students will enroll in and complete higher education. Lower readiness levels result in a higher need for remedial services once students enroll in college.<sup>3</sup>



Collin County consistently **leads the region** in TEA-standard college readiness.

The COVID-19 pandemic disrupted academic progress in 2020; however, most North Texas counties had rebounded by 2021.

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research methodology

The research process, as with past reports, began with the Beyond ABC Advisory Board identifying the indicators included in this year’s report. Working closely with staff at Children’s Health, members of the research team at the Institute for Urban Policy Research (IUPR) at the University of Texas as Dallas collected and analyzed data for the past five years from the eight counties covered in this report: Collin, Cooke, Dallas, Denton, Fannin, Grayson, Tarrant, and new this year, Ellis.

The research team identified a precise, technical definition for each indicator, then began the process of gathering the data. While most data was available from public sources, other indicators required the team to make informal requests to state agencies for customized data runs. In select instances, data was obtained through the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA), which extended the timeline for data collection.

When possible, the team reacquired five full years of data, rather than simply appending the most recent year. This approach ensured comparability across counties, including Ellis County for the first time this year. Additionally, due to the evolving nature of administrative data (a process sometimes referred to as “settling”) some values for prior years may differ from those in previous Beyond ABC editions. Often, figures published for recent years in past reports were provisional. As state agencies finalize their records, earlier estimates are replaced with more accurate figures. This report uses the most current available data.

The team continues to update data sources and refine the definitions of indicators. These changes were made to ensure greater accuracy, improve data availability or provide a more meaningful representation of the underlying issue. Any such changes are noted in the report.

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# acknowledgements

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Lincoln, age 11, Collin County



view the Beyond ABC report online  
at [childrens.com/beyondabc](https://childrens.com/beyondabc).