NEWS NEWS

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Mayor John F. Street Releases Finding of the 2004 Children's Report Card

PHILADELPHIA — Mayor John F. Street, several City commissioners, officials of Philadelphia Safe and Sound, and an audience of more than 100 child advocates unveiled the findings in Report Card 2004: The Well-Being of Children and Youth in Philadelphia today in a City Hall press conference.

The report card is the city's annual assessment of the health, safety and development of Philadelphia's children and youth. The report card tracks Philadelphia's progress toward achieving five desired results, reflecting the key factors affecting children's lives: family, community, school, health, and behavior. Taken together, these desired results create a vision for Philadelphia's children and youth.

A total of 26 indicators, culled from reliable and recent citywide data, were used in this year's report card. These indicators shed light on the current status of Philadelphia's children and track changes in conditions. For the fifth consecutive year, the city received an overall grade of ***Mixed, with inconsistent progress*** in this year's report card.

"Philadelphia has realized improvements in many child and youth indicators over the past year, especially in the area of early childhood health," said Mayor Street. "Unfortunately, those gains were offset by extremely troubling challenges faced by older youth, especially around community safety standards. A rise in youth violence and homicide should be cause for great concern for every resident of Philadelphia.

"Despite our progress in improving some outcomes for children, the city received an overall grade of *Mixed* again this year," the Mayor continued. "There is cause for optimism, just as there is the need for renewed commitment to do even more for our children. The conditions that affect the city's children, developed over decades and generations, not over the past five years. The reality is that Philadelphia's city government cannot do the work alone. We need a greater degree of public-private collaboration. To that end, I am delighted to announce today the formation of a new Children's Commission, which includes many of the most respected civic and child advocacy leaders in the city."

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"The original Children's Commission, created in my first term, supported the City's efforts to develop data sources like the Report Card and Children's Budget. The new, reconstituted Children's Commission will build on the prior commission's work to use these resources to improve decision-making on how children and families are being served and to make private and public services for children and families more effective, the Mayor added. "The new commission will convene regular meetings with members of my Cabinet and the leadership of the private child advocacy community. The commission also will author reports to me which will provide analysis of effective City programs and policies for children, as well as action plans to better address ongoing challenges in keeping the city's children healthy, safe and prepared for a successful transition into adulthood. By providing recommendations to city government and private agencies on building upon gains or addressing deeply-entrenched problems confronting Philadelphia's children and youth, the commission will be a catalyst for positive change and a powerful voice for the city's most vulnerable residents."

Report Card 2004 reveals improvements in the Healthy Start desired result, especially in indicators measuring the health and school readiness of young children. The Healthy Start desired result is the only one the five key results that has achieved a *promising* rating, and the only one to improve its rating since the first report card. Since 1995:

- Philadelphia's infant mortality rate has fallen by 25%.
- More Philadelphia mothers are receiving adequate prenatal care.
- More than 90% of first-time first-graders are being promoted, up from 83.3% in the 1995-96 school year.
- Only the rate of infants born with low birth-weight has not improved since 1995, though this trend is consistent with national trends. The national rate rose in 2002 to the highest level since the early 1970s, probably due, in part, to an increase in multiple births.
- Healthy Start indicators, though encouraging, have not improved to the point that they match national and state levels.
- The desired result that children and youth live in S*afe, supportive communities and environments* desired had this year's lowest rating of *problematic* and is the most daunting challenge facing the city in its efforts to improve the lives of children.

The data in *Report Card 2004* demonstrate that Philadelphia is unsafe for many children and youth, and that too many young people are turning to crime:

- The number of juveniles victimized by major crime has increased since 1998
- A recent increase in major crimes against juveniles was driven by a rise in violent crimes like murder, rape and aggravated assault
- The number of juveniles arrested for drug-related offenses in 2003 was 80% higher than in 1996
- The number of reported assaults in public schools in the 2002-03 school year was more than double the number in 1995, though more rigorous reporting of incidents has contributed to this increase
- The most troubling aspect of the most recent safety data is the number of homicides of young people from age seven to 24
- This number had declined to a low of 111 in 2002, 30% below the 160 homicides in 1996. But the figure increased to 136 in 2003, cutting in half the improvement made since 1996 in just one year

- The data also make clear that the ready availability and use of guns is contributing to Philadelphia's safety problems with children and youth:
  - Gunshot wounds caused 90% of homicides of young people in Philadelphia last year
  - The number of gunshot wound victims age 24 and younger increased to 880 in 2003, 17% higher than the previous year
  - Clearly, Philadelphia will not protect its young people from violence until the gun use issue is addressed. This will require a concerted effort from the city, state and federal governments, since federal and state actions have preempted local government authority in this area

On the education front, the effectiveness of the School District's reforms cannot be determined at this point in time, although there are indications of incremental improvement in the public schools

- The percentage of students scoring "proficient and above" in the state PSSA test have generally improved in both math and reading for 5th and 8th grade students in the last three years, though results for 11th graders have not improved
- On-time graduation rates have improved since 1995-96, though the rate has declined in each of the last two years through the adoption of more rigorous promotion and graduation standards
- The high school drop out rate has been reduced from 31% to 23% since 1995-96, and the school attendance rate has risen slightly
- Problems remain, however. Despite improvement in the graduation rate, nearly 45% of 9th graders do not graduate within four years
- Despite improvement in the drop out rate, nearly one-in-four 9th graders drop out of school within four years
- Despite national and state trends showing increases in SAT® scores over the last several years, average scores for Philadelphia public school students have dropped from 850 in 1996-97 to 824 in 2002-03
- Philadelphia is incrementally increasing the number of youth who stay in school, but many are still struggling and remain at risk. Closer examination is needed on what happens after 8th grade and what can be done to help students carry improved school performance into high school

There are other telling report card trends to watch, both good and bad:

- The teen pregnancy rate has improved steadily. The rate for young women ages 15-17 has fallen 35% since 1995.

- The death rate for youth ages 15-19 has been cut more than one-half since 1996, with a marked reduction in unintentional deaths.

- The percentage of high school students who reported smoking was 13.9%, which was less than one-half of the percentage reported in 1997.

- The number of child abuse cases has dropped by 40% since 1996, but the number of children removed from home as a result of abuse, neglect or delinquent behavior has not improved.

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- Expansion of STD screening has identified a dramatically higher incidence of chlamydia: the rate of chlamydia among teens ages 15-19 in 2003 was nearly double the rate in 1995.

One promising new development this year is the mapping technology being employed throughout the city in both public and private child-serving agencies. The mapping allows city government and private organizations to pinpoint the location of problems and the need for deeper resources right down to specific communities.

This is an important development because different communities face different challenges in improving the health, safety, education and overall positive development of their children and youth.

The City expects to begin producing "community report cards" available later this year.

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