



2019 Community Assessment

Section 1. Introduction and Overview

The Early Learning Coalition encompasses a wide variety of programs and services including grant funded literacy programs, subsidized child care for income eligible working and/or attending school parents, Child Care Resource & Referral, aiding and educating locally-owned child care providers, professional development opportunities for locally-owned child care providers, free child development assessment for all Marion County children birth to 8-years-old through our Help Me Grow partnership, parent education and training through Success by 6 in partnership with United Way of Marion County, Florida's Voluntary Pre-Kindergarten program, and collaborative community partnerships to enhance education and child care experiences of parents and children throughout Marion County.

Early Learning Coalition's Location and Geographical Features

Our community consist of 1,663 square miles, making it the fifth largest county in all of Florida. Commonly known as "Horse Capital of the World," Marion County is a world leader in Thoroughbred horse breeding and training with Ocala Star Banner reporting a total of 17 out of 20 horses in the 2017 Kentucky Derby being tied to Marion County.¹ ELCMC is located on the southwest quadrant of the county.

Nearly three-quarters of the Ocala National Forest is in Marion County. The Forest offers 383,573 acres of unique ecological sites, trails, and natural springs. Marion County is also the home of the Silver Springs State Park, which encompasses 350 acres.

¹ Medina, Carlos E., and Carlos E. Medina Correspondent. "17 Of 20 Kentucky Derby Horses Have Marion County Ties." Ocala.com, Ocala Star Banner, 5 May 2017, www.ocala.com/news/20170504/17-of-20-kentucky-derby-horses-have-marion-county-ties

Early Learning Coalition's Range of Direct Services

ELCMC contracts directly with childcare providers both within and outside the county limits (for convenience of clients living near the county border). ELCMC also utilizes grant funding and community partnerships to enhance the scope of direct services available.

Since Voluntary Pre-Kindergarten (VPK) was voted on in 2002 and signed into law in January of 2005, ELCMC has administered the registration and transferring of children as per Florida Constitution Section 1. Public education (b) which states:

“Every four-year old child in Florida shall be provided by the State a high-quality pre-kindergarten learning opportunity in the form of an early childhood development and education program which shall be voluntary, high quality, free, and delivered according to professionally accepted standards. An early childhood development and education program means an organized program designed to address and enhance each child’s ability to make age appropriate progress in an appropriate range of settings in the development of language and cognitive capabilities and emotional, social, regulatory and moral capacities through education in basic skills and such other skills as the Legislature may determine to be appropriate.”²

The Early Learning Coalition is also responsible for contracting of VPK providers (see section 6 for more info). VPK ensures that all 4-year-old children have access to a quality education that prepares them for kindergarten and for the educational setting of K-12.

Through our Help Me Grow grant ELCMC also provides free developmental screenings to all Marion County children birth to 8, as well as resources and connections for any parents with additional concerns and needs.

ELCMC offers free professional development to contracted providers on a monthly basis.

ELCMC has multiple community partnerships such as Read Aloud 15 and Success By 6. Read Aloud 15 provides Marion County with free books to ensure that all the county’s children and their parents are reading for at least 15 minutes a day to improve their child’s cognitive development. ELCMC partners with United Way of Marion County for the Success By 6 initiatives, which focuses on educating parents to be their child’s first teacher and ensuring that the community has access to needed child care essentials. Some of these essentials include diapers, car seats, and educational workshops for parents.

Through the Success By 6 partnership, ELCMC can aide in providing Marion County parents with education on parenting and early childhood development, and materials such as car seats and diapers to ensure that parents have what they need. Success By 6 initiatives include our local diaper drive which provides free diapers to parents in need for their children, car seat classes that provide free car seats to all attending parents, and Parents As Teachers workshops which educate parents on strategies to ensure that learning continues when returning home from child care and/or school.

² Constitution of the State of Florida Section 1. Public education (b)

ELCMC also partners with Kiwanis Club of Ocala for the Reading Is Fundamental program, and they provide ELCMC with funding for our Success By 6 and Read Aloud 15 programs. Through this partnership ELCMC can distribute books directly to children across eight Marion County elementary schools, ensuring that children VPK through 2nd grade receive a book three times a year. By the end of the 2018-2019 school it is estimated that 8,445 books will have been distributed by The Kiwanis partnership also allows ELCMC to provide pack-n-plays to local families in need of sleeping arrangements for newborns and infants.

ELCMC has also partnered with Marion County Public Library to hold multiple community events and to offer our contracted providers with a lending library of educational materials to be used at child care facilities.

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Section 2. Demographic Information

Children Under 5-Years-Old and Children Under 5 in Poverty

The American Community Survey reports that 12.9% of Marion County's population are families living beneath the poverty level.³ The American Community Survey reports 87,376 family households in Marion County.⁴

Family Households in Marion County: 87,376

X

Multiplied by 12.9% (.129)

Gives an estimate of
11,272 family housing units in poverty

The American Community Survey reports that as of 2017 there are a total of 17,240 birth to 4-years-old in Marion County.⁵

The American Community Survey reports that 17.6% of all people in Marion County are living beneath the poverty level.⁶

Birth to 4: 17,240

X

Multiplied by 17.6% (0.176)

Gives us an estimate of
3,034 children birth to 4-years-old living in poverty

³ American Community Survey Selected Economic Statistics 2017

⁴ American Community Survey Selected Social Characteristics 2017

⁵ American Community Survey Demographic and Housing Estimates 2017

⁶ American Community Survey Selected Economic Statistics 2017

24.9% of families living beneath the poverty level care for children under 5-years-old.⁷

Family housing below poverty level: 11,272
 X
 Multiplied by 24.9% (0.249)

Gives us an estimate of
 2,807 poverty housing units with children under 5-years-old

Estimate Children 5-18 Living in Poverty

The American Community Survey reports that there are 64,615 children under 18-years-old.⁸

64,615
 -
 Subtract children birth to 4: 17,240

Leaves us with 47,375 children 5-years-old and up

*This number will exceed Marion County Schools; accounting for forms of alternative schooling and dropouts

5 and up: 47,375
 X
 Multiplied by 17.6% (0.176)

Gives us an estimate of
 8,338 children 5 and older living in poverty

⁷ American Community Survey Selected Economic Statistics 2017

⁸ American Community Survey Demographic and Housing Estimates 2017

Racial and Ethnic Information on children Under 4

The American Community Survey tells us that 5% of Marion County's population is under 5-years-old.⁹ The American Community Survey also tells us the population of each race in Marion County. With this information we can roughly estimate the race population of children under 5 (See Section 5 for population of predominate race in Marion County).

White population in Marion County: 281,763¹⁰
X
5% (0.05)

14,088 white children from birth to 4

Black population in Marion County: 44,237¹¹
X
5% (0.05)

2,212 black children from birth to 4

Asian population in Marion County: 5,129¹²
X
5% (0.05)

256 Asian children from birth to 4

Hispanic/Latino population in Marion County: 42,467¹³
X
5% (0.05)

2,123 Hispanic/Latino children from birth to 4

⁹ American Community Survey Demographic and Housing Estimates 2017

¹⁰ American Community Survey Demographic and Housing Estimates 2017

¹¹ American Community Survey Demographic and Housing Estimates 2017

¹² American Community Survey Demographic and Housing Estimates 2017

¹³ American Community Survey Demographic and Housing Estimates 2017

Language Information of Families in Service Area¹⁴

English: 289,098
Spanish: 29,417
Indo-European Languages*: 5,447

*Albanian, Anatolian, Armenian, Balto-Slavic, Celtic, Germanic, Hellenic, Indo-Iranian, Italic, Tocharian

Population not speaking English "very well": 22,194

Section 3. Estimates of all Children in Poverty

Estimate of all children in poverty:

5 and up: 8,338
+
Birth to 4: 3,034

Gives us an estimate of
11,372 children in poverty

¹⁴ American Community Survey Selected Social Characteristics 2017

Section 4. Demographic Information – Geographical Location

Where the families and Providers are Located

Marion County is spread among 1,663 square miles. Demographic information has been divided by zip code to provide the most accurate information. The Marion County population based on the 2017 census is as follows:¹⁵

Zip Code	Population	# of Child Care providers	Zip Code	Population	# of Child Care Providers
34420	14,776	6	34476	22,347	2
34431	8,014	5	34479	14,320	4
34470	19,636	15	34480	19,368	8
34471	25,082	14	34482	24,105	6
34491	25,173	4	32179	8,023	1
34472	31,317	11	32686	4,944	2
34473	19,274	6	34488	9,766	1
34474	15,937	5	32192	N/A*	1
34475	12,275	9	Total Child Care Providers Offering School Readiness 101		

*No info available since 2010 US Census

Episcopal Children's Services reports that Marion County saw an increase in School Readiness children being served, from 2,325 vouchers in 2014 to 2,832 vouchers in 2017.¹⁶ As of December 18, 2018, ELCMC reports another increase to 3,052 active School Readiness vouchers for Marion County.¹⁷

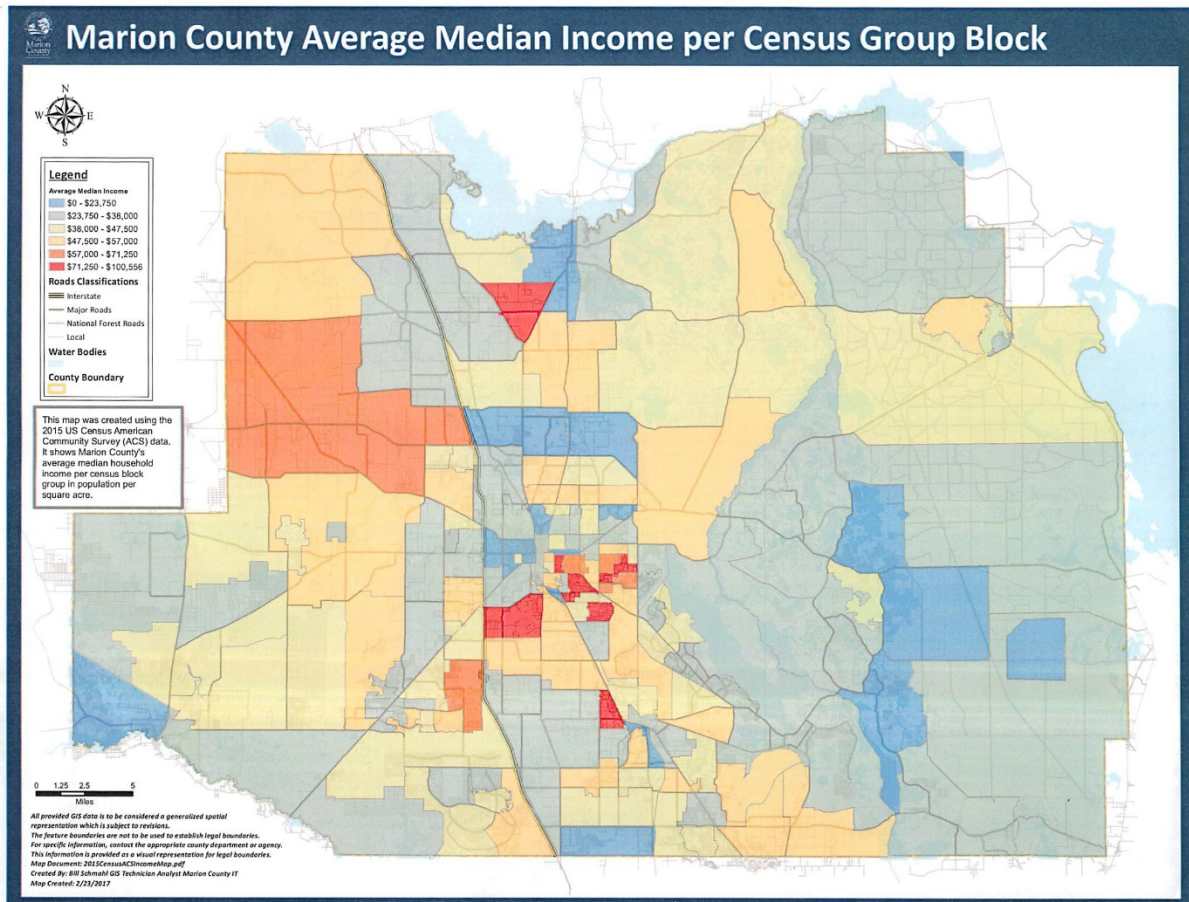
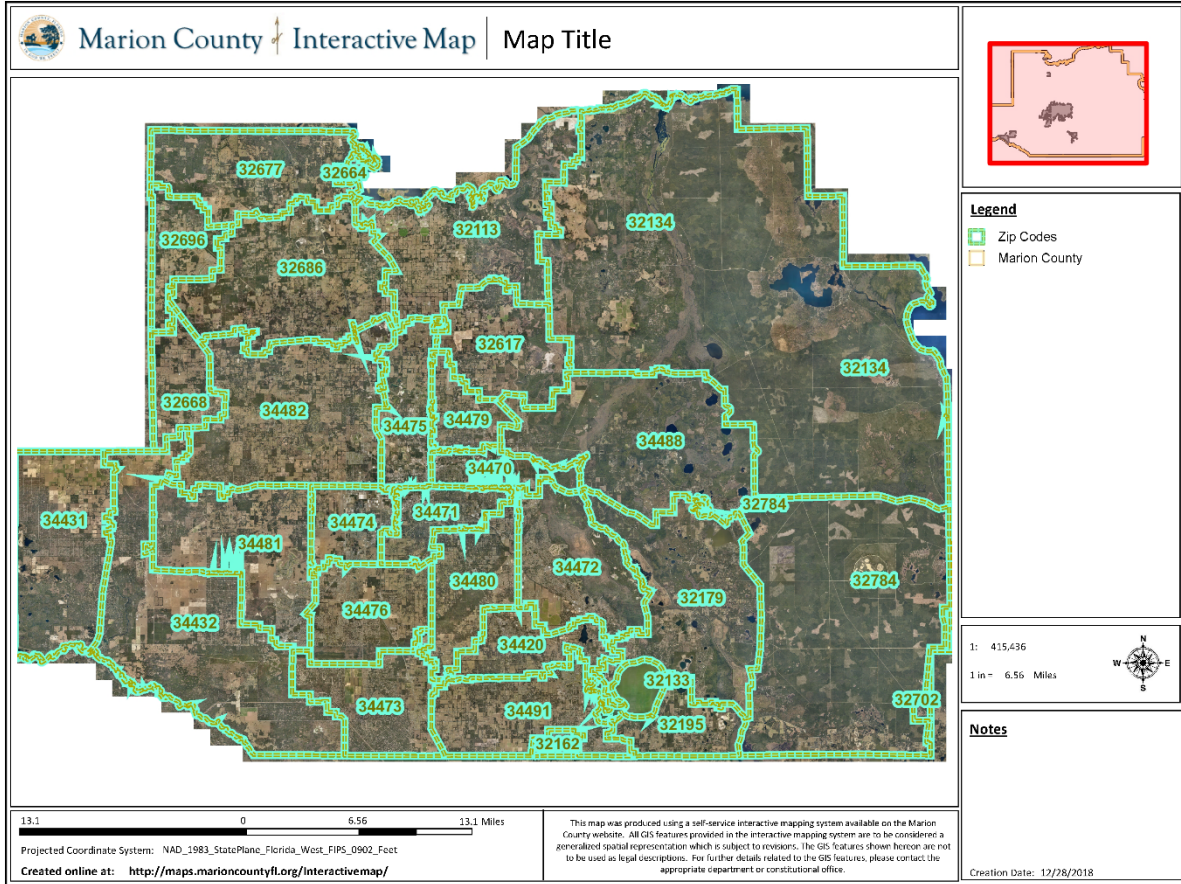
How geography impacts services and operations:

The geography's impact on services comes from the county's size. Services are needed throughout the county, primarily in outlying areas. Although Marion County is considered an urban county, portions of the area are covered by Ocala National Forest, while other areas are horse farming communities.

¹⁵ Data Access and Dissemination Systems (DADS). American Factfinder - Results, 5 Oct. 2010, https://factfinder.census.gov/faces/nav/jsf/pages/community_facts.xhtml . Ensure that your population box reads "2017 ACS 5-year population estimate"

¹⁶ report, Staff. "Community Assessment 2018 Head Start Early Head Start." Episcopal Children's Services

¹⁷ Internal ELCMC report



As per the two previous maps and table, in most lower income areas there are less opportunities for subsidized childcare, due to lack of contracted providers.

Section 5. Child Care Programs

Voluntary Pre-Kindergarten:

ELMC handles the eligibility of every child in Marion County, as well as any transfers to and from our county.

As of January 10, 2019 ELMC and Marion County have 114 licensed and certified VPK providers. This number accounts for centers that are either VPK only or offer VPK in conjunction with other curricula and programs.

School Readiness:

Early Learning Coalition of Marion County's School Readiness program offers reimbursement for child care to income-eligible working-class parents, parents who are qualifying students, and at-risk families.

All working parents must be working a minimum of 20 hours per week and fall within the state mandated income guidelines of being no more than 150% above the poverty level.

Parents who are attending school need to be engaged in a minimal of 20-hours of educational activity each week. While age of the parent/care-giver is not a determining factor in eligibility these student parents may be parents attending high school, a GED program, technical or vocational programs, associate of arts, associate of science, Bachelor of Art or Bachelor of Science programs at their school. This attendance needs to be proven by an official enrollment letter on their school's letterhead, stating the students start date and graduation date; and a print-out of their lab hours and/or class schedule.

As per Florida Statute 1002.87 all Early Learning Coalitions are required to assign priority to certain families and children, such as families under the age of 13 receiving Temporary Cash Assistance (as defined in Florida Statute 414)¹⁸ and at-risk children under the age of 9.¹⁹ This statute reads:

“(1) Each early learning coalition shall give priority for participation in the school readiness program as follows:

(a) Priority shall be given first to a child younger than 13 years of age from a family that includes a parent who is receiving temporary cash assistance under chapter 414 and subject to the federal work requirements.

(b) Priority shall be given next to an at-risk child younger than 9 years of age.”

¹⁸ See Florida Statute 414 for further information

¹⁹ See Florida Statute 1002.87 (1)(a) and 1002.87(1)(b)

Following these priorities Florida Statute 1002.87 states that “Subsequent priority shall be given, based on the early learning coalition’s local priorities identified under s. 1002.85(2)(j), to children who meet the following criteria.”²⁰

“1. A child from birth to the beginning of the school year for which the child is eligible for admission to kindergarten in a public school under s. 1003.21(1)(a)2. who is from a working family that is economically disadvantaged, and may include such child’s eligible siblings, beginning with the school year in which the sibling is eligible for admission to kindergarten in a public school under s. 1003.21(1)(a)2. until the beginning of the school year in which the sibling is eligible to begin 6th grade, provided that the first priority for funding an eligible sibling is local revenues available to the coalition for funding direct services.

2. A child of a parent who transitions from the work program into employment as described in s. 445.032 from birth to the beginning of the school year for which the child is eligible for admission to kindergarten in a public school under s. 1003.21(1)(a)2.

3. An at-risk child who is at least 9 years of age but younger than 13 years of age. An at-risk child whose sibling is enrolled in the school readiness program within an eligibility priority category listed in paragraphs (a) and (b) and subparagraph 1. shall be given priority over other children who are eligible under this paragraph.

4. A child who is younger than 13 years of age from a working family that is economically disadvantaged.

5. A child of a parent who transitions from the work program into employment as described in s. 445.032 who is younger than 13 years of age.

6. A child who has special needs, has been determined eligible as a student with a disability, has a current individual education plan with a Florida school district, and is not younger than 3 years of age. A special needs child eligible under this paragraph remains eligible until the child is eligible for admission to kindergarten in a public school under s. 1003.21(1)(a)2.

7. A child who otherwise meets one of the eligibility criteria in paragraphs (a) and (b) and subparagraphs 1. and 2. but who is also enrolled concurrently in the federal Head Start Program and the Voluntary Prekindergarten Education Program.”²¹

As of January 10, 2019 ELCMC is contracted with 104 child care facilities for School Readiness. This number accounts for out of county contracts as well.

²⁰ See Florida Statute 1002.87(1)(c)

²¹ See Florida Statute 1002.87(1)(c) 1-7

Early Head Start:

Early Head Start serves infant to three-year-olds with child care services ranging from home-based, center-based, and family child care. Early Head Start focuses on serving low-income families and the programs are designed to promote the development of the children, and to enable their parents to fulfill their roles as parents and to move toward self-sufficiency.

Head Start:

Just like the Early Head Start Program, Head Start serves low-income families in their needs for child care and steps toward self-sufficiency. Head Start primarily serves children 3 and 4-years-old and is designed to meet the developmental needs of the children.

Healthy Start:

Healthy Start serves pregnant women, infants, and children up to age 3 with counseling for psychosocial issues, nutrition, and smoking cessation; childbirth, breastfeeding, parenting support and education, home visits, and referral to any needed services.

Home Instruction for Parents of Preschool Youngsters (HIPPY):

Serving a diversity of families to support the parent's role as their child's first educator, HIPPY primarily focuses on those most at risk because of poverty. Parents are provided with educational materials to effectively strengthen their child's needs concerning early literacy, social skills, emotional development, and cognitive functions.

Section 6. Special Populations

Thomas Butler (Marion County Public Schools Homeless Liaison) reported that as of January 24, 2019 there exactly 1,978 homeless children enrolled in Marion County Public Schools.²² Marion County Public Schools defines homeless children as per the McKinney-Vento Act which states that homeless students are “individuals who lack a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residents.” This could be for reasons such as sharing the housing of other persons due to loss of housing, economic hardship, or a similar reason. These could also be students living in motels, hotels, trailer parks, camping grounds, public or private settings not meant for sleeping, in cars, parks, bus stations, train stations, substandard housing, or emergency/transitional shelters. Other definitions of homeless students under this act include children abandoned in hospitals and/or awaiting foster placement.²³

Marion County Public Schools reports on their website 8,788 children with special needs currently enrolled in the public-school program.²⁴

On January 22, 2019, Kids Central Inc reported that there were 422 foster children in Marion County. 300 foster children in foster homes, 386 living with relative or non-relative care-givers, 23 currently in adoptive placement, and 13 currently in other placements such as medical care or with the Department of Juvenile Justice.

The Marion County Homeless Council reported that there are currently 271 unsheltered homeless and 300 sheltered homeless as of the end of the Point in Time Survey of January 2018.²⁵

As of December 18, 2018, ELCMC is serving 269 homeless and foster care children through early learning programs.²⁶

²² An internal report from MCPS

²³ Read “Best Practices for Homeless Education” at <http://www.cpacinc.org/wp-content/uploads/2009/12/McKinney-Vento-Eligibility.pdf>

²⁴ “ESE HOME.” / Science Fair, www.marionschools.net/exceptionaleducation

²⁵ Marion County Homeless Council. “PIT.” Marion County Homeless Council, 17 May 2018, <https://mchcfl.org/pit>

²⁶ This data comes from one of ELCMC’s internal reporting systems

Section 7. Needs of Children and Families

Education

According to the Public Policy Institute's 2012-2013 study on early education, "the early years of a child's life appeared to be a crucial component of a strong foundation needed for future success."²⁷

Before being able to understand the data given we first must understand the growth in population, so that the stats given can better serve as an illustration of what growth should have happened within the past 2 years. As a population grows so should its enrollment in educational programs.

General²⁸

Year	Population	Growth and Rate
2015	342,757 (all)	N/A
2017	354,353 (all)	11,596 (Up by 3.33%)
2015	63,152 (Under 18)	N/A
2017	64,345 (Under 18)	1,193 (Up by 1.87%)

Within just 2 years, the population of Marion County has increased by 11,596 as a whole (or by 3.33%). In theory each educational program (Preschool through college) should scale at the same rate of each age groups population. Population numbers and growth of each age group and their corresponding educational programs will be provided within each table for reference, as well as the differences and rates for each individual change.

Preschool Attendance²⁹

(Preschool is defined in the dictionary as "relating to the time before a child is old enough to go to kindergarten." This table accounts for those educational programs. These are children ages 1 to 4-years-old)

Year	Population	Growth and Rate
2015	16,836 (Under 5)	N/A
2017	17,240 (Under5)	404 (Up by 2.37%)
2015	4,526 (Attending)	N/A
2017	3,560 (Attending)	966 (Down by 23.89%)

As can already be seen in this first table: despite the population of this age group increasing the number of this age group attending education programs is decreasing to almost a third of this age groups population. This could be due to the high cost of such educational programs in Florida like early

²⁷ Public Policy Institute of Marion County, Inc. "2012-2013 - A Promise to The Future." Page 6, Public Policy Institute of Marion County, Inc, 2013, https://img1.wsimg.com/blobby/go/90f5f849-0b89-4475-8c1e-2a3e9c4c8f72/downloads/1cpcoui7r_281892.pdf

²⁸ American Community Survey Social Characteristics 2017

²⁹ American Community Survey Social Characteristics 2017

child care programs³⁰. Despite Marion County’s median income rising to \$41,964 (as reported by American Community Survey), the Economic Policy Institute reports the cost of child care in Florida being almost 20% of Marion County’s median income.³¹ This could also be due to a decrease in child care providers offering School Readiness, with that number dropping from 162 in July 2016 to 101 as of January 2018.³² And as per Florida Statute 402.305(4)(a)1-7, each child care provider must not exceed a certain number of children per staff, meaning that each child care provider can only enroll a certain number of students as determined by the number of staff they have hired.³³ Childcare facilities are also further limited by class room physical space requirements, and DCF reports in Rule: 65C-22.002

“A child care facility that held a valid license on October 1, 1992, must have a minimum of 20 square feet of usable indoor floor space for each child. A child care facility that did not hold a valid license on October 1, 1992 and seeks regulatory approval to operate as a child care facility, must have a minimum of 35 square feet of usable indoor floor space for each child.”³⁴

Episcopal Children’s Services reports in their 2018 Community Assessment that despite 12,148 children birth to four needing childcare services, Marion County child care facilities only have a maximum capacity of 9,834 children. Episcopal Children’s Services also reports that of all children ages three and four in Marion County 66% are not enrolled in preschool.³⁵

As will be illustrated in the following tables as well, this gap in education continues to grow as each group grows older.

Kindergarten Attendance³⁶

Year	Population	Growth and rate
2015	16,836 (Under 5)	N/A
2017	17,240 (Under5)	404 (Up by 2.37%)
2015	3,637 (Attending)	N/A
2017	3,448 (Attending)	189 (Down by 5.34%)

College Attendance³⁷

Year	Population	Growth and Rate
2015	273,380 (18 and up)	N/A
2017	279,163 (18 and up)	5,783 (Up by 2.09%)
2015	14,468 (Attending)	N/A

³⁰ “Child Care Costs in the United States.” Economic Policy Institute, www.epi.org/child-care-costs-in-the-united-states/#/FL

³¹ “Child Care Costs in the United States.” Economic Policy Institute, www.epi.org/child-care-costs-in-the-united-states/#/FL

³² ELCMC’s own reports

³³ Florida Statute 402.305(4)(a)1-7

³⁴ Rule: 65C-22.002(3)(a)

³⁵ report, Staff. “Community Assessment 2018 Head Start Early Head Start.” Episcopal Children’s Services

³⁶ American Community Survey Social Characteristics 2017

³⁷ American Community Survey Social Characteristics 2017

2017	14,195 (Attending)	273 (Down by 1.9%)
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College Attainment; Some College, No Degree³⁸

Year	Population	Growth and Rate
2015	273,380 (18 and up)	N/A
2017	279,163 (18 and up)	5,783 (Up by 2.09%)
2015	55,527 (Attempted)	N/A
2017	55,299 (Attempted)	288 (Down by 0.41%)

As the population of Marion County, both as a whole and its differing age groups, continues to rise the number of citizens attending school is steadily decreasing. If the population of a certain age group raises so should that groups attendance in educational programs, otherwise there becomes a larger gap between the number of educated and uneducated citizens.

Despite this gap in education Marion County sees less retention in grades K-2, which is 40 times lower than the state average. Marion County has been cited as the seconded lowest school district in Florida for student retention. Ocala Star Banner reports that district officials state, "there is a very extensive retention checklist," and that students are retained when necessary. Ocala Star Banner reports that only 1 in 1,369 students are retained.³⁹

Social Services

While Marion County has seen a decrease in the number of families living below the poverty level, American Community Survey reports the number of families in Marion County still consists of 12.9% of Marion County's entire population as of 2017. With a population of 343,778 being used for that exact census, 12.9% puts Marion County at an approximate 44,347 parents and children in poverty.

The American Psychological Association reports that poverty is directly linked to problems such as homelessness, lack of health care, unsafe neighborhoods, and under resourced schools; as well as reducing economic productivity and output, rising crime rates, and increase in the cost of health care.⁴⁰

Employment

Florida Department of Economic Opportunity reports that, as of December 2018, Marion County has an unemployment rate of 3.9%, with 267,064 citizens currently employed.⁴¹ This is a large decrease compared to American Community Survey's report of unemployment being 5.6% in 2015.⁴² But despite Marion County's low unemployment rate Episcopal Children's Services is reporting that 57.4% of Marion

³⁸ American Community Survey Social Characteristics 2017

³⁹ Callahan, Joe, and Joe Callahan. "School Board, District Explore Retention Rates." Ocala.com, Ocala.com, 30 Sept. 2018, www.ocala.com/news/20181001/school-board-district-explore-retention-rates

⁴⁰"Effects of Poverty, Hunger, and Homelessness on Children and Youth." American Psychological Association, www.apa.org/pi/families/poverty.aspx

⁴¹ "Latest Statistics." Florida Department of Economic Opportunity, 18 Jan. 2019, www.floridajobs.org/workforce-statistics/workforce-statistics-data-releases/latest-statistics

⁴² American Community Survey Selected Economic Characteristics 2015

County citizens are “working poor.”⁴³ Working poor is defined by the Center for Poverty Research as “people who spend 27 weeks or more in a year in the labor force either working or looking for work but whose incomes fall below the poverty level.”⁴⁴

Ocala/Marion County Chamber of Economic Partnership reports that as of 2017 Marion County is home to over 14,000 businesses. Some of Ocala’s top employers currently include Marion County Public Schools, Florida Hospital Ocala, State of Florida (all departments), Wal-Mart, and Ocala Health.⁴⁵ American Community Survey also reports that two of the largest industries in Marion County continue to be education and retail.⁴⁶

Housing

American Community Survey reports that, as of 2017, the median dollar amount for a mortgage in Marion County is \$119,200⁴⁷, and Zillow reports that, as of January 7, 2019, the state of Florida has an average mortgage interest rate between 4% and 4.5%.⁴⁸ At an interest rate of 4% over a 30-year period, residents are left with a monthly payment of \$569, and at 4.5% a monthly payment of \$604.

With Marion County’s median income being \$41,964 these mortgages come to an estimated 17.27%. This percentage can be found by dividing the median yearly income (\$41,964) by 12 (months in a year) to get an estimated monthly budget of \$3,497. You then divide the monthly payment (see above paragraph) by your monthly budget, you’ll be given the percentage of your income which needs to be reserved for your mortgage payment.

But it is important to remember that 17.6% of Marion County is living beneath the poverty level (which gives us an estimated 11,272 family homes in poverty, as per Section 2).⁴⁹ With the current Federal Poverty Level: families of 2 would be expected to spend 41.48% of their yearly income, family sizes of 3 would spend 32.86% of their yearly income, and family sizes of 4 would spending 27.2% of their yearly income.⁵⁰ Episcopal Children’s Services reports that, as of 2017, 41% of all Marion County citizens are having to dedicate more than 35% of their income to housing cost.⁵¹

American Community Survey also reports that, as of 2017, there are 101,514 housing units being occupied by homeowners, with 50% having already paid off their mortgage. While this seems like a positive statistic it could be the result of Marion County’s constant population growth of retired

⁴³ report, Staff. “Community Assessment 2017 Head Start Early Head Start.” Episcopal Children’s Services

⁴⁴ “Who Are the Working Poor in America?” UC Davis Center for Poverty Research, 2016,

<https://poverty.ucdavis.edu/faq/who-are-working-poor-america>

⁴⁵ “Existing Businesses.” Ocala History | Ocala Marion CEP Florida, <https://ocalacep.com/growing-jobs/existing-businesses/> Click the drop-down for Major Employers

⁴⁶ American Community Survey Select Economic Characteristics 2017

⁴⁷ American Community Survey Selected Housing Characteristics 2017

⁴⁸ Zillow, Inc. “See Today’s Mortgage Rates on Zillow.” Mortgage Learning Center, Zillow Porchlight, 2019, www.zillow.com/mortgage-rates/fl/

⁴⁹ American Community Survey Economic Characteristics 2017

⁵⁰ “Federal Poverty Level (FPL) - HealthCare.gov Glossary.” HealthCare.gov, www.healthcare.gov/glossary/federal-poverty-level-fpl/

⁵¹ report, Staff. “Community Assessment 2018 Head Start Early Head Start.” Episcopal Children’s Services

citizens. American Community Survey reports that 47.7% of Marion County citizens are over the age of 55.

As of January 1, 2019, Housing and Urban Development (HUD) defines the fair market rates for apartments and homes as seen below:⁵²

Unit as defined by number of bedrooms	Rent Price
0 Bedroom	\$631
1 Bedroom	\$712
2 Bedrooms	\$867
3 Bedrooms	\$1,154
4 Bedrooms	\$1,281

Fair Market Rates are defined by HUD as:

“used to determine payment standard amounts for the Housing Choice Voucher program, to determine initial renewal rents for some expiring project-based Section 8 contracts, to determine initial rents for housing assistance payment (HAP) contracts in the Moderate Rehabilitation Single Room Occupancy program (Mod Rehab), rent ceilings for rental units in both the HOME Investment Partnerships program and the Emergency Solution Grants program, calculation of maximum award amounts for Continuum of Care recipients and the maximum amount of rent a recipient may pay for property leased with Continuum of Care funds, and calculation of flat rents in Public Housing units.”⁵³

As of January 2019, Florida’s minimum wage is \$8.46 an hour.⁵⁴ Even at 40 hours per week ($8.46 \times 40 = 338.4$) two people could not afford a one-bedroom home/apartment ($338.4 \times 2 = 676.8$) at HUD’s fair market value or the average mortgage rate on a 30-year mortgage.

And at the current Federal Poverty Level of \$12,140 a year per-person, any citizen below the poverty level would need to dedicate at least 62.4% of their monthly income to affording a housing unit with zero bedrooms.⁵⁵ This percentage can be found by taking the yearly income as defined by the

⁵² “FY 2019 Fair Market Rent Documentation System.” Low-Income Housing Tax Credits | HUD USER, 2019, www.huduser.gov/portal/datasets/fmr.html

⁵³ “FY 2019 Fair Market Rent Documentation System.” Low-Income Housing Tax Credits | HUD USER, 2019, www.huduser.gov/portal/datasets/fmr.html

⁵⁴ “Florida Minimum Wage for 2018, 2019.” Federal and State Minimum Wage Rates for 2018, 2019, www.minimum-wage.org/florida

⁵⁵ “Federal Poverty Level (FPL) - HealthCare.gov Glossary.” HealthCare.gov, www.healthcare.gov/glossary/federal-poverty-level-fpl/

Federal Poverty Level and dividing it by the months in each year ($\$12,140 / 12 = \1011.66) and then dividing the HUD fair market rate for a 0 bedroom unit by the monthly income ($\$631 / \$1011 = 0.6241$).

Transportation

McDonald Transit has been contracted by Marion County to oversee day-to-day operation of our SunTran system, which is governed by the Ocala/Marion Transportation Organization.

As of 2018 SunTran has publicly released their Transit Development Plan, which will be helping to establish a 10-year plan for topics including transit and mobility needs, and transit goals for Marion County. In this report SunTran states “Medium population projections prepared by the Bureau of Economic and Business Research (BEBR) estimate that the population of Marion County will grow to 401,100 people by 2025”, many of which do not have access to motor vehicles due to age and ability to operate a motor vehicle, and states that these factors show “a growing need for public transit within Marion County can be assumed...”.⁵⁶

Health

Ocala Star Banner reports that as of December 2018 there are 59,688 citizens having to rely on food stamps/SNAP benefits to buy food, with Episcopal Children’s Services reporting that 21,674 of those citizens are families.⁵⁷ Florida Department of Education reports that of the 43,119 Marion County students enrolled during the 2017-18 school year, 78.6% of children were actively enrolled in the free and reduced lunch programs.⁵⁹

Florida Kids Count’s 2017 report an increase of overweight and obese children to 39.5%.⁶⁰ In Florida Kids Count’s most recent report for 2018 they are reporting a change to 39.1%.⁶¹

On January 17, 2019, Well Florida reports on their website that 9.2% of all births in Marion County are considered “Low Birth Weight,”⁶² which is defined by University of Rochester Medical Center as “babies who are born weighing less than 5 pounds, 8 ounces (2,500 grams).”⁶³

Well Florida also reports that the percentage of mothers receiving either late or no prenatal care is 8.4%, which is higher than the state average of 5.1%.⁶⁴

⁵⁶ See Sun Tran’s “2018 - 2027 Transit Development Plan” pages labeled 2-4 and 2-10

⁵⁷ report, Staff. “Local Notes on Partial Shutdown of Federal Government.” Ocala.com, Ocala.com, 16 Jan. 2019, www.ocala.com/news/20190116/local-notes-on-partial-shutdown-of-federal-government.

⁵⁸ report, Staff. “Community Assessment 2018 Head Start Early Head Start.” Episcopal Children’s Services

⁵⁹ See Florida Department of Education’s “Lunch Stats by District 2017-18”

⁶⁰ “2017 Florida Child Well-Being Index, Marion County.” Floridakidscount.org, 2018,

<http://floridakidscount.org/docs/2017Index/Marion.pdf>

⁶¹ “2018 Florida Child Well-Being Index, Marion County.” Floridakidscount.org, 2019,

www.floridakidscount.org/index.php/counting-for-kids-blog/2018-chil

⁶² “Marion County Data.” Well Florida, 2018, <https://wellflorida.org/data-reports/marion-county-data/>

⁶³ “Low Birth Weight.” Ice Packs vs. Warm Compresses For Pain - Health Encyclopedia - University of Rochester Medical Center,

www.urmc.rochester.edu/encyclopedia/content.aspx?contenttypeid=90&contentid=p02382

⁶⁴ “Marion County Data.” Well Florida, 2018, <https://wellflorida.org/data-reports/marion-county-data/>

Florida Health reports that vaping products are on the rise with Marion County's youth. Center on Addiction defines vaping as "the act of inhaling and exhaling the aerosol, often referred to as vapor, which is produced by an e-cigarette or similar device."⁶⁵ Florida Health reports that amount of Marion County minors having experience with vaping products has risen from 6.1% in 2012 to 26.3% in 2018, and that the current amount of youth consistently using vaping products in 2018 is 15.7%.⁶⁶

Episcopal Children's Services reports in their 2017 community assessment (updated January 2018) that 21% of citizens in Marion County have no form of health insurance.⁶⁷ The Henry J Kaiser Family Foundation (KFF), a Washington DC based non-profit dedicated to national health care studies, reports that individuals without health care "are more likely to be hospitalized for avoidable health problems and to experience declines in their overall health. When they are hospitalized, uninsured people receive fewer diagnostic and therapeutic services and have higher mortality rates than those with insurance."⁶⁸

Considering the current opioid epidemic, Marion County Heroin Opioid Task Force has published the Marion County Heroin/Opioid Resource Guide. In this guide it is estimated that Marion County has seen 160 deaths due to opioid addiction in 2017.⁶⁹ Due to the growing number of citizens abusing opioids, Marion County has also seen an increase in Neonatal Abstinence Syndrome (NAS). NAS is defined by Florida Health as "a condition experienced by neonates exposed to opioid prescription or illicit drugs during the prenatal period. The infant may undergo withdrawal from these substances . . ."⁷⁰ Florida Agency for Health Care Administration reports in their latest study that as of 2016 Marion County had seen 67 documented cases of NAS.⁷¹

Section 8. Community Resources

United way of Marion County links community members to the 2-1-1 resource directory which can be searched by zip code or city for all available resources.⁷² This list of available resources covers categories of housing, financial aid, clothing, material goods, food, transportation, disaster and emergency services, legal services, tax services, immigration services, education, employment, health

⁶⁵ Fp-Admin. "What Is Vaping?" Center on Addiction, 1 Oct. 2018, www.centeronaddiction.org/e-cigarettes/recreational-vaping/what-vaping

⁶⁶ "Behavioral Survey Data." Health Care-Associated Infections (HAI) | Florida Department of Health, 2018, <http://www.floridahealth.gov/statistics-and-data/survey-data/florida-youth-survey/2018FYTSCountyPDF/Marion.pdf>

⁶⁷ report, Staff. "Community Assessment 2017 Head Start Early Head Start." Episcopal Children's Services

⁶⁸ Published: Dec 07, 2018, and Dec 2018. "Key Facts about the Uninsured Population." The Henry J. Kaiser Family Foundation, The Henry J. Kaiser Family Foundation, 8 Jan. 2019, www.kff.org/uninsured/fact-sheet/key-facts-about-the-uninsured-population/

⁶⁹ View the Marion County Heroin/Opioid Resource Guide online at http://mcchildrensalliance.org/blog/wp-content/uploads/2018/05/opiateResGuide_Web.pdf

⁷⁰ "Birth Defects." Health Care-Associated Infections (HAI) | Florida Department of Health, 25 Oct. 2018, www.floridahealth.gov/diseases-and-conditions/birth-defects/NeoNatalAbstinenceSyndromeNAS.html

⁷¹ See "Neonatal Abstinence Syndrome (NAS) in Florida" at http://www.myfloridaagro.com/Resources/Qtr_Mtg_Nov17/EQRONOV8NASNOGRPHCSUpdtdFnI508.pdf

⁷² This resource list is available through 211's official website, and UWMC offers a link from their "Get Help" page

care, health insurance, Medicaid, Medicare, mental health, substance abuse, consumer safety, children services, elderly services, and a category for resources needed by military personal. Each of these categories is then broken down to sub-categories to help Marion County residents find agencies and resources for their specific needs.

2-1-1 also offers 24-hour service by phone, where citizens can speak with a liaison who help them find resources for their specific needs.

Section 9. Analyzing the Data

SUMMARY

Marion County continues to grow at a rapid pace both in business and population. Despite so many strengths Marion County is still facing challenges with large numbers of children living in poverty, foster care, living with homelessness, having to rely on the free/reduced lunch programs for at least one meal a day, living in households that must rely on food stamps/SNAP for daily nutrition, and the possibility of future children being born with opioid addiction. These can all be symptoms and causes of seeing less enrollment in educational programs from early learning opportunities all the way through college, with the gap between educated and uneducated growing with each age group. As stated in the previously cited PPI study on early education (page 14, citation 25), lack of participation in early education programs and early intervention programs could be contributing to the rising number of families and children living in poverty (see Section 3). Subsequently this rising level of poverty has an affect on each child's ability to learn as reported by Harvard University's Center on the Developing Child.⁷³

Curiously, the lack of involvement in early education programs is concerning given how many programs currently exist. While Episcopal Children's Services reports that 93% of Marion County are proficient in English, not attending early education programs could also be the cause of an estimated 22,194 Marion County citizens, despite their primary language, "not speaking English well" as reported by American Community Survey (see Section 2).⁷⁴ Children who do not speak English as their primary language may not learn the language basics needed to read and communicate in American class rooms and may miss the opportunity for early interventions programs that could direct their parents/care-givers to help the child learn such early language skills. While parents may still be referred to early intervention programs by health professionals, parents and children could miss the opportunity for another point of contact for referral to programs that can aid their child in language and communication basics.

Lack of involvement in early education programs, whether caused by poverty or not, has long-lasting effects on a child's ability to learn. Lack of early mathematics knowledge and skills are the most important indicating predictors not only for later math achievement but other subjects and grade

⁷³ "The Foundations of Lifelong Health Are Built in Early Education." Harvard University's Center on the Developing Child, pp. 2 and 14

⁷⁴ report, Staff. "Community Assessment 2018 Head Start Early Head Start." Episcopal Children's Services

retention.⁷⁵ Early education programs have proven to positively affect academic study up to age 15, as seen in the Carolina Abecedarian Project and recorded in the Journal of Economic Perspective.⁷⁶

Marion County continues to offer resources and resource directories for citizens in need which is continually needed. This need can be seen in Marion County's large poverty rate, number of children shown qualifying for free and reduced lunch, Marion County's Homeless Council current report of homeless citizens, and many citizens requiring Food Stamps/SNAP to eat. These resources are needed for citizens experiencing poverty and its symptoms. There are still significant unmet needs in our county.

Some of the activities for increasing and improving the early learning environment in Marion County:

- ELCMC's wide variety of programs
- Available early education programs
- ELCMC's Help Me Grow program, serving as free developmental screening for all Marion County children birth to 8-years-old.
- ELCMC's Inclusion department allowing for on-sight child screenings at child care providers, as well as timely check-ups to ensure each child's needs are being met.
- ELCMC's partnership with Kiwanis Club of Ocala

Statistics supporting need for affordable/subsidized early education programs in Marion County:

- A decrease in educational program attendance (See section 7: Education)
- A decrease in child care providers offering School Readiness (See section 7: Education)
- More than 50% of the county qualifying as working poor (See section 7: Employment)
- Lower than state average retention rates for K-12 (See section 7: Education)

In closing, our community assessment demonstrates statistic evidence of Marion County's current need for early education, affordable housing, needed response to the current opioid epidemic, and the necessity of programs such as food stamps/SNAP and the free/reduced lunch program to ensure our citizens physical health. While the community assessment documents programs, entities, and resources that help Marion County citizens to overcome such challenges it also highlights the needs for these types of assistance to continue.

⁷⁵ Claessens, Amy and Engel, Mimi. "How important is where you start? Early mathematics knowledge and later school success" American Psychology Association

⁷⁶ Curry, Janet. "The Journal of Economic Perspectives." Journal of Economic Perspectives, vol. 15, no. 3, 2001, pp. 219–220., doi:10.1257/jep.15.3.i.