



Florida State University Early Head Start



2025 Community Assessment



Empowering Families in Gadsden Since 1996

CXS3467890

Executive Summary

Introduction

This Assessment is a tool to make program decisions that will best serve the needs of the Gadsden County community, locate available resources, build on strengths and resources, and set program goals. Early Head Start leadership staff regularly monitors changes and trends. In addition, the Community Needs Assessment is the formal and far-reaching process in fulfillment of the requirements of Head Start Performance Standards (45 CFR 1302.11). This process is completed at least once over the five-year grant period.

Florida State University Early Head Start (FSU EHS) uses findings from the Assessment to (1) identify populations most in need of services including prevalent social or economic factors, challenges, and barriers experienced by families and children; (2) Inform the program’s design and to ensure service delivery that reflect needs of the community; (3) Inform the enrollment, recruitment, and selection process to prioritize the enrollment of those populations with relevant circumstances; (4) Identify strengths and resources in the community that can be leveraged for service delivery, coordination, and partnership efforts for education, health, nutrition, and referrals to social services to eligible children and families; and, (5) Identify the communication methods and modalities available to the program that best engage with prospective and enrolled families in accessible ways (OHS).

The 2025 Community Needs Assessment of Gadsden County is an imperative process which entails gathering, reviewing, and analyzing several key data sources to discover the distinctive community needs within the service area. FSU Early Head Start reports on these community needs as well as improved outcomes for children and families enrolled in our program. This data demonstrates that the program is linked to greater outcomes. Annual and multi-year assessments and reporting show the impact of our services and support, and how they strengthen our families’ ability to achieve their goals.



Methods of Data Collection

FSU Early Head Start is a program of the Center for Prevention and Early Intervention Policy (CPEIP). The Community Needs Assessment began in November of 2024, facilitated by an FSU CPEIP Facilitator. The Program Director also secured the assistance of the program's Family Information & Enrollment Coordinator, and the Head Start Program Designer and Management Consultant to complete the Assessment Team.

The process encompassed three phases:

1. **Review of Extant Databases** describing Gadsden County demographics and characteristics of Early Head Start families. Data was collected on population, economy, poverty, education, health, and social well-being. When available, State of Florida and national data were included for comparative purposes.
2. **Review and Make Descriptive Updates on Community Programs** serving the Early Head Start population of pregnant women, infants and toddlers. The team completed research and review of relevant services and offerings, medical and health care facilities, and social service agencies.
3. **Survey of Parents and Community Partners**
 - EHS parents were asked to respond to a series of questions regarding their use of programs and services in the community as well as their needs for certain types of services.
 - Partner agencies were asked to provide insight into their observation of changes in availability of community services, community demographics, as well as their partnership with Early Head Start.

Summary of Major Findings

Gadsden County, Florida remains an area of enormous need. While positive trends exist, the most significant predictors of risk for poor child and family outcomes are still present – high poverty and unemployment rates, limited health care access, and low educational attainment for large portions of the population. Major findings include:

- ▶ The number of two-parent households with children enrolled in program services rose from 35% to 51% from 2020 to 2024. This reveals an increase of 16%, which is a promising upward trend.

- ▶ The social-emotional gains of children in FSU Early Head Start show a positive trend in early childhood development.
- ▶ There was a decrease in medical providers in the community and families had a difficult time accessing convenient, ongoing medical care.
- ▶ Food Insecurity is a major problem for families with children 0-3 years of age, especially low-income families.
- ▶ The closing of restaurants and grocery stores, coupled with worker layoffs led to fewer available jobs, causing a decrease in economic stability and self-sufficiency for families.
- ▶ **FSU Early Head Start consistently meets children and families' needs.**
In PY 2023-2024, in addition to prenatal and early childhood education, the following were completed at 100%: children received assistance to establish a medical home; children had access to a dental home; families received prenatal and postpartum care and education on breastfeeding, fetal development, and the effects of substance abuse; families were connected to medical coverage such as Medicaid; and children received developmental and sensory screenings within 45 days of enrollment.

Summary of Recommendations

In addition to providing parents with activity ideas to support the skills children had the most difficulty mastering (like fine motor and pre-writing tasks, social play skills, cognitive skills and self-help skills, such as independent toilet use), the Assessment yielded additional program recommendations:

- ✓ Embrace the promising trend of two-parent households by improving the engagement of fathers/partners in program and community activities.
- ✓ Focus Group Socializations and learning sessions on early childhood social emotional and cognitive development, as well as mental health for parents.
- ✓ Support or refer families for transportation assistance, housing referrals, and access to food pantries, healthcare, financial assistance, and jobs.
- ✓ Organize staff training around trends and needs of enrolled families like guiding children's behaviors as well as mental health and wellness.
- ✓ Organize program activities around both promising and challenging trends.

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Program Overview

Program History

Headquartered in the heart of Gadsden County, Florida, the FSU Early Head Start (FSU EHS) program has provided quality services to families since 1996. The mission of FSU EHS is to promote healthy prenatal outcomes for pregnant women, enhance the development of very young children, and promote healthy family functioning.

The home-based program is funded through the federal Office of Head Start to serve 68 infants, toddlers, and pregnant women. The Office of Head Start is part of the Administration for Children and Families, which falls under the Department of Health and Human Services.

To be eligible for services, an expectant mother or family with a child under three must live in Gadsden County and earn less than the federal poverty guidelines. There are a few enrollment opportunities for families who earn more if they have significant risk factors. At least 10% of enrollment slots are reserved for children with delays or disabilities.

Services are provided year-round to meet the health, developmental, educational, and social service needs of young children and families.

- Weekly 90-minute home visits focus on prenatal and parenting education, child development activities, health and safety, and family goal setting.
- Group Socializations or “Play Groups” held at least twice a month give families opportunities to interact in fun, educational activities and strengthen parent-child relationships as well as their peer networks of support.

ABOUT EARLY HEAD START



Early Head Start programs provide family-centered services for low-income families with very young children.

EHS programs are tailored for the unique needs of infants and toddlers. Early Head Start Home Based services strive to strengthen the family-child relationship, engage in responsible interactions, using the home as the learning environment, and provide developmentally appropriate child learning experiences. This prepares children for continued growth and development and eventual success in school and life.

Early Head Start programs support both mothers and fathers, in their role as primary caregivers and teachers of their children. Programs assist families in meeting their own personal goals and achieving self-sufficiency across a wide variety of domains, such as housing stability, continued education, and financial security.

Early Head Start programs also mobilize the local community to provide the appropriate resources and environment necessary to ensure a comprehensive, integrated array of services and support for children and families.

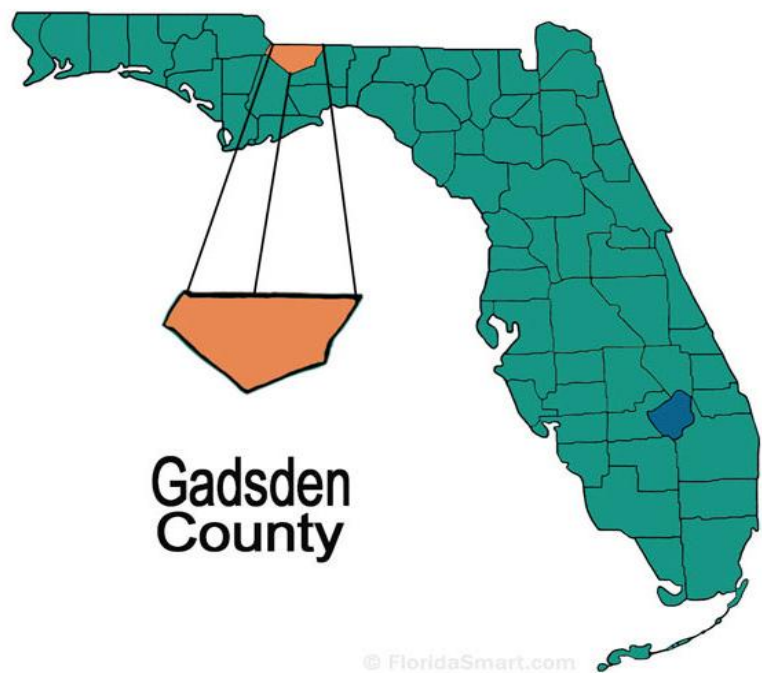
-Office of Head Start

Service and Recruitment Area

Gadsden County is a sparsely populated, mostly agricultural area located in the Big Bend region of Northwest Florida. Gadsden’s population is estimated at about 44,151 as of 2024. The rural nature of the county is evident in that it remains one of the least densely populated in the state, with an average of 93.1 persons per square mile, compared to 363.8 people per square mile in Florida. The county’s land area of 508 square miles is approximately 32 miles long and 22 miles wide and is bounded on the east by the Ochlocknee River, on the west by the Apalachicola River, on the southeast by Lake Talquin (North Florida’s largest lake), and on the north side by the State of Georgia.

The county’s population is centered on six communities, the largest being the county seat of Quincy, followed by Havana, Chattahoochee, Midway, Greensboro, and Gretna. Many residents live in remote areas where location and lack of transportation create barriers to accessing services. Those living in isolated areas are far from important services such as grocery stores, pharmacies, and healthcare providers.

The lack of regular bus routes makes it challenging for families to attend school, choose a quality childcare, and have a variety of healthy food options. In addition to physical access to services, the area’s persistent infrastructure deficiencies create hardships for families, making it difficult to move towards self-sufficiency. The needs of the children and families as detailed in this assessment clearly highlight the necessity for FSU Early Head Start services. The grantee proposes to continue providing services to this area.



Staffing Patterns

Early Head Start prioritizes recruiting and maintaining a multi-disciplinary staff of passionate professionals to work with children and families. The program employs a Director and a management team to ensure all Performance Standards are properly implemented in the areas of Program Administration, Health Services, Education and Disabilities Services, Family and Community Engagement, and Enrollment and Data Management.

In addition, the Home-Based Coordinator provides reflective supervision to seven Home Visitors, one of whom is a Home Visitor/Counselor able to provide consultation on infant and maternal mental health concerns and mental health services to families as requested under the supervision of the Program Director, a Licensed Clinical Social Worker. Two Bilingual Spanish-speaking Home Visitors primarily serve families with limited English skills. The program contracts with a registered dietician/licensed nutritionist to provide consultation on nutrition services, as needed. The program also employs current or former parents on a part time basis to assist in the recruitment of new families.



Program leadership and several staff have served the County for many years in varying capacities such as early childhood education, home visiting, and more. This consistency helps the program maintain community relationships and trust, which is imperative to best meet the needs of families in the community.

Program Services

The FSU Early Head Start program embraces a play-based, child directed approach to early childhood education. Our educational services for parents of infants and toddlers include the use of research-based information from the FSU Partners for a Healthy Baby Home Visiting Curriculum to support developmental issues, health and safety, pregnancy, and specific parenting topics related to the family's unique needs. The FSU faculty team possesses expertise in obstetric medicine, early childhood development, psychology, infant mental health, social work, and early intervention. Using the latest research and clinical guidelines from their respective disciplines, the faculty team compiled evidence-based strategies for home visitors to use with expectant and new families.

Selection process falls in line with 45 CFR §1302.14

Primary eligibility for enrollment is based upon federal poverty guidelines of income; however, the program targets the “neediest of the needy,” and priority selection criteria also include a variety of additional risk indicators. Priority is given to pregnant women and infants with high scores on Florida’s Universal prenatal and infant screening instrument.

Additional risk factors considered in determining priority need for services include:

1. A mother with less than a high school education;
2. A teenaged parent at the time of first pregnancy;
3. A child with special needs or disability;
4. The number of children in the household under the age of three years;
5. Incidence of domestic violence;
6. Documented child abuse or neglect; and
7. A mother of an infant or toddler with a diagnosed disability.

By providing home visiting services to women beginning in the prenatal period, the FSU Early Head Start program has an opportunity to work with the family for more than three years. In addition to supporting pregnant women, the program provides comprehensive health services to its enrolled children and families by providing:

- ▶ Information and parent education on child health and development.
- ▶ Developmental, social emotional and sensory screening, and ongoing assessments.
- ▶ Referrals to community providers.
- ▶ Assistance to parents who need to establish a medical home.
- ▶ Emotional support to primary caregivers and optional counseling.
- ▶ Help to families in establishing preventative health and dental habits.
- ▶ Assistance with tracking health care appointments for children and expectant women.



Program Highlights

Between 2023 and 2024, FSU Early Head Start served 44 infants, 37 one-year olds, 26 two-year olds, and 17 pregnant women, for a total of 124 participants. This represents 4.8% of the eligible population in Gadsden County; a county where approximately 75% of children 0-5 are eligible for Medicaid (ACHA, 2023).

Early Head Start served 84 families during FY 2023-2024

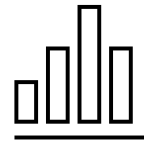
<i>Children completed a well-child physical exam</i>	88%
<i>Children with current immunizations</i>	84%
<i>Families received Hurricane Preparedness kits to teach families about safety</i>	100%
<i>Families provided emergency or crisis services (food, diapers, formula, etc.)</i>	100%

Assessment Methodology

Planning Process

The Community Assessment Team

The Community Assessment was prepared by FSU CPEIP consultants and management staff of FSU Early Head Start with assistance and input from the Home Visitors, Governance Members, current parents and community partners.



The objective is to identify and analyze the Gadsden County community and to identify characteristics which may have a significant impact on program planning and development. To summarize, FSU EHS is required to collect and analyze information in the Community Assessment about:

- ✓ **The number of eligible infants**, toddlers, preschool age children, and expectant mothers, including their geographic location, race, ethnicity, and languages they speak, including:
 - Children experiencing homelessness in collaboration with, to the extent possible, McKinney-Vento Local Education Agency Liaisons (42 U.S.C. 11432 (6)(A));
 - Children in foster care; and
 - Children with disabilities, including types of disabilities and relevant services and resources provided to these children by community agencies;
- ✓ **The education, health, nutrition and social service needs** of eligible children and their families, including prevalent social or economic factors that impact their well-being;
- ✓ **Typical work, school, and training schedules** of parents with eligible children;
- ✓ **Other child development, childcare centers, and family childcare programs** that serve eligible children, including home visiting, publicly funded state and local preschools, and the approximate number of eligible children served;
- ✓ **Resources that are available** in the community to address the needs of eligible children and their families; and,
- ✓ **Strengths** of the community.

Data Collection Methods

Secondary Data Collection

In producing this Community Assessment, data and statistics were collected and analyzed from several national, state, and local resources including the most recent research from the US Census Bureau, Florida CHARTS, Florida Departments of Education and Health, the Bureau of Labor Statistics, and local programs. When available, State of Florida and national data were included for comparative purposes. A detailed list of Data Citations can be found in Appendix A.



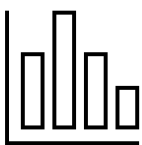
Secondary data was extracted from existing databases for Gadsden County demographics, eligible children and families, community services, and characteristics of Early Head Start participants. Collected data focused on population, economy, poverty, education, health, and social well-being.

Primary Data Collection

Parent and Community Partner surveys were developed using a combination of queries used in past assessments, outside relevant examples, and Office of Head Start resources. Enrolled parents completed the survey via an online Survey Monkey questionnaire. The survey was available in both English and Spanish. Home Visitors provided reminders and offered support to all parents to prevent barriers to participation. Community Partner surveys were provided to various agency partners and community representatives on the Policy Council. This survey focused on perceived needs in the community and services provided to the Early Head Start eligible demographic through other agencies.

Data Analysis

Quantitative and qualitative primary data from the surveys were analyzed and reviewed. Internal aggregate data and the annual Program Information Report (PIR) uncovered family strengths and needs. The team also examined the Needs Assessment to ensure Head Start Standards were adequately met.



The information collected through this comprehensive process reveals the ongoing and emerging challenges experienced by children and families living in the service area. ***The results exhibit the capability and necessity*** of FSU EHS to provide quality early childhood education services and solutions to some of the exposed gaps in services.

The data analysis and reporting process also helps FSU-EHS determine community strengths, needs, and resources [HEAD START PERFORMANCE STANDARDS1302.11] and to identify:

- ✓ The communication methods and modalities available to the program that best engage with prospective and enrolled families in accessible ways.
- ✓ The needs of eligible children and their families and barriers to program participation such as transportation needs.

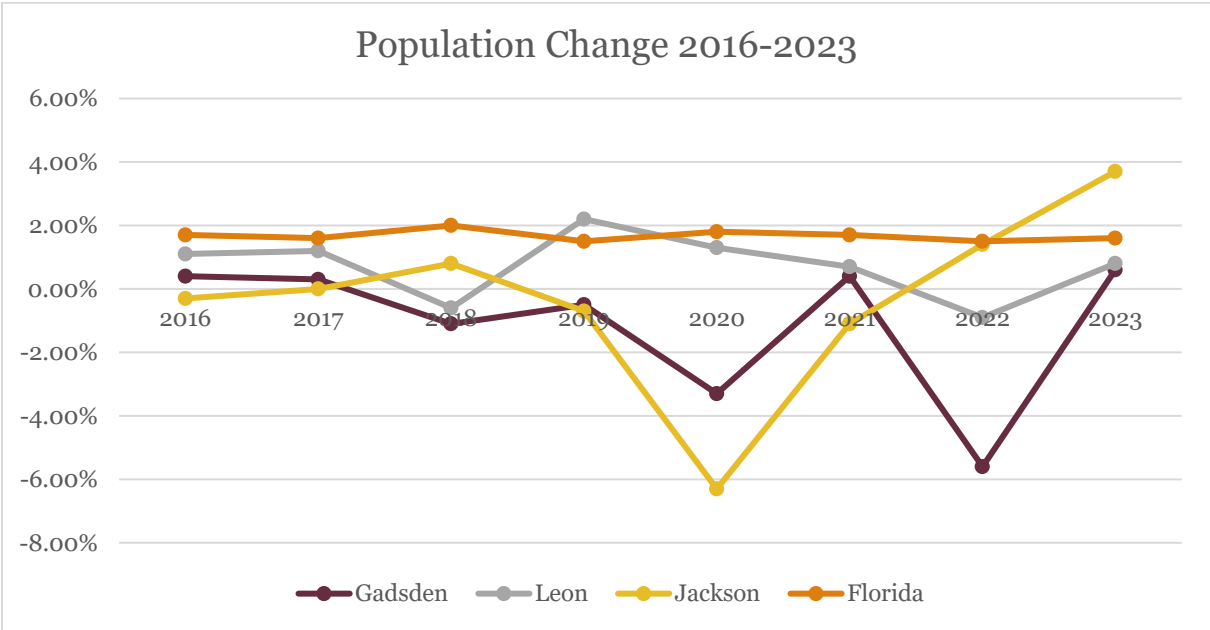
Based on OHS performance standards outlined in 45 CFR §1302.101, data from the community assessment will be used to:

- ✓ Make decisions about program options, program calendar, types of services and collaborative partnerships, location of centers, recruitment areas, and recruitment and selection priorities.
- ✓ Design and implement comprehensive services that meet the needs of eligible children.
- ✓ Make decisions around enrollment criteria, such as what ages of children will be served, whether 3-year-olds must be prioritized, or if higher income private pay families will be enrolled in non-Head Start slots.
- ✓ Inform policies, programs, and practices, allowing resources to be allocated in ways that ensure equity and optimal child outcomes.
- ✓ Determine the skills and competencies needed in the existing workforce, as well as gaps in professional development that need to be addressed to better serve children and families.
- ✓ Inform the program's coordinated approach to professional development.

Service Area Data

Geographic Features

Gadsden County has been much less affected by population growth compared to the rest of Florida, including the surrounding areas (Leon and Jackson Counties). As of the most recent census, the population is 44,151. Gadsden County's population experienced a huge decline of approximately 9.2% between 2010 and 2022, dropping from 47,792 to 43,403. In the last five years, the variances have been significant.



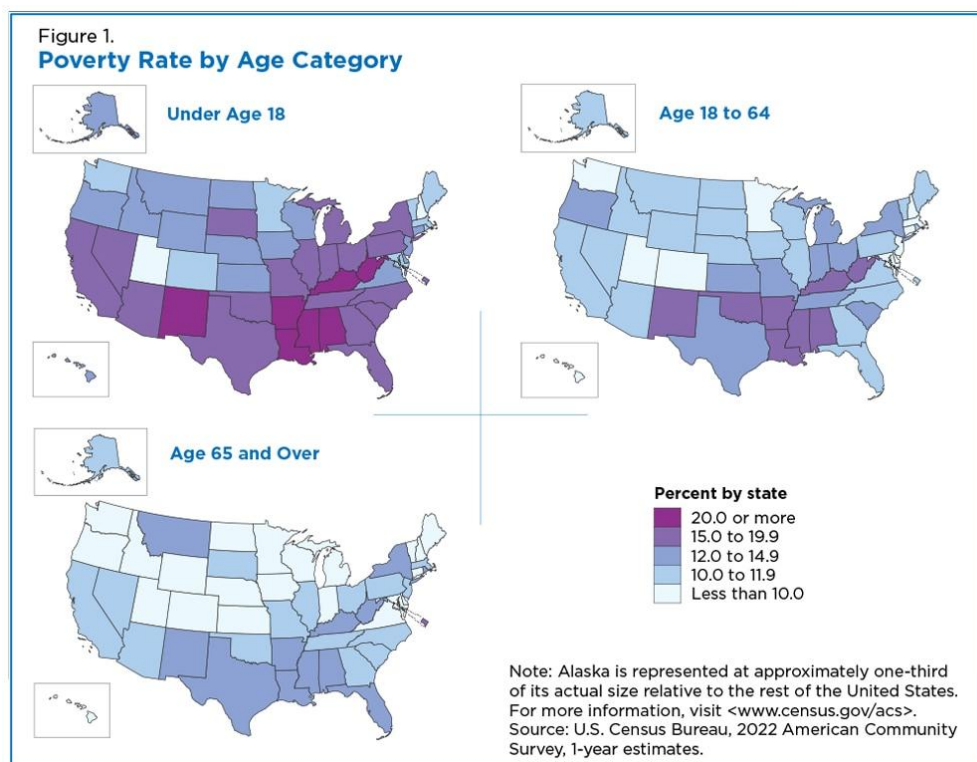
Source: FL CHARTS, US Census, 2024

While many counties in Florida experienced a migration into their cities due to retirees and those moving from colder climates, Gadsden County saw a slight decrease. County leaders have determined that stabilizing the population “will involve more housing development, infrastructure in different areas of the county that will allow commercial development along the interchanges” (Engle, 2024). **In recent years, the county has had a slight natural increase** (more births than deaths) in population, this is more than net migration into the county. Gadsden’s overall net migration was less than 1 percent. Some of the county’s immigration is correlated to low-wage earning workers who have chosen to live year-round in the county to perform agricultural work.

Economic Features

Unfortunately, like many rural communities across the state and country, Gadsden County's poverty and economic circumstances have been slow to recover since COVID. Residents are largely dependent on traveling to neighboring counties for employment in predominately public sector and low-paying service industry jobs resulting in a per capita personal income of \$23,898, compared to Florida's average of \$38,850.

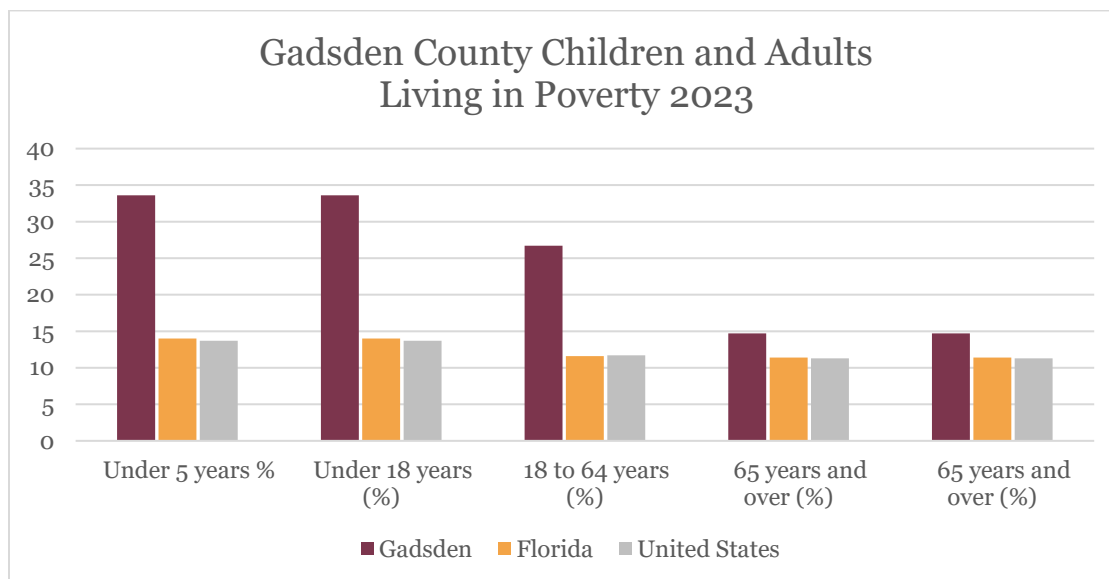
There has been an increase in the types of jobs available in this area. This is primarily due to new, large companies in the community, including a large medical marijuana processing facility and an *Amazon* warehouse in a neighboring county. However, for some, lack of transportation makes it difficult to sustain employment out of county and non-citizens with pending immigration status are also unable to obtain employment there without legal complications due to the discrepancies between federal and state law surrounding cannabis.



Source: *Social and economic factors report 2022*
United States Census Bureau, American Community Survey (ACS) 1-year estimates.

Poverty in Gadsden County has been higher than that of Florida and the U.S. in every population category on average over the past five years. In 2023, the total adult county population below federal poverty was 35.5% compared to 11.9% statewide. The poverty

rate, calculated at 150% of Federal poverty, for children under 5 was estimated at 41.6%, which is consistent with recent years. Female-headed households with related children birth-to-five represented is 45.1% of the county’s families living in poverty (ACS, 2023).



Source: Social and economic factors report (FL CHARTS). 2023 Data are from United States Census Bureau, American Community Survey (ACS) 5-year estimates.

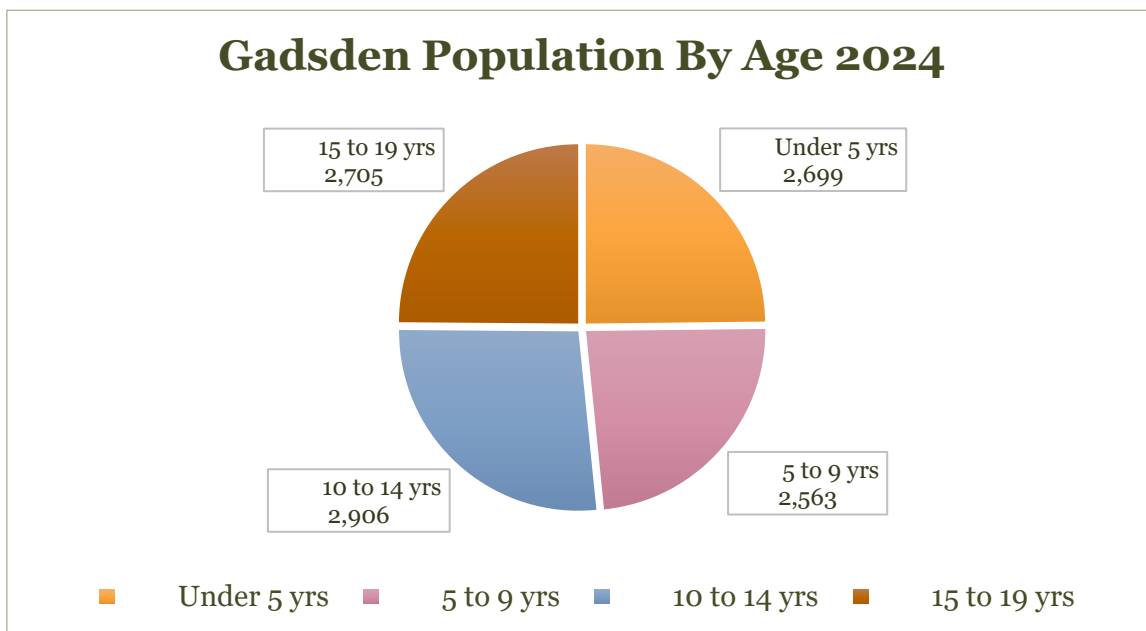
Unemployment: This rate is usually reviewed on a five-year rolling period. While the unemployment rate dropped across the state of Florida by 1% in the last year, according to the United States Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics, Gadsden’s unemployment rate was at 3.9% in 2023, which remains one of the highest county rates in this measure. The percent of persons aged 16 and older living in Gadsden County who are **not in the labor force** for the five-year period (2019-2023) was 52.2%, higher than the state average of 40.8% and more than 15% higher than the national average of 37%.

During SY 2023-2024 Gadsden County reported 99.6% of students enrolled in the public school system were economically disadvantaged, compared to 68.9% of students statewide. According to the Florida Department of Children and Families, almost a quarter (24.4%) of Gadsden’s residents were receiving food stamps and 34.8% of the county’s population are receiving Medicaid assistance in 2021-2022. During this period, WIC (Supplemental Nutrition Program for Woman, Infants and Children) served 4,369 families. There are no typical work, school, and training schedules of parents with eligible children. However, some enrolled families reported working 7am-3pm, mostly in the city of Quincy. Many jobs are at larger companies such as Walmart and processing plants. These jobs are limited to those with no criminal background, and they require inflexible shiftwork

schedules. Numerous families eligible for Early Head Start services work at fast food or hospitality jobs where shifts can vary. There are two regional education institutions with a satellite location in the county which offer GED and other courses, usually during weekday mornings. However, they are only located in the City of Quincy and there is limited transportation to these locations from other cities in the service area.

Gadsden County Demographics

Population: According to 2024 population estimations, about 2,699 or 6% of the county’s population were children under 5 years old.



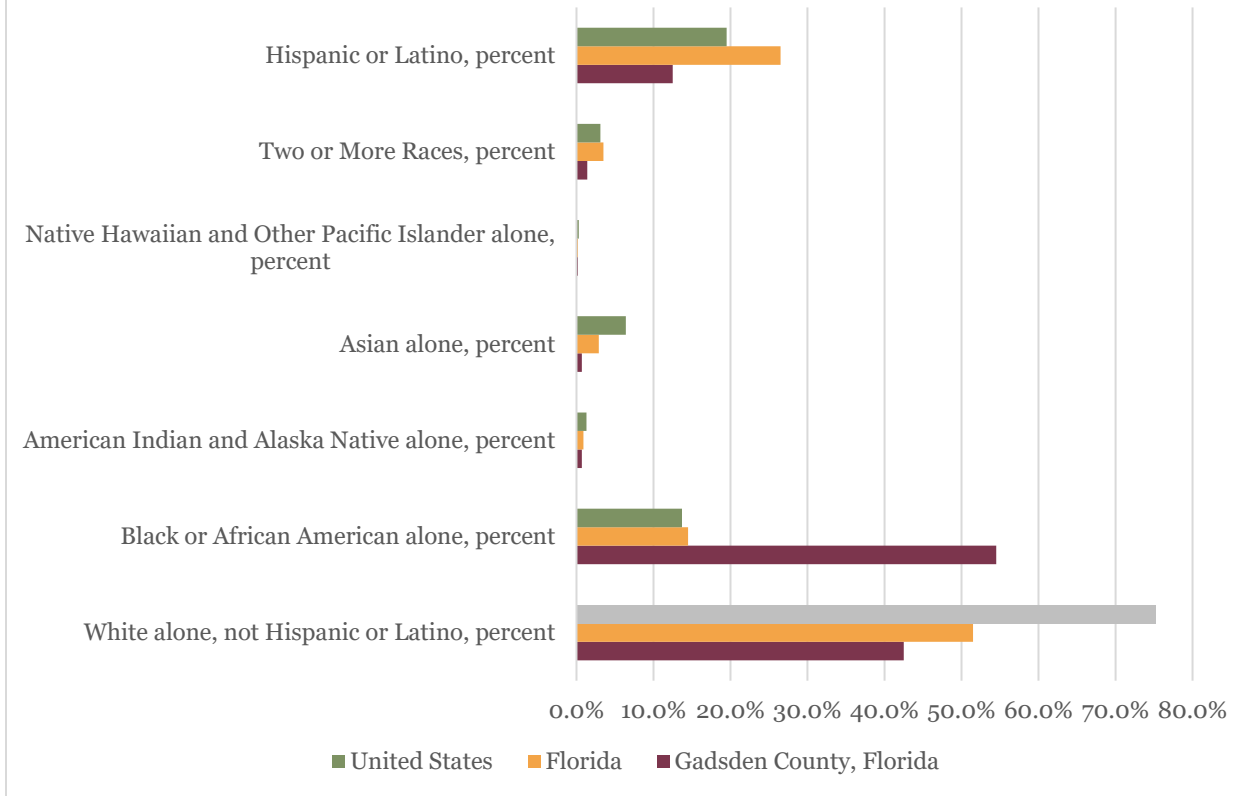
Source: United States Census Bureau

Racial, Ethnic, and Linguistic Demographics:

The racial characteristics of Gadsden County differ substantially from other Florida counties, primarily because it is the only predominantly Black/African American county in the state. The Black/African American population in the state comprises about 15.5% of the total population, compared to a strong majority in Gadsden County. The racial and ethnic breakdown of the county is approximately 55.6% African American/Black, 35.2% white, 11.1% Hispanic ethnicity regardless of race, 4.7% multi-racial, less than .03% Asian and 3.8% “Other”.

Race & Ethnicity Population 2023 Estimates for the US, Florida, and Gadsden County

(% of Total Population)



Source: FL CHARTS. Population from the United States Census Bureau

Having limited English proficiency (being able to speak English less than “very well”) poses challenges for educational achievement, employment, accessing services, and often results in lower quality of care. These factors influence maternal and child health outcomes and should be considered when developing appropriate interventions. Almost 9.7% of the County’s population over the age of 5 years old speaks Spanish at home and 41% of these Spanish speakers have limited English proficiency.

Florida’s linguistic diversity requires maternal, infant and early childhood systems to develop linguistic competence in multiple languages. Although the Hispanic population rates in Gadsden County have, on average, remained the same over the past five years, there are still many public and private service providers in the county that do not offer services in Spanish.

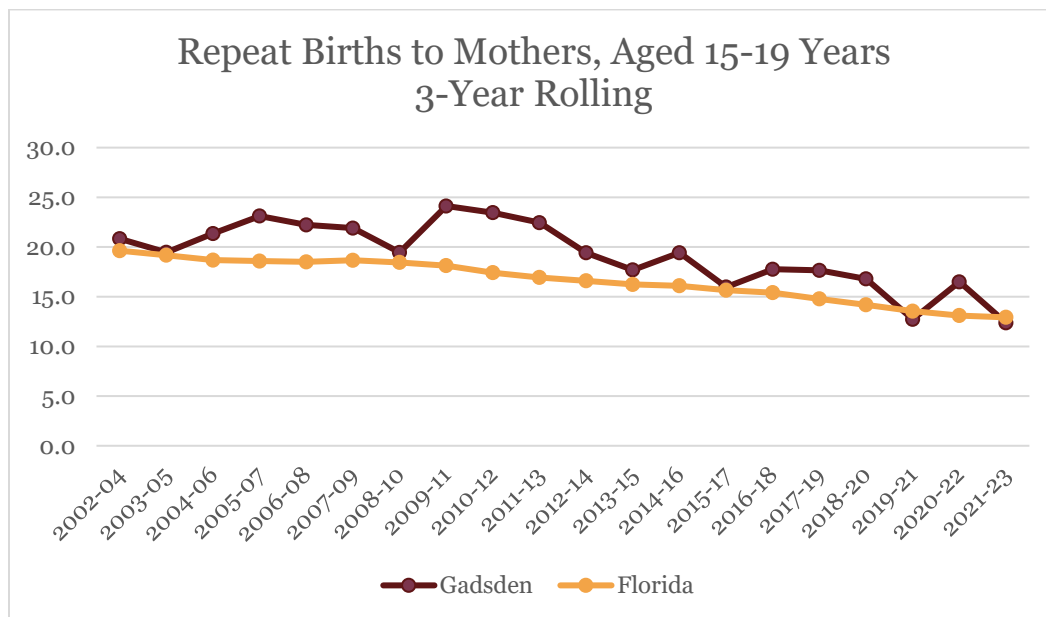
Eligible Families

FSU Early Head Start serves a portion of the population with the greatest financial, educational, and medical need. Many eligible families waiting to enroll are those who want to ensure their child is ready for “3-year-old school” and the program helps these parents become self-sufficient educators and advocates for their children. Demographic data for children and families that are eligible for services are calculated using population estimates from the Florida Legislature, Office of Economic and Demographic Research, as well as information based on data from the US Bureau of the Census (FL Charts).



Children and Expectant Mothers

According to population estimations from 2021-2023, 3.3% of the total population were children under 5 years old and there were 469 live births to mothers living in the county. Repeat pregnancies in teens are also of concern, with 12.4% of local teen mothers having given birth previously, compared to 12.9% statewide.



Source: Florida Department of Health, Bureau of Vital Statistics

Children Experiencing Homelessness

Many low-income Gadsden County families lack a fixed, regular residence. Instead, they share housing with other relatives or friends due to economic hardships and meet the federal definition of “homeless” as defined by the McKinney-Vento Act. During the 2021-2022 school year the Florida Department of Education data indicated Gadsden had 166 homeless students. This accounts for 3% of students. The vast majority (86%) of Gadsden’s homeless students were sharing housing with others or “doubling up” due to loss of home or other economic hardship.

The remaining Gadsden homeless students were reported as living in shelters and motels. The average annual “Point in Time” homelessness count for the entire Big Bend Region for 2021-2023 is 681, but these counts are limited in that they predominantly capture the population in emergency shelters and on urban streets. There are no emergency homeless shelters or temporary/transitional housing programs in the county and “invisible” homeless families doubled up with friends or family members or in motels or campgrounds are not counted.



Many families “doubling up” turn to grandparents for assistance. Grandparents often take the reins when raising grandchildren due to a combination of factors like parental substance abuse, child abuse and neglect, unemployment, incarceration, mental or physical illness, teenage pregnancy, child or parental disability, divorce, military deployment, abandonment, and death (AAMFT, 2025). In 2023, the percentage of grandparents living in households with one or more of their own minor grandchildren (0-17 years of age) in Gadsden County was 5.3 compared to Florida at 35.4 (US Census ACS). The overall state as well as Gadsden numbers have decreased in recent years.

According to the 2024 Annual Homelessness Assessment Report (AHAR) to Congress by the Department of Housing and Urban Development, Florida does not have a particularly high homeless population compared with the United States, but those who are homeless do not have adequate shelter. It is even harder for those living in rural areas.

Estimates of Homelessness by State

Exhibit 3-9: State Estimates of People in Families with Children Experiencing Homelessness by State, 2024

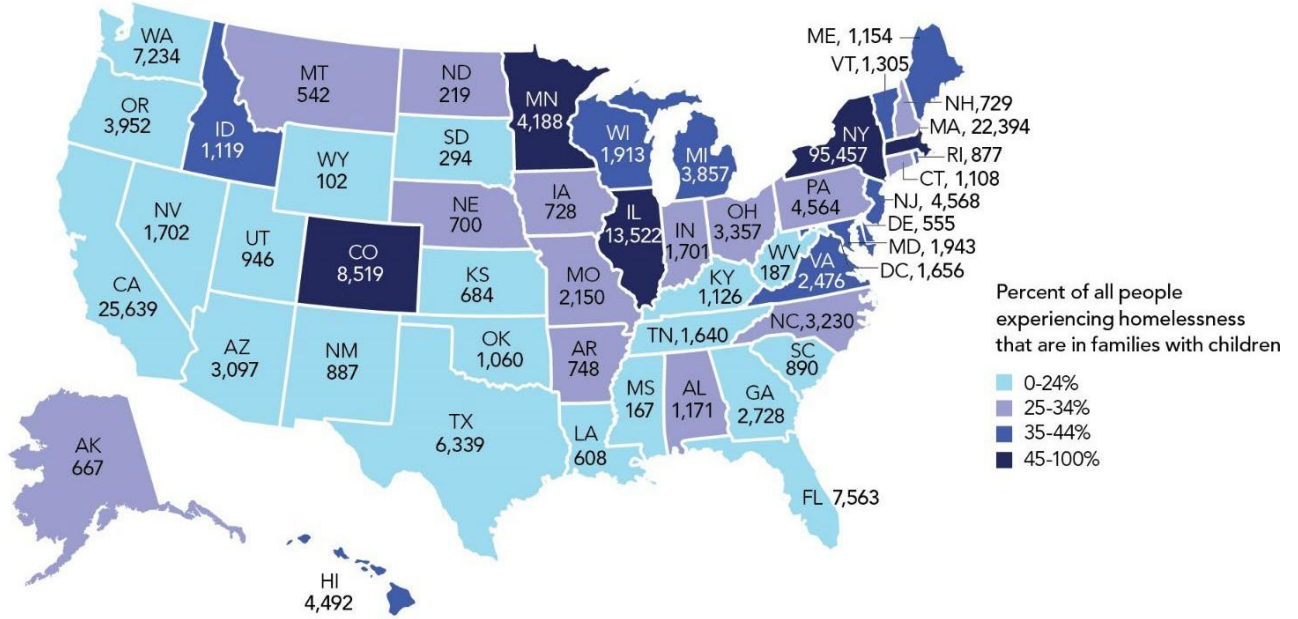
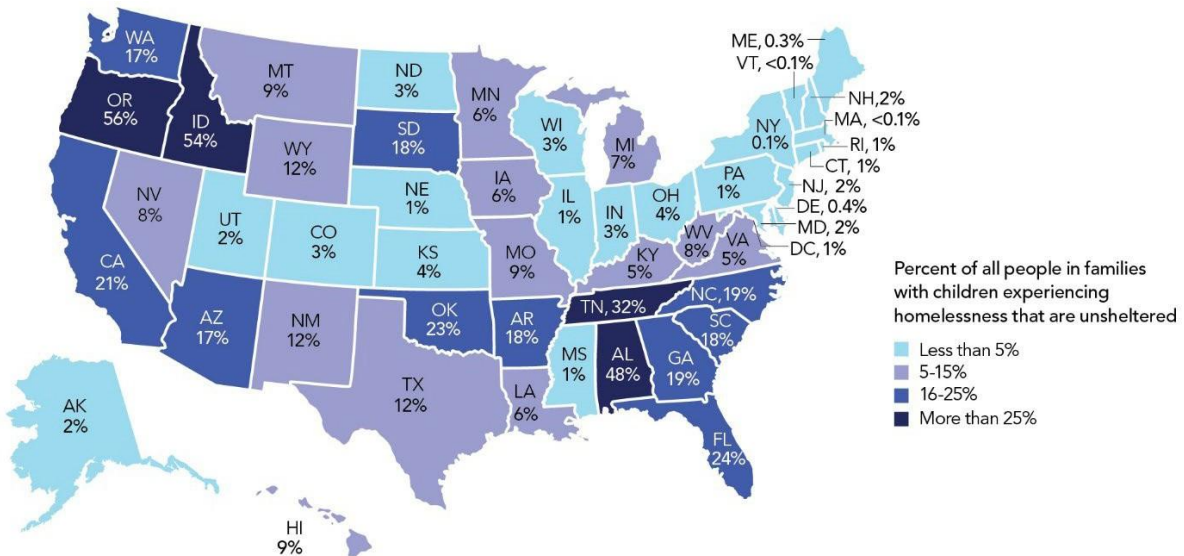


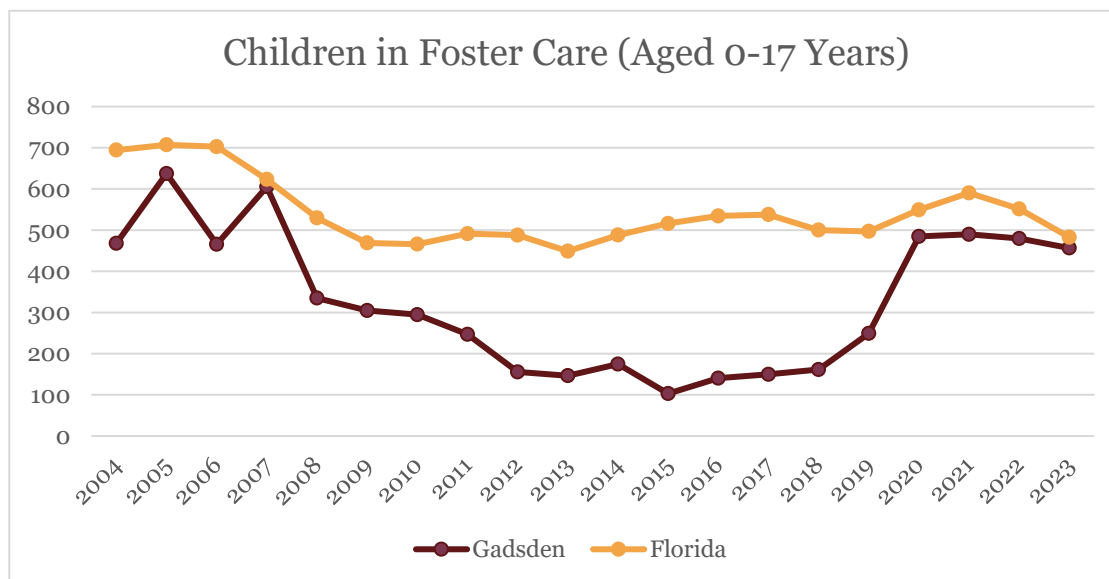
Exhibit 3-10: Percentages of People in Families with Children Experiencing Homelessness Who Are Unsheltered, 2024



Source: Social and economic factors report 2024
 United States Census Bureau, American Community Survey (ACS) 1-year estimates.

Children in Foster Care

Children in foster care are categorically eligible for Head Start services. In 2023, the rate per 100,000 of Children in Foster Care (Aged 0-17 Years) was **456.4** in Gadsden County compared to Florida at **482.8**. The line graph below shows change over time when there are at least three years of data, revealing a slightly downward trend.



Source: Florida Department of Children and Families, Florida Safe Families Network

Child Welfare

Fostering Court Improvement (FCI) is a non-profit organization that prioritizes collaboration between the two principal government organizations responsible for the safeguarding of abused and neglected children: the child welfare agency and the dependency court. FCI converts existing data from the Adoption and Foster Care Analysis and Reporting System (AFCARS) and National Child Abuse and Neglect Data System (NCANDS) into reports to provide a platform of shared data for every state in the nation.

In 2021-2022, FCI revealed 569 children were subjects of child abuse and neglect reports ranking Gadsden 57th out of 67 for the rate of children involved in reports. 24% of the 78 children involved in verified maltreatment cases were not removed from their parents, but continued to stay in the home while case management and other services were provided to the family. Between October 2021 and September 2022, the most frequent type of maltreatment resulting in removal was neglect (68%) and caretaker

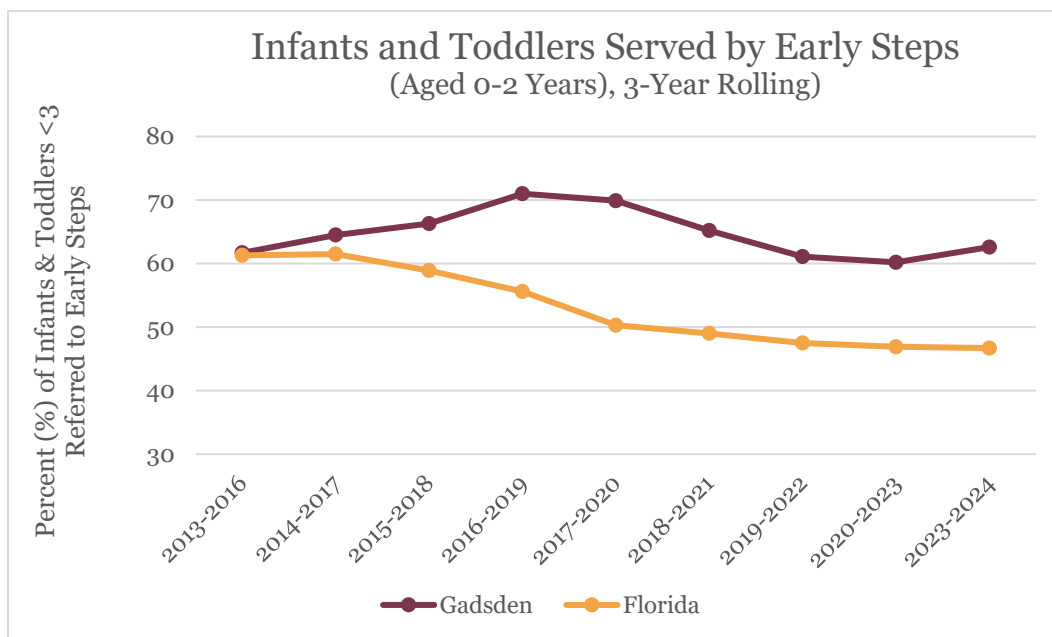
substance use (32%), followed closely by abandonment (26%), and inadequate housing (26%).

Children with Disabilities

Head Start programs are required to ensure that at least 10% of enrollment slots are occupied by children with disabilities. According to national Head Start reports, nearly half of the children with disabilities in Head Start programs are diagnosed after they enroll in the program. This occurs often through screening by Early Head Start staff, or the ongoing child assessment and community referral process.

The process for referring children to the agency responsible for conducting evaluations under IDEA, and scheduling Individualized Family Service Plan (IFSP) and Individualized Education Plan (IEP), meeting with parents, and providers takes a considerable amount of time. Therefore, FSU Early Head Start works to ensure children receive quality home visiting services throughout their time in the program.

According to the most recent data from the Florida Bureau of Early Steps and Newborn Screening, the percentage of Infants and Toddlers Served by Early Steps (Aged 0-2 Years) in Gadsden in FY 23-24, was 56.3 compared to Florida at 45.6. Early learning experiences are crucial for later success in school, the workplace and the community. Early intervention services positively impact outcomes across children’s developmental domains: physical, cognitive, communication, social or emotional and adaptive.



Source: Florida Department of Health, Bureau of Early Steps and Newborn Screening