

COUNTY PROFILE

Together For Children Comprehensive Community Plan 2008-2014



Washington County continues to experience rapid population growth. The total population has grown by close to 65% since 1990, and 15% since 2000, from 311,554 in 1990, to 445,342 in 2000, and to 514,269 in 2006 (2006 American Community Survey). Washington County's growth rate has been more than double the growth rate for the state as a whole.

County population growth results from a high birth rate, and from in-migration. 54% of the county's growth between 2000 and 2006 was from births. Ten percent of the county's population moved to the county in the past year (2006 American Community Survey).

In 2006, there were 134,070 children under the age of 18 residing in Washington County (2006 American Community Survey). Just over 26% of Washington County's population is under the age of 18, compared to 23.7% of the state population. The Portland State University Center for Population Research estimates that Washington County will have the highest number of children in the state, by 2014 (exceeding Multnomah County).

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The diversity of Washington County continues to grow at an even faster rate than the population as a whole.



Latinos comprise the largest minority population in the county, representing 14.5% of the population, with an estimated 74,372 residents. This reflects more than a 518% increase since 1990, when there were an estimated 14,210 Latinos in the county.

Similarly, there has been significant growth in the Asian population, growing from 12,891 in 1990 to 44,009 in 2005, an increase of just over 341% since 1990. Asian/Pacific Islanders now comprise 8.5% of the county population.

While comprising a much smaller proportion of the county population, there has also been growth in the African American and Native American populations. The African American population has grown by 339% since 1990, and comprises 1.4% of the county population; and the Native American population has grown by 183% in the same period and comprises less than 1% of the county population.

School enrollment data provides additional information regarding the increasing diversity of the county.

In the 2000-01 school year, almost 25% of students were minority, with Latino students comprising the largest proportion (13.7% of total school enrollments), followed by Asian students (8.3%). The proportion of minority students was higher at the elementary level, with 28% of students being minority, with Latino students again representing the largest group (16.8%), followed by Asian students (8.1%). African American and Native American students have much lower enrollment levels.

By the 2006-07 school year, enrollment of minority students had

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grown significantly, by 68% for all students, while the overall student population had only grown by 13% since 2000-01. Minority students comprised almost 37% of all students by the 2006-07 school year.

The growth rate for minority students was higher for middle and high school students at 79% and 84% respectively. At the elementary level, minority students comprise 40% of enrollments, while at the middle and high school levels the proportions are lower (35% and 33% respectively).

The Latino student population grew by 69% over this period, while the Asian population grew by 22%. By 2006-07 Latino students comprised 21% of the student population while Asians comprised just about 9%.

The number of White students declined by 6% since 2000-01, and by the 2006-07 school year, enrollment levels had decreased to just under 63% of the total student population down from 75% of total enrollments in 2000-01.

By the 2006-07 school year, 57% of schools in the county had minority enrollment levels exceeding 30%, with 20% having minority enrollments in excess of 50%, and 6% had more than 70% minority students.

Elementary schools had significantly higher minority enrollment levels, with 64% of elementary schools having 35% minority students, 26% having more than 50%, and 10% having in excess of 70% minority students.



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Poverty

While Washington County continues to have one of the highest per capita incomes in the state, the proportion of people living in poverty has increased significantly, rising from 6.5% in 1990 to 7.4% in 2000 and to 9.9% in 2006.

Per capita income has risen by just under 14% since 2000, while during the same time period, the poverty rate in Washington County has grown by 34%, faster than that of other urban counties in Oregon. Children are disproportionately affected by poverty, with poverty rates among children rising from 7.9% in 1990 to 13.6% in 2006.

In 2006, 21.7% of Washington County households were single parents, slightly above the state average of 21.2%. Single parents are also more likely to live in poverty: in 2006, 15.8% of single mother headed households lived in poverty, growing to 32.5% by 2006, compared to 5.7% of two parent families.



The percent of children participating in the free/reduced lunch program is another indicator of poverty.

Since the 2000-01 school year, the percentage of Washington County school children participating in the program has increased from 21.7% to 31.7% in the 2006-07 school year, a 46% increase in six years.

This data reflects continued population growth in the county and the impact of the economic downturn of recent years.

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Minority children are significantly more likely to live in poverty. In 2000 the following percentages of Washington County children lived in poverty:

	White	Latino	Asian/PI	Afr. Amer.	Nat. Amer.
Children Under 6	6.0%	24.6%	7.1%	19.9%	9.8%
Children Under 18	5.7%	23%	9.5%	15.9%	20.8%

The 2006 American Community Survey, estimated that the percentage of White and Latino children living in poverty increased significantly; sample sizes for other population groups are too small to provide valid percentages.

In 2006, the percentage of White children living in poverty grew to 9.2% for children under 6, and to 8.1% for all children under 18.

Among, Latino children the increase in poverty rates was also quite marked, increasing to 31.2% for children under 6 and growing to 27.7% for all children under 18.



Children living in single parent households are also substantially more likely to live in poverty, as the following chart with 2000 Census data illustrates:

	White	Latino	Asian / PI
Two parents w/ children under 18	2.3%	18.7%	5.8%
Single mother w/ children under 18	17.4%	41%	30.2%
Single mother w/ children under 5	25.7%	50.4%	21.2%

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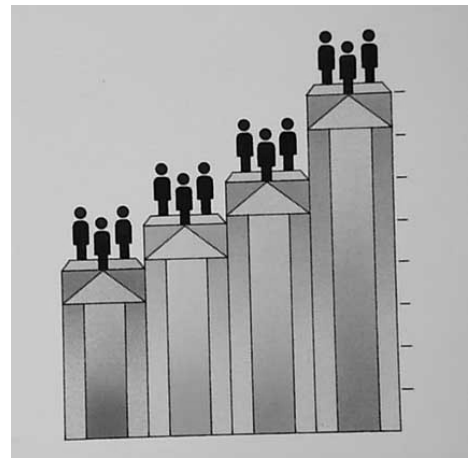
Themes

The first question posed to all community groups with which members of the Strategies Committee met, was:

How has the community changed in recent years?

There was remarkable consistency across communities in terms of some of the major themes:

Rapid population growth. Every community spoke of the continued rapid population in their communities and throughout the county. Communities noted the many ways in which this growth manifests itself: increased traffic on our roads, school overcrowding as districts experience challenges in building schools fast enough to keep pace with growth, new housing developments, new commercial developments, residential communities growing up along the MAX line, increasing social issues as the county becomes increasingly urban with social infrastructure to respond unable to keep pace, and the challenges of developing a sense of community in the face of rapid growth.



Growing diversity. Our community recognizes our growing diversity and is concerned about our ability to support the needs of multiple populations with differing values, languages and lifestyles. We want to know how to honor differences, how to be inclusive and how to enrich our own lives through sharing the traditions of others.

Growing income disparity. Our community is concerned that although the per capita income of the county continues to grow, our low income population is growing at a much faster rate. We

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are increasingly a community of ‘haves’ and ‘have nots’. There are significant pockets of poverty, that didn’t exist fifteen years ago, where a majority of children and families struggle to make ends meet, where young children enter school without the experiences and tools essential for early school success, and where youth drop-out of high school and engage in risky behaviors at much higher rates.

Limited awareness of services and supports available.

While population growth has strained the social infrastructure in the county, there has been some expansion in the range and capacity of health and social services in the county in recent years. However, there is limited awareness of the services and supports available to children and families, among educators and social service providers as well as among the general public. There was considerable agreement and interest in increasing community awareness of the needs and issues facing children and families, and the services and supports available to assist in meeting needs, as well as in promoting awareness of how individuals and organizations can become involved in supporting children and families.

Increase connections between schools and communities.

Schools serve as natural connection points and meeting places in the community. Many believe we should embrace schools as easily accessible hubs that can bring neighborhoods, families and children together with a range of activities and supportive services. Schools open to the community for recreation, continuing education and services, in the evenings and through the summer, can be a powerful tool for creating that intangible sense of community so challenging to achieve in Washington County’s rapidly changing and increasingly urban environment.

Prevention and early intervention are of primary importance, and involve promoting healthy lifestyles and choices, and building assets and resiliency in our children and families as well as preventing problems and reducing risks. Research informs us that if we provide support to families and children early, the problems they face can be mitigated. Prevention and early intervention

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can help us avoid the negative individual, family, school and community consequences that result from juvenile crime, alcohol, tobacco and other drug use, child abuse, domestic violence, and dropping out of school.

Honoring and supporting families was recognized as an essential ingredient to raising healthy children and building strong communities. We are raising our children in challenging environments in a complex world, and often parents need support. It is critical that we honor this need through non-stigmatizing formal and informal support systems for families as their children grow.

Assuring that children and youth are ready for school and successful in school is imperative to healthy behaviors and choices, and preparing them for full participation in community life as adults. Graduation from high school is seen as a defining passage which measures our community's capacity to provide good maternal and child health care, adequate early childhood education, attending to parental and community support through the years, academic achievement, social supports and healthy activities. The high school graduation rate, juvenile crime rates, substance use rates, teen pregnancy rates, and child abuse rates are key indicators of our success with our children and benchmarks for their success as adults.

Strong collaboration and cross-system partnerships are a valued hallmark in providing social services in Washington County, and there is a deep commitment to maintaining this traditional approach to service delivery as systems become more complex.

There is a strong belief that Washington County is a 'nimble' county, that when a need or issue is identified in the community, some group or organization in the county emerges to lead an effort to address it in a multi-agency, cross-system way. We know that raising healthy, successful children is not only the work of schools or government or community organizations, but rather it is a task

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that belongs to every one of us, and to all of us together.

Supportive neighborhoods, adults who watch over the children on their block, people who mentor a young person, faith communities that reach out to the homeless or operate a food pantry, teens who are given a voice in civic affairs, youth who believe in their future, children who feel valued and special and talented are all results of a caring and engaged community.

A stable resource base is essential to assure consistency and continuity in the educational and social infrastructure so crucial to our communities' well-being.

It is imperative that we not only stabilize base of resources, but that we continue to work to build our community capacity to provide these essential services in order to preserve the livability of our communities, and enable our children and families to realize their full potential.

Elected leaders must act with vision, and avoid legislative and funding debates that pit our school systems against human services.

We believe that it is through collaboration among schools, other publicly funded services and the private sector that we can provide the strongest supports to children and families.

