

Fewer kids in foster care in Pennsylvania, Allegheny County

By Jill King Greenwood

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A report to be released today finds Pennsylvania is making "significant progress" in safely reducing the number of children living in foster care.

That number fell almost 12 percent between this year and last, according to the Pennsylvania Partnerships for Children, a nonprofit, nonpartisan group in Harrisburg.

"Pennsylvania's child welfare system serves some of the most vulnerable children and families in our communities. It is critically important that we continue to monitor the performance of this essential safety net," said Joan L. Benso, president of the partnership.

The report compared data collected between April 1, 2009, and March 31 with the previous year, and drew from all 67 counties in the state.

The declines are being achieved without endangering children's safety, the report said, because repeat cases of child abuse did not measurably increase and re-entry into foster care declined.

In Allegheny County, the rate of children being placed in foster care dropped from 13 per 1,000 children in 2009 to 11.6 per 1,000 this year, partnership spokeswoman Kathy Geller Myers said. Across the state, the rate is 9.9 per 1,000 children.

According to the report, nearly 90 percent of counties reduced the number of kids going into foster care. The number of children entering the welfare system -- which includes group homes -- declined more than 16 percent.

Statewide, the number of children reuniting with their birth families during the year increased 11 percent.

The biggest age group in the foster care system is children 6-12, at 22.5 percent, the report shows.

The news wasn't all good. The report found that black children are six times more likely than white children to be placed in foster care and more likely to exit the foster care system without a permanent family.

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