

The Child Indicator

THE CHILD, YOUTH, AND FAMILY INDICATORS NEWSLETTER

Winter 2011
Publication # 2011-03

Vol. 11, Issue No. 1

Putting It On The Map: Web-Based Applications for Indicator Data

Several innovative examples of web-based technology for display of indicator information, often including maps, have emerged in recent months.

- **Rhode Island's DataHub** (www.ridatahub.org) is a tour-de-force of data integration. It draws on multiple data sets—federal, state, and local—to facilitate analysis and visualization across many topics of child and adolescent well-being. The DataHub includes both aggregate and individual-level (program) data (with appropriate confidentiality protections). Tables, charts, and maps, both pre-made and custom-generated, are part of the interface. Essentially a data warehouse, the DataHub uses visualization software, WEAVE, that is quite user-friendly. Another feature of the site, Data Stories, presents, through figures and text, succinct, data-based explanations of key issues, such as **substance abuse, or mathematics test scores**. In the site's own words:

"Policymakers, program planners and grants writers can use the HUB to demonstrate where to target scarce public resources and explain the data-driven rationale behind policy decisions. With the proper clearance, the HUB is a researcher's paradise."

The DataHub, which is officially in "beta" mode, is developed and maintained by The Providence Plan, created with funds provided by the U.S. Office of Safe & Drug-free Schools, and sponsored by several state agencies, including Health, Education, and the Department of Children.

- **Curious to see per-capita expenditures on "fast food" in your county?** Or the percentage of households without a car having a grocery store within a mile of home? How about the number of recreation and fitness facilities per thousand population?

The Food Environment Atlas (<http://maps.ers.usda.gov/FoodAtlas/>) is sponsored by the U.S.

Department of Agriculture's

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Web-Based Applications

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Economic Research Service. The Atlas includes 90 national, state-, and county-level indicators of “the food environment,” displayed on thematic maps. Drawing data from a number of sources, the Atlas aims to stimulate discussion of the determinants of a community’s food choices and diet quality, recognizing that these outcomes are the result of a complex interplay between factors such as food pricing, proximity of stores and restaurants, public food assistance programs, and local characteristics.

- Another kind of mapping application is IECAM—the Illinois Early Childhood Asset Map (<http://iecam.crc.uiuc.edu/>). IECAM offers users multiple geographic regions within the state of Illinois—House and Senate Districts, ZIP Codes, counties, municipalities, and more—for display of the location of licensed and exempt child care facilities, Head Start programs, and pre-K programs. Years covered are 2006-2009. Housed at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, IECAM is a project of the University’s Early Childhood and Parenting Collaborative.
- www.diversitydata.org presents metropolitan-area data, in maps and tables, on a number of indicators related to diversity, opportunity, and quality of life for various racial and ethnic groups. Among the more innovative indicators on this site are those dealing with segregation/ integration of schools and metro areas, disparities by race/ethnicity in the poverty rates of schools students attend, and children’s exposure to neighborhoods with a variety of factor associated with advantage and disadvantage. There are hundreds of indicators included, in total, though some date back to the 2000 decennial census. DiversityData is a project of the Center for Advancing Health, at Harvard University.

Grading the Nation and the States: “Quality Counts” in Education

Editorial Projects in Education (EPE), publisher of *Education Week*, recently released its annual comprehensive “report card” on the status of American education. The nation and each state (including DC) receive an overall grade, and grades on six distinct dimensions of policy and performance. Maryland takes top honors (B+) in the overall rating, for the third straight year, while most states get grades of C+ or lower.

The more provocative findings have to do with the several dimensions the report tracks. For instance, in addition to an index that captures K-12 achievement, EPE’s Research Center calculates a “chance-for-success” index, that takes a “pipeline” perspective on education from early childhood through K-12, college, and adult economic outcomes. Under “transitions & alignment,” grades are awarded on the strength of the connections and coordination between K-12 schooling and other segments of a “cradle to career” system.

Quality Counts 2011, including interactive state report cards, is available at <http://www.edweek.org/ew/qc/index.html>

Revisiting Homelessness

As the economic recovery sputters ahead, many data still point to lives severely damaged by the Great Recession. The National Alliance to End Homelessness, and the Homelessness Research Institute have released the *State of Homelessness in America* report, which provides data through 2009 on counts of the homeless, and associated economic indicators and demographic “drivers,” at the state and national levels.

Not surprisingly, the number of homeless nationwide increased in 2009, though 20 states (including DC) saw their homeless population decrease. As is often the case, however, the story is in the details. Family households were the group that had the largest year-to-year percentage increase (four percent). Nearly forty percent of homeless people were “unsheltered”—living on the street, in a car, or in other places not designed for human habitation. Foreclosures (one among many influences on homelessness) were up by 21 percent in 2009, to a total of 2.8 million. The report also examines the prevalence of multiple risk factors for increased homelessness. Risk is defined as “worse than the national average” on unemployment, foreclosure, doubling-up, housing cost burden, or lack of health insurance; by these measures, half of all states have multiple risk factors.

A special focus of this year’s report is youth aging out of foster care. The odds of their experiencing homelessness, as estimated by the authors, are one in six. “Unaccompanied” youth (homeless and not living with families) are an especially problematic subgroup of the homeless population, because there is agreement that their numbers are vastly undercounted.

The report is available at <http://www.endhomelessness.org/content/article/detail/3668>

Taking an Expansive View of Health: Two New Databooks

Child Health USA 2010 is the 20th annual report from the U.S. Maternal and Child Health Bureau on the health status and service needs of America’s children. More than 50 indicators describe health status and health care (both financing, and utilization). Selected indicators are available at state and city levels. The report reaches beyond the traditional health indicators to encompass a number of contextual determinants of well-being, including “child-family connectedness,” “school engagement,” and “working mothers and child care.” The on-line version of the databook is available at <http://www.mchb.hrsa.gov/chusa10/index.html>.

America’s Health Rankings, 2010, provides a state-level look at 42 indicators. A comprehensive view of health is also evident here, with high school graduation, violent crime, air pollution, income disparity, and “underemployment rate” and other “supplemental measures” joining more conventional, “core” measures. States are ranked on each indicator, as well as assigned an overall ranking (for 2010, Vermont was top-ranked, followed by Massachusetts and New Hampshire). Indicator rankings are based on standardized (“Z-”) scores. Overall rank is a composite of weighted indicator scores, with weights (positive or negative) assigned by an expert panel on the basis of the indicator’s contribution to overall health, the degree to which the indicator’s contribution is unique, and the reliability of the data making up the indicator. Sponsors are United Healthcare, the American Public Health Association, and Partnership for Prevention.

More information is at <http://www.americashealthrankings.org/>

Rethinking (and Re-crafting) Data Systems

A new, explicit emphasis on the quality of data and data systems has emerged in indicators work. One prime example is the [Data Quality Campaign \(DQC\)](http://www.dataqualitycampaign.org) (including the Early Childhood Data Collaborative) (www.dataqualitycampaign.org), a project of 14 managing partners, including the Council of Chief State School Officers, the Education Commission of the States, and the National Conference of State Legislatures. Delving into the nitty-gritty of building longitudinal data systems, particularly to meet new mandates from the U.S. Department of Education, the DQC identifies and tracks state-by-state progress on “essential elements,” 10 “state actions” critical to changing the culture of data use and maximizing data infrastructure investments, and capacity to address key policy issues.

These are rapidly moving developments, and the DQC site provides a very timely way of keeping up. The Early Childhood Data Collaborative, whose members include the DQC and many of its partners, also has a presence on the DQC site, where it promotes “P-20” (preschool through post-secondary) alignment of early care and education data systems. Many states are taking advantage of federal Statewide Longitudinal Data Systems grants to link pre-kindergarten and K-12 data systems.

The challenges involved in such efforts are highlighted in a recent publication from the New America Foundation. “Many Missing Pieces” (http://earlyed.newamerica.net/sites/newamerica.net/files/policydocs/NAF_ManyMissingPieces.pdf) summarizes the history and ongoing developments in this arena.

Selected New International Reports

PISA 2009. The Program for International Student Assessment (PISA) is a well-regarded benchmark survey of academic performance in the OECD (Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development) countries. The latest report focuses on “reading literacy” among 15-year-olds. Korea and Finland reported the best performance. Among other highlights were the following:

- The gender gap (girls consistently read better than boys, in every country) is equivalent to one year of schooling.
- Schools where achievement levels are not linked to students’ socioeconomic background are most likely to be those that admit students of all abilities.
- Across countries, schools with good discipline and positive student-teacher relations have better reading results.
- Across countries, the percentage of students who say they read for pleasure declined from 69 percent in 2000 to 64 percent in 2009.

The *Executive Summary* is available at http://www.oecd.org/document/61/0,3746,en_32252351_32235731_46567613_1_1_1_1,00.html#Executive_summary

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Selected New International Reports

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More from OECD: Jobs for Youth. Just as we in the U.S. have seen, in the European OECD countries youth unemployment leads that of all other age groups, at about 20 percent, and is not expected to fall below 17 percent until after 2012. Similar to what we term “disconnected youth” are those European youth who are “neither in education nor in employment or training (“NEET”)—about 13 percent of 15- to 24-year-olds. One recommendation from this report is for more countries to build upon the vocational educational and training programs (such as apprenticeships) well-established in Austria, Germany, and Switzerland. These have functioned to keep impressive proportions of those countries’ youth on strong school-to-work pathways. The report is available at <http://www.oecd.org/dataoecd/0/26/46748099.pdf>

The Children Left Behind. A new report from UNICEF looks at “inequality in child well-being in the world’s rich countries.” Twenty-four countries (including the U.S.) are ranked by the degree of inequality their children experience along three dimensions of well-being—material, education, and health—and overall. Inequality is measured as the gap between the bottom end of a measure’s distribution, and the median. Differences between nations in the size of this gap can provide a relative measure of their success in creating greater equality.

The report sheds light on several often-debated issues. For example, it is not the case that countries managing to have high median academic achievement do so at the cost of increasing inequality of performance; rather, the highest median school achievement is attained by countries with the lowest levels of inequality. Indeed, this pattern holds true as well in the health dimension of well-being.

While government efforts play an important role in restraining inequality (in some countries, reducing child poverty by as much as two-thirds), still there are global economic trends that are limiting the success of these efforts. In particular, one sobering fact is that full-time work no longer guarantees that a family will live at a better than poverty level.

The report is available at <http://www.unicef-irc.org/publications/619>

Issues for Data Users

The number of U.S. households having cell-phone-only (wireless) telephone service is growing rapidly. During the first half of 2010, nearly 27 percent of households were in this category. The prevalence of wireless-only is even higher in households with children—29 percent as of early 2010. Another 16 percent of homes (23 percent where children were present) received all or mostly all calls on wireless phones despite having a landline. Renter households and low-income households are among the groups with higher rates of cell-phone-only usage.

The report is *Wireless Substitution: Early Release of Estimates From the National Health Interview Survey, January-June 2010*. Available at <http://www.cdc.gov/nchs/data/nhis/earlyrelease/wireless201012.pdf>

New Census Releases

The U.S. Census Bureau has released a number of data products within the past few months. Driving much of this activity is the American Community Survey (ACS), a continuous sampling of households that yields estimates on a yearly basis for many larger geographic areas, and annually updated multi-year estimates for all smaller areas—down to the census block group. The smallest areas (those with fewer than 20,000 people) have had to wait until now to get their first ACS data, collected over a five-year period between 2005 and 2009. Larger areas now have updated three-year (2007-2009) and 2009 estimates. The ACS essentially replaces the old “long form” of the decennial census, collecting information on topics including age, race/ethnicity, and gender (still data collected decennially), as well as family relationships, income, education, and housing. Details, including guidance for data users, are available at <http://www.census.gov/acs/www/>

Following years of discussion, debate, and analysis, an alternate “official” measure of poverty is finally gaining some traction. The current federal poverty thresholds and guidelines have long been recognized as anachronistic, developed as they were at a time that predated many now-common forms of government assistance to low-income households, as well as the kinds of expenditures (e.g., medical out-of-pocket costs, child care, commuting expenses) that now comprise a sizable portion of many families’ budgets.

Now, *the Supplemental Poverty Measure (SPM)*, developed by the Census Bureau to reflect these new realities, will (pending approval of the Administration’s budget) form the basis for a set of alternate poverty estimates to be published in September, 2011. The SPM will not replace the current thresholds and guidelines, which will continue to be published as the primary estimates of poverty, and to guide eligibility for means-tested assistance programs. However, the SPM does give what many believe to be a more accurate picture of people’s expenses and resources, as well as accounting for the variety of circumstances of today’s families and children.

Several recent papers discuss these developments in detail; see <http://www.census.gov/hhes/povmeas/methodology/supplemental/research.html> for more information.

Finally, Census has released 2009 poverty figures, by school district, from its Small Area Income and Poverty Estimates (SAIPE) program. These are modeled estimates, using data from several sources that include rates of poverty for related children ages 5-17, and additional poverty tabulations for states and counties. For more information, see <http://www.census.gov/did/www/saipe/>

Announcements

The International Society for Child Indicators (ISCI) has issued a call for papers, and an invitation to attend, its third international conference, to be held at the University of York (England), July 27-29, 2011.

ISCI seeks to promote child well-being throughout the world through its network of individuals dedicated to improving measures and data resources, advancing data analysis, exploring theoretical issues, and disseminating information on the status of children.

To learn more about ISCI, and the conference, go to www.childindicators.org. To submit an abstract (due January 31, 2011), contact isci2011@events.york.ac.uk

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The third Greenville (SC) Family Symposium, titled “The Quest for Health and Community: Democracy, Spirituality, and Neighborly Caring,” will be held April 11-13, 2011. Featured speakers will include: Felton Earls, James Garbarino, Gary Melton, Ferran Casas, and Asher Ben-Arieh, among many others. More information is available at www.familysymposium.com.

The Child Trends DataBank (www.childtrendsdatabank.org), a compendium of more than 100 indicators of children’s well-being and the context for their development, is a resource for researchers, practitioners, policymakers, and others. Along with trend data, for each indicator we summarize why it’s important, what we know about how to bend the trend in a desired direction, and links, where available, to state, local, and international data. Several new indicators have been added to the *DataBank* in the past year, including Bullying, Children’s Exposure to Violence, Preterm Births, Youth Employment, and Parental Expectations for Academic Achievement.

About The Child Indicator

The goal of *The Child Indicator* is to communicate major developments and new resources within each sector of the child and youth indicators field to the larger community of interested users, researchers, and data developers on a regular basis. By promoting the efficient sharing of knowledge, ideas, and resources, *The Child Indicator* seeks to advance understanding within the child and youth indicators community and to make all of its members more effective in their work. Past issues are available at www.childtrends.org/ci.

Child Trends produces and distributes *The Child Indicator* with funding from the Annie E. Casey Foundation. We welcome your comments and suggestions. All communications regarding this newsletter can be directed to childindicator@childtrends.org.

Child Trends is a nonprofit, nonpartisan research center that studies children at all stages of development. Our mission is to improve outcomes for children by providing research, data, and analysis to the people and institutions whose decisions and actions affect children. For additional information on Child Trends, including publications available to download, visit our Web site at www.childtrends.org. For the latest information on more than 100 key indicators of child and youth well-being, visit the *Child Trends DataBank* at www.childtrendsdatabank.org. For summaries of over 500 evaluations of out-of-school time programs that work (or don't) to enhance children's development, visit www.childtrends.org/WhatWorks.

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