

The Child Indicator

THE CHILD, YOUTH, AND FAMILY INDICATORS NEWSLETTER

Fall, 2009
Publication # 2009-46

Vol. 9, Issue No. 2

KIDS COUNT and America's Children: New Editions of Two Signal Indicators Publications

This past summer saw the release of two publications that the child indicators field has come to rely on for essential data on the well-being of children in the U.S. Each reflects a maturing of a field that has both shaped, and been shaped by, these important projects.

The *KIDS COUNT Data Book*, a publication of the Annie E. Casey Foundation (AECF), celebrated its 20th anniversary with the 2009 edition. A state-by-state look at 10 key indicators of well-being, the Data Book tracks progress over time and assigns ranks to states, in both overall well-being, and by indicator. A feature of each year's Data Book is an essay by AECF president, Douglas Nelson. 2009's essay focuses on the ongoing need for high-quality data, and highlights in particular shortcomings in the official poverty measure, undercounts in the decennial census, gaps in our knowledge of particular sub-groups of children, and the need to strengthen the collection and use of data within a number of federal and state administrative systems. Nelson's essay is a ringing endorsement of the value of indicators and the potential for their improvement in "counting what counts."

The KIDS COUNT Data Center website has incorporated a number of new features. Each indicator can be portrayed on maps, line-graphs, and in rankings by state. Customized state-level profiles can also be created online. For all states, county-level data are also provided, and for many states, community-level data are available. Besides the 10 KIDS COUNT "key indicators," the site includes many additional indicators grouped by category.

The (U.S.) Federal Interagency Forum on Child and Family Statistics publishes *America's Children: Key National Indicators of Well-Being*, the 12th annual edition of which was released earlier this summer. The report includes 40 indicators in seven sections: family and social environment, economic circumstances, health care, physical environment and safety, behavior, education, and health. Each section also highlights one or more "indicators needed"—drawing attention to current gaps in our ability to assess well-being. In alternate years the report also has a "Special Feature"; this year's is Children with Special Health Care Needs. Charts or tables show trend data over time

continued on p. 2

In This Issue...

KIDS COUNT and America's Children: New Editions of Two Signal Indicators Publications pp. 1-2

The Untapped Strengths of 15-Year-Olds p. 2

Recently Released Reports pp. 3-6

Improving Child Indicators: Report of a 2008 Symposium p. 7

International Roundup pp. 7-9

Noteworthy Publication p. 9

Written by:

David Murphey, Ph.D.
Laura Lippman
Kristen Darling-Churchill, M.P.P.

Designed by:

Lindsay Giesen

<http://www.childtrends.org/ci>



(typically, 10-20 years), and are supplemented with bulleted highlights and an appendix with detailed tables.

For more on the Kids Count 2009 Data Book and Data Center, see <http://datacenter.kidscount.org/>
For more on the *America's Children* report, see www.childstats.gov/.

The Untapped Strengths of 15-Year-Olds

Teen Voice 2009: The Untapped Strengths of 15-Year-Olds reports on a national survey of 1,817 15-year olds (representative, but within volunteer participants only) conducted for the Search Institute. The report introduces three new concepts: “sparks,” “teen voice,” and “relationships and opportunities.”

“Sparks” is “a metaphor for describing how young people experience talents, interests, or strengths . . . and that give them real purpose, direction, or focus.” According to the survey results, two-thirds of 15-year-olds say they have at least one spark, with 28 percent naming as their strongest spark sports or other physical activities, and 24 percent describing creative endeavors such as art, music, or dance. Teens who know their sparks are more likely to report higher levels of initiative, sense of purpose, and desire to make a difference. They are also more likely to value having strong friendships, being civically engaged, and serving others.

The Teen Voice Index (TVI) is a composite of five items dealing with teens’ engagement in social issues and civic life. Overall, just 18 percent of youth scored high on the TVI, which is positively correlated with parental education level. Fifteen-year-olds with high scores on the TVI are much more likely than those with low scores to see civic engagement as important, hold prosocial values, and have a sense of purpose. They are twice as likely as teens with low TVI scores to be actively engaged in school and to have goals to master what they are studying.

The Relationships and Opportunities Index (ROI) highlights three elements that significantly help teens: being valued and treated fairly; having access to and being involved in high-quality opportunities, such as after-school programs; and having people who help nurture their sparks. About one in eight 15-year-olds (12%) scored high on the ROI. A critical issue is the quality of the programs in which teens participate. The report estimates that only 23 percent of America’s 15-year-olds participate in high-quality programs and activities in their communities.

The report argues that all of the strengths captured in these measures—sparks, TVI, and ROI—are important for teens. However, according to the study, only seven percent of 15-year-olds experience high levels of all three, and 31 percent don’t experience high levels of any of the three.

For more information, see: <http://www.search-institute.org/at15research>

Recently Released Reports

2007 Data from the National Survey of Children's Health

Sponsored by the Maternal & Child Health Bureau, and administered as part of the State & Local Area Integrated Telephone Survey, the National Survey of Children's Health (NSCH) provides national and state-level data on a range of child indicators previously unavailable at a state level. Currently fielded every four years, the NSCH takes a broad view of child health and well-being. Parents report on children's access to care; on a number of child and parent health status items; on accessing child care and other services; on neighborhood conditions; on the child's participation in out-of-school activities; and more. For researchers, this data set is invaluable because data are child-level, allowing examination of the occurrence of multiple risk- and strength-factors within groups of children.

A helpful online tool for selecting specific states, or groups of states, for analysis on particular indicators is the Data Resource Center for Child & Adolescent Health, at www.childhealthdata.org.

National Immunization Survey 2008 Data Show Disparities by Poverty Status

The Centers for Disease Control (CDC) recently released the report *National, State, and Local Area Vaccination Coverage Among Children Aged 19-35 Months --- United States, 2008*. Based on data from the National Immunization Survey (NIS) of children born during January 2005-June 2007, this report describes coverage estimates for series and selected individual vaccines in 2008, for all states and selected local areas.

The report shows a great deal of variation in vaccination coverage among states/local areas. For example, state coverage on the "benchmark" immunization series ranged from 59.2 percent in Montana, to Massachusetts' 82.3 percent. In contrast, coverage varied little among different racial/ethnic groups. However, for most vaccines, coverage for children living below poverty is significantly lower than for children living at or above poverty.

For the full report, see www.cdc.gov/mmwr/preview/mmwrhtml/mm5833a3.htm?s_cid=mm5833a3_e

2009 SAT Report Shows Increasing Racial/Ethnic Diversity Among Test-Takers

The College Board recently announced that, of the 1.5 million "Class of 2009" high school seniors who took the SAT, approximately 613,000, or 40 percent, were minority students. This is up from 29.2 percent in 1999. Hispanics, the largest and fastest-growing minority group taking the SAT, represented 13.5 percent of all test-takers, up from 7.8 percent in 1999.

Several factors influence SAT performance. Taking a practice test (the PSAT/NMSQT) was associated with increased scores of between 33 and 45 points per section. Students who completed a core curriculum scored, on average, between 44 and 46 points higher on sections of the test. Honors or advance placement students scored between 59 and 79 points higher per section.

Research shows that writing is the SAT section most predictive of college success.

For more information on the SAT, see <http://professionals.collegeboard.com/testing/sat-reasoning/about>

Improving Measures of High School Performance

A new report, released by the Alliance for Excellent Education, addresses the systemic efforts required to prepare students for college and career success. *Moving Beyond AYP: High School Performance Indicators* outlines the need to adopt indicators of the factors that contribute to a school's poor performance, to determine effective improvement strategies, and to track interim progress over time.

continued on p. 4

The report identifies the following emerging issues for indicators related to high school accountability and improvement:

- Developing multiple indicator systems;
- Understanding relationships between indicators;
- Analyzing progress on high school performance indicators; and
- Building the technical infrastructure to collect indicator data.

For additional information, see: www.all4ed.org/files/SPIMovingBeyondAYP.pdf.

High School Graduation Rates Decline After 10-Year Rise: Variability Among Locales Remains High

Education Week and the Editorial Projects in Education (EPE) Research Center recently released *Diplomas Count 2009: Broader Horizons: The Challenge of College Readiness for All Students*. The report shows that three out of every ten students in U.S. public schools fail to finish high school with a diploma. For the first time in the past decade, the nation's graduation rate declined between 2005 and 2006. Based on EPE's analysis of data, the high school completion rate in 2006 (the most recent year of data available) was 69 percent. While this represents an increase from 66 percent in 1996, the 2006 rate reflects a point-and-a-half drop from 2005.

EPE Research Center uses what it terms the Cumulative Promotion Index (CPI) to calculate graduation rates. Drawing on the Common Core of Data from the National Center for Education Statistics, the CPI is a mathematical product of the single year-to-year promotion rates between ninth and twelfth grades.

Among states, the majority has seen improvements in their graduation rates since 1996, ranging from half a percentage point increase to as much as 13 percentage points. However, the highest-performing state (New Jersey, 82 percent) and the lowest (Nevada, 47 percent) are separated by 35 points.

The report also examined the nation's 50 largest school districts and found significant variation, ranging from Detroit, MI, which had the lowest graduation rate at 27 percent, to Cypress-Fairbanks, TX, at 81 percent. At the district level, findings also indicated an encouraging trend of long-term gains. For 1,500 districts, graduation rates between 1996 and 2006 increased by 15 percent or more. The report also highlights districts that exceeded expectations based on their demographic and structural characteristics.

For more information see www.edweek.org/rc/

Racial/Ethnic Disparities in Behavioral and Learning Disorders

A recently released research brief by the Joint Center for Political and Economic Studies, *Trends in Child Health 1997-2006: Assessing Racial/Ethnic Disparities in Diagnoses of ADHD/ADD and Learning Disability*, examines the rate of diagnoses of attention deficit-hyperactivity disorder/attention deficit disorder (ADHD/ADD) and learning disability (LD) among children under the age of 18 who are black, Latino, or white.

Based on data from the National Health Interview Survey (NHIS), findings included the following:

- Overall, Latino children were less likely than white children to receive an ADHD/ADD diagnosis. Overall, the likelihood of diagnosis was not significantly different between black and white, or between black and Latino children.
- Among children with private health insurance, whites were more likely than either black or Latino children to be diagnosed with ADHD/ADD.

- Overall, black and white children were equally likely to have been diagnosed with a LD, and Latino children were less likely than white children to receive a LD diagnosis.

For more information, go to: www.jointcenter.org/

Young Children in the Adult Criminal Justice System

From Time Out to Hard Time: Young Children in the Criminal Justice System critically examines how the U.S. treats young children (ages 12 and below) who commit serious crimes.

At any one time, more than 10,000 children younger than 18 are held in adult prisons and jails. Twenty-two states and the District of Columbia allow children as young as seven to be prosecuted and tried in adult court. Nearly 80 children per year aged 13 and younger are judicially transferred to adult court, and an even greater number end up in the adult system via automatic transfer laws or through laws which allow prosecutors to file cases directly in adult court. Many of the cases involve relatively minor offenses, such as property crimes.

From Time Out to Hard Time argues that allowing youth to be treated as adults in the criminal justice system is misguided and counter-productive, and makes a number of policy recommendations, focusing on keeping such youth in the juvenile justice system.

The report is a special project conducted by the Lyndon B. Johnson School of Public Affairs at the University of Texas.

For more information, see: <http://www.utexas.edu/lbj/news/images/file/From%20Time%20Out%20to%20Hard%20Time-revised%20final.pdf>

Children of Immigrants

According to a new report from the Urban Institute, more than one in five U.S. children (about 16.4 million) had an immigrant parent in 2007. While the national figure is 23 percent, the proportion of such children varies widely by state, with half of all children of immigrants living in California, Texas, or New York. Nearly a third live in “mixed-status” families where the children, but not the parents, are U.S. citizens. The majority (55 percent) of children of immigrants are Hispanic/Latino. One-quarter have parents who lack a high school degree. And, in spite of being more likely to live in a two-parent family than children without an immigrant parent, they are also more likely to live in poverty. In some states, more than a quarter of children of immigrants are poor. However, few immigrant families with children use public benefits, relative to their rate of poverty.

Most data in the report are from 2005-06, and thus do not reflect the economic downturn that began in 2007. Accompanying the report is a web-based “Children of Immigrants Data Tool,” giving browsers the ability to generate customized, state-level charts.

For more information, see: www.urban.org/uploadedpdf/411939_childrenofimmigrants.pdf, and <http://datatool.urban.org/charts/datatool/pages.cfm>.

New Census Bureau Data on Health Insurance Coverage, Income, and Poverty

New estimates for a number of important social, economic, demographic, and housing characteristics have been released, or will be later this fall, by the U.S. Census Bureau.

The primary resource for most users will likely be the American Community Survey (ACS), which will provide single-year estimates (in this case, for 2008) for the nation, all states, and geographic areas with populations of 65,000 or more, including all congressional districts.

For those interested in health insurance coverage, the ACS is just one of several sources providing these data. The ACS asks only whether a person had health insurance at the time they are surveyed. In contrast, the Current Population Survey (CPS), which released national and state-level data for 2008 in early

September, count as “insured” those reporting having had insurance at any time during the calendar year, and “uninsured” as those who were without insurance for all of 2008. Finally, for estimates of health insurance coverage for each of the nation’s counties, the Bureau’s Small Area Health Insurance Estimates (SAHIE) are available (latest year is 2006).

For poverty and income data, the best estimates are considered to be those from the ACS. Three-year estimates (2006-08) for all geographic areas with populations of 20,000 or more are scheduled to be available in late October.

For more information on the ACS, see: <http://factfinder.census.gov>

For more information on the CPS data on income, poverty, and health insurance coverage, see: www.census.gov/hhes/www/poverty/poverty08.html

For more on SAHIE, see: www.census.gov/did/www/sahie/

First Look at National Adoption Data

The National Survey of Adoptive Parents (NSAP), conducted in 2007, is the first nationally representative survey of adoptive parents in the U.S. A chartbook, *Adoption USA*, based on analyses conducted by Child Trends, under contract with the U.S. Department of Health & Human Services, will soon be available from the Child Information Gateway (www.childwelfare.gov). The chartbook describes the characteristics, adoption experiences, and well-being of children and their families, and provides comparisons, where available, between adopted children and the general U.S. child population. Data from the NSAP are available to researchers for secondary analysis. The dataset may be accessed at www.cdc.gov/nchs/slits/nsap.htm. Additionally, Child Trends will conduct a workshop, via webinar and teleconference, on how to use data from the NSAP, on December 8, 2009, at no cost to participants. For more information, contact Sharon Vandivere (svandivere@childtrends.org), or Karin Malm (kmalm@childtrends.org).

Improving Child Indicators: Report of a 2008 Symposium

Anticipating the advent of a new U.S. administration, in December 2008, Chapin Hall at the University of Chicago convened in Bethesda, Maryland, a group of experts from the academic, nonprofit, and government sectors, to discuss the future of child indicators. In wide-ranging discussions, a number of both opportunities and challenges were identified. One point of agreement was the need to collect better data around key transition points in children's lives. A recent Chapin Hall paper growing out of that meeting draws on a number of the themes expressed there, and offers recommendations, organized under three areas.

The first of these is early childhood and the transition to school. The paper urges that birth, immunization visits, and kindergarten entry provide universal contact points where better indicators of child development should be collected. However, in order to provide optimal data, several hurdles need to be overcome: establishing a single standardized birth certificate (currently only 19 states have adopted the new format); incorporating additional measures of physical development into scheduled health visits for immunizations; and developing a standard set of school readiness indicators and associated data sources.

The second area is the transition to adulthood, where opportunities exist to link data systems, including secondary and post-secondary schooling, and employment; and to use administrative data from such systems to develop predictive indicators of success in youth and adulthood.

The third area focuses on the context of children's lives. Here the key opportunities for improved indicators are in developing a universal measure of early childhood program quality; improving the federal poverty measure; and enhancing knowledge about immigrant parents and children.

The paper is available at: [www.chapinhall.org/sites/default/files/Child Indicators Report 07 21-09 0.pdf](http://www.chapinhall.org/sites/default/files/Child%20Indicators%20Report%2007%2021-09%200.pdf)

International Roundup

First report on child well-being from OECD: *Doing Better for Children*

The Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), comprising 30 nations including the U.S., has issued its first report on child indicators across its members. Given that these countries span the globe, from Japan to Europe, Australia, and North America, finding measures to assess comparative well-being posed special challenges.

The OECD report groups indicators under six dimensions: material well-being, housing and environment, health and safety, risk behaviors, and quality of school life. In addition to seeking indicators that could be compared across countries, the OECD sought those that "are relatively amenable to policy choices." Data are reported by country, and, where possible, by sex, age, and migrant status. Each country is ranked on each of the six dimensions, as well as on individual indicators. "Country highlights" reports are available for many countries, including the U.S.

Across the six dimensions, countries are placed as well above, well below, or around the average for the OECD group. According to this metric, Iceland and Sweden are the strongest performers, with the largest number of average or above-average dimension scores. Those countries with no above-average dimension scores include Italy, Mexico, New Zealand, Poland, Turkey, and the United States. The report points out that in the U.S., despite public spending on children (though not *young* children) and average family incomes that are among the highest in the OECD countries, children are doing poorly on many health outcomes (low birth-weight, infant mortality, child mortality, teen births), in educational achievement, and in child poverty (nearly

continued on p. 8

double the OECD average). In selecting indicators, the OECD strove to capture for each country both “efficiency” (i.e., average well-being), and “equity” of outcomes.

For more on the OECD report, see: www.oecd.org/els/social/childwellbeing.

A Picture of Australia’s Children, 2009

The Australian Institute of Health and Welfare has published its fourth “comprehensive national statistical report on Australia’s children.” This and related indicator reports evidence a strong commitment in Australia, over more than 10 years, to measurement of important areas of child well-being.

In addition to presenting 40-some indicators, *A Picture of Australia’s Children* identifies a set of 19 “headline indicators,” specifically intended to focus public policy attention on priorities for children’s health, development, and well-being. Tellingly, of these “headline indicators” only 10 have fully developed data; six require further data development; and three remain undefined other than by their priority area. Among the data gaps are areas for measurement which have challenged indicators work in many countries: for example, the number of children attending early childhood programs; defining quality in child care; and what constitutes “healthy functioning families.”

The report includes extensive breakouts by sex, as well as by state, indigenous status, geographical “remoteness,” and (in some cases) socioeconomic status.

For more information, see: www.aihw.gov.au/publications/index.cfm/title/10704

WHO World Health Statistics, 2009

The World Health Organization’s annual compilation of data from its 193 member states focuses on health indicators. Many of these have to do with children, including percent of births attended by skilled health personnel, breastfeeding, overweight among under-5-year-olds, and tobacco use among adolescents.

Available at: www.who.int/whosis/whostat/2009/en/index.html

The African Report on Child Well-Being

“The first African report on indicators for Africa’s children” has been published by the African Child Policy Forum. ACPF is a pan-African policy and advocacy center on child rights. The report highlights huge challenges to child health and well-being among Africa’s children, but also calls attention to some areas of significant progress. Infant mortality, measles deaths, and access to essential medications (especially antiretroviral drugs) have improved in many countries. At the same time, under-five mortality remains very high (due, in great part, to malnutrition); children with disabilities receive very few services; the number of children orphaned exceeds 48 million, and in several countries orphans account for more than 1 in 5 children; access to and quality of education are generally low, and violence against children is pervasive.

A key feature of the report is The Child-friendliness Index, a composite rating by country which takes into account (1) policy and legal protections for children, (2) efforts and outcomes related to children’s basic needs, and (3) children’s participation in decisions that affect their well-being (the last dimension not included in this report’s calculation, due to lack of data). Rankings by the Index put Mauritius and Namibia as the most child-friendly governments. Significantly, the Child-friendliness Index data show that national income (GDP) is not necessarily related to a country’s strength of commitment to children: “The missing factor is political will, reflected in misplaced priorities and the clouded vision of governments as to what constitutes the long-term interest of their countries.”

For more information, see: www.africanchildinfo.net/africanreport08/

continued on p. 9

Wikichild.org

Wikichild.org, an interactive website like Wikipedia, allowing content contributions from users, is planned to launch later this year. Designed for the global community of researchers and analysts in child policy and well-being, the project is managed by an international consortium led by the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development's (OECD) Social Policy Division, with partners including the UNICEF Innocenti Research Center, the International Society for Child Indicators, the University of Auckland, and Action for Children and Youth Aotearora (New Zealand). The consortium will establish processes for reviewing and monitoring content for the site, which will have customized software for interactive presentations of child statistics and research. Browsers will be able to access a broad range of child research and data, while registered users will be able to upload content, post comments, or suggest amendments to posted content.

For more information, contact: Dominic.Richardson@oecd.org.

Education By All for the Well-being of Children Indicators Workshop Brighton, England, July 19-20, 2009

This workshop addressed the question, "How can we develop indicators of children's personal perception of their well-being in their multiple learning environments that would be relevant not only for the work of all of our organizations but also for society at large; and contribute to nurturing the well-being of children?" The participants identified gaps in current European data and policy which would enable countries to monitor child participation in and perception of their own environments. Participants agreed on the need for key indicators of children's perceptions, as well as indicators of the learning environments themselves, and the relationship between the two.

International Society for Quality of Life Studies (ISQOLS) Meeting Florence, Italy, July 19-23, 2009

There were many sessions of the ISQOLS meeting related to child well-being indicators, including a plenary session on methodological issues in developing indicators of children's quality of life in international comparisons. In addition, papers focusing on children and adolescents were sprinkled throughout other sessions on methodological issues, relationships, social capital, material well-being, disability, leisure time, health, education, and media use.

NOTEWORTHY PUBLICATION

The Child: An Encyclopedic Companion. Editor-in-Chief, Richard A. Schweder. The University of Chicago Press. 2009. A resource for scholarship on children and childhood from a variety of disciplines, *The Child* contains more than 500 articles written by experts in their fields, and addresses "the many worlds of childhood both within the United States and around the globe."

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 its members more effective in their work.

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.childtrends.org. For summaries of over 400 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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