

March 2010

Kids Count in Michigan Data Book 2009:
Place AND Public Policy Matter to Kids and Families
March Update

The Kids Count in Michigan Data Book 2009 was released in mid-January. This year, the Data Book emphasized the importance of place to well being, and offers a comparison of trends in rural, midsized and urban counties. This discussion augments the individual county-level analysis of trends in program and other outcomes for children and families that are annually included in these important reports.

The findings in the Data Book prove the need to invest in children, and bring to the forefront evidence that children and families are languishing in Michigan's fiscal crisis. As good public policy making can contribute positively to well-being, inadequate or misguided public policy making also contributes. This year's Data Book reveals evidence of both.

The annual Michigan budget is the single, most powerful expression of the state's priorities. It is during the state budget process that decisions are made about the expenditure of approximately \$8.1 billion in state revenues, and there are many competing interests that legislators and other policymakers must consider in dividing up tax dollars. Michigan's fiscal year begins on October 1st and ends on September 30th of the following year. The state budget that is currently being debated in the Legislature is for the fiscal year beginning on October 1, 2010 and ending on September 30, 2011. It is referred to as the fiscal year 2010-2011 budget or FY11 budget.

The FY2011 state budget discussions are taking place following significant reductions in the FY 2010 budget in per pupil grants to all local school districts, reductions for Intermediate School Districts, and cuts to programs improving school readiness, child and adolescent health, and high school completion. While the Governor's budget proposals maintained FY2010 spending for many programs, that assumption is made possible by earmarking additional revenue that has not yet been approved by the Legislature or the voters.

Michigan is facing a nearly unprecedented economic crisis. Clearly, the well-being of children is the key to our economic future. The single best predictor of economic prosperity is a state's success in educating and preparing its workforce. The good news is that we know what it takes for kids to thrive in school and the workplace. The challenge is that we need to better match public policy decisions to what works.

Children Need: TO BE BORN HEALTHY AND HAVE ACCESS TO HEALTH CARE SERVICES

This year's Data book provides some good news related to the health of mothers and children, reflecting some of the last decade's good public policy decisions.

- ✓ More Michigan mothers are getting enough prenatal care.
- ✓ There are fewer preventable deaths for babies, kids and teenagers.
- ✓ There are fewer teenagers having babies of their own than a decade ago, but recent trends are troubling.

Despite these gains, poor families are at higher risk of poor health, and some of the progress is threatened by public disinvestment.

- ✓ Recent reductions in Medicaid impact the over 900,000 Michigan children insured through that program.
- ✓ There have been deep reductions over the last several budget years in a range of public health prevention and promotion programs.
- ✓ Support for adolescent health programs and mental health programs for families have also been reduced.
- ✓ The teen parent counseling program was recently eliminated.

However, there are certainly public policy opportunities as well, including the current national focus on improving health services. Michigan needs to invest to take advantage of new program and service possibilities, but this investment appears to be lacking.

FY11 Budget Proposals:

- ✓ After serious cuts last year, further cuts to some Medicaid providers are proposed.
- ✓ No expansions in MICHild eligibility or services are proposed, despite the opportunity of increased federal funding support.
- ✓ The Child Care Enhancement Program is at risk of elimination.
- ✓ Public health and prevention programs continued to be cut, with additional reductions in lead screening and abatement and teen pregnancy prevention programs.
- ✓ Further cuts were made to child and adolescent health centers, and Medicaid coverage for 19-20 year olds is again at risk.

Children Need: TO BE RAISED BY PARENTS OR CAREGIVERS WHO HAVE THE SUPPORTS THEY NEED TO BE THEIR CHILDREN'S FIRST AND BEST TEACHERS AND TO HAVE THE OPPORTUNITY TO PARTICIPATE IN HIGH QUALITY EARLY LEARNING PROGRAMS.

As we all know, and the Data Book illustrates, it is a tough time in Michigan for families.

- ✓ The economy worsened, resulting in more children and families living at or near poverty.
- ✓ More abuse and neglect has been investigated and confirmed.

Unfortunately, our public policies are failing to reflect this need.

- ✓ At best, there has been faltering investment in programs to help move families out of poverty.
- ✓ Family support and prevention programs have experienced deep cuts.
- ✓ Pre-school and community collaboration supporting families with young children have been the recent targets of disinvestment.

Yet, Michigan's comprehensive system helping communities around the state support parents with young children, and getting more kids ready for school and getting more schools ready for kids allows us opportunities. Michigan needs to continue and increase investment in proven programs – investments that pay off.

FY2011 Budget Proposals:

- ✓ Continued funding for child abuse and neglect prevention programming, following significant cuts.

- ✓ No restoration of cuts in the Great Start School Readiness preschool program for 4-year-olds, and continued ability of school districts to use this funding to plug holes in other areas of their budgets.
- ✓ Continued funding for Great Parents/Great Start programs and no restoration of funding for local early childhood collaborative work.

Children Need: TO BE EDUCATED IN HIGH QUALITY SCHOOLS ENGAGING PARENTS AND THE COMMUNITY IN PREPARING STUDENTS FOR POST-SECONDARY EDUCATION, WORK AND LIFE.

The extensive public policy attention paid to K-12 education has resulted in some good news in the Data Book. The improvement in MEAP trends indicates that Michigan set up learning standards and students, teachers and schools are meeting those standards.

However, too many kids lack a high school diploma and many aren't finding the system there to help them reach that credential.

- ✓ Reductions in per-pupil funding for schools and reductions to Intermediate School Districts are often the most harmful to innovative school-workforce-community partnerships, resulting in negative impacts for kids most at risk of school failure.
- ✓ Reductions in adult education and the elimination of targeted initiatives have resulted in the further erosion of 2nd and 3rd chance options for young people to get on track toward graduation and a path to adult success.
- ✓ Cuts in before- and after-school programming run contrary to research evidence that illustrates the important role those opportunities play in educational success.

Yet, the unprecedented attention and engagement of the private sector, supporting research, innovation in Michigan and around the nation, and renewed public sector attention provide an opportunity. We are poised to improve educational success. Unfortunately, continuing to cut programs that support students will hamper our ability to take advantage of that opportunity. If Michigan fails to recognize that educational success is impacted by the success and failures of many systems over a child's life and fail to promote partnerships to fix the situation, we won't get the outcomes that we want and need.

FY2011 Budget Proposals:

- ✓ Continued cuts to per pupil payments to schools.
- ✓ Partial restoration of limited funding for before- and after-school programs.
- ✓ No restoration of damaging cuts to dropout prevention and recovery programs.

Children Need: TO LIVE IN COMMUNITIES THAT WORK TOGETHER TO PROVIDE SERVICES TO CHILDREN AND FAMILIES IN THE MOST IMPACTFUL WAY.

Michigan is fortunate to have community examples around the state that are experiencing successful partnering for better service delivery and better planning and resource development. To maximize this opportunity, we need to remove policy barriers to partnership and utilize public policy solutions to create community links in order to maximize resources and take advantage of programs that work.

Children Need: ADVOCATES TO TALK TO LEGISLATORS ABOUT LOCAL KIDS COUNT DATA

This year promises to present more challenges to policy makers as they prioritize limited state and federal resources in the coming months. As they make these difficult decisions, they must remember that

families need help now more than ever. Every decision must be made knowing that children and families are the key to Michigan's economic future.

Data from the Kids Count 2009 Data Book provides a picture of the status of children and their families. Policy makers need access to that information in order to make informed decisions about programs and initiatives that impact children and families, favorably or unfavorably.

Constituent conversation with policy makers is critical! Kids Count project staff provide copies of the Data Book to each legislative office, and utilize the information in conversation with policy makers throughout the year. However, when surveyed, legislators say that the way they find out about children and families in their area is from their constituents. Most were familiar with the Kids Count data, but the legislators who really utilized the information were those who had discussed it with their constituents.

Kids Count is a useful conversation starter. Even for people who have not talked with elected officials before, Kids Count data can provide a topic of conversation. Asking policy makers what they think about the data, and what plans they have to help address some of the issues of concern is a good place to start. Helping policy makers understand the context behind some of the numbers is even more valuable. Where there have been improvements, have there been community efforts that have impacted the situation? Or have there been cuts in programs and services that have resulted in worsening data in an area?

For more information about talking with your elected officials, contact Michele Corey at corey.michele@michiganschildren.org or via phone at 517/485-3500.

Kids Count in Michigan is a collaboration of the Michigan League for Human Services, which researches and writes Kids Count reports, and Michigan's Children, which assists with dissemination of the data to communities across the state. As a partner in dissemination and public policy advocacy to improve the lives of children and youth, Michigan's Children is working with policy makers and local communities to use the information available through the Kids Count project to improve planning and decision-making about children's services.

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