

February 2011

Kids Count in Michigan Data Book 2010: The Education Connection
Public Policy Connections Needed For Educational Success

The Kids Count in Michigan Data Book 2010 was released on February 8, 2011. This year, the Data Book illustrates how the successes and failures in the social safety net, the health system, the child welfare system, the economic system and overall family supports impact the educational and life success of children around the state. The Data Book 2010 continues to include individual county-level analysis of trends in program and other outcomes for children and families that are available annually in these important reports.

As good public policy making can contribute positively to well-being, inadequate or misguided public policy making also impacts well-being. This year's Data Book, again, reveals evidence of both. While there is some good news in the Data Book, it also shows us that our children are suffering and need our attention more than ever if they are to be successful in school and life. The Data Book also illuminates where Michigan's Children expect policymakers to put their energies in 2011.

The role that economic security, health and personal safety play in a child's ability to learn cannot be ignored. The findings in the Data Book prove the need for a commitment to the education of our children starting prenatally and extending through career development by joining the many factors that influence a child's ability to learn so that they work to optimize their success. Without investments in young children, the state's attempts to improve educational achievement will fail. Without investments in these same children once they enter school, the state's attempts to increase high school graduation rates will fail. And, without investments in those same young people who struggle to stay engaged with school or have already become disengaged, the state's attempts to expand access to higher education and modernize its economy will fail.

The annual Michigan budget is the single, most powerful expression of the state's policy 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. The Governor is on the verge of introducing his recommendations for the state budget for the fiscal year beginning on October 1, 2011 and ending on September 30, 2012 that will then be debated by the Legislature. It is referred to as the fiscal year 2011-2012 budget or FY12 budget.

The FY2012 state budget discussions will take place following several budget years of cuts to critical programming for children and families and the most recent year where the state relied heavily on the infusion of federal funds to balance the budget. Still unresolved is Michigan's structural budget deficit, resulting in significant challenges for this budget process and new leadership in Lansing.

As is widely acknowledged, 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. Now is the time to start viewing the health, safety and economic security of our families as part of the overall workforce development strategy that

will turn around Michigan's economy. The good news is that we know what it takes for kids to thrive in school and the workplace and where the best investments can and should be made. The challenge is that we need to better match public policy decisions to what works for children to be able to ultimately thrive.

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. Despite this improvement, almost a third of all mothers are not.
- ✓ There are fewer preventable deaths for babies, kids and teenagers. However, babies born in 39 other states remain more likely to survive to their first birthday than babies born in Michigan.
- ✓ There are fewer teenagers having babies of their own than a decade ago, but recent trends are troubling and Michigan's rate remains significantly higher than most other industrialized countries.

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 and Michigan failed to take advantage of Federal funding to expand the state's MI Child 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 and Child Care Enhancement programs were recently eliminated.

What We Should Expect Our Policymakers To Do in 2011:

- ✓ Support federal and state health care reforms guaranteeing that all children are insured, have access to care and have a medical home.
- ✓ Ensure adequate outreach for Medicaid and MIChild programs, and adequate funding for comprehensive coverage for all eligible children and young adults.
- ✓ Expand public funding for evidence-based health programs that increase rates of teenage prenatal access and promote overall access, reduce rates of teenage pregnancy, and reduce high mortality and morbidity rates for African-American and other at-risk infants and children.

Children Need: TO BE RAISED BY PARENTS OR CAREGIVERS WHO HAVE THE SUPPORTS THEY NEED TO BE THEIR CHILDREN'S FIRST AND BEST TEACHERS.

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. From 2000 – 2009, child poverty in Michigan increased 50 percent, with nearly one in five children in poverty in 2009.
- ✓ The percent of children receiving food stamps nearly tripled over the decade, and there has been a 26% increase in free/reduced lunch receipt in the last three years alone.
- ✓ According to the Data Book, low income children are more likely to repeat a grade, exhibit behavior problems and not be engaged in school; and the number of years spent in poverty during childhood increases the risk of high school dropout.

- ✓ More abuse and neglect has been investigated and confirmed. Fewer children are removed from their homes, but youth in foster care are much less likely to graduate from high school or go on to post-secondary success than other young people.

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, and recent recommendations to cut Michigan's Earned Income Tax Credit as a possible cost-saving measure would move an estimated 14,000 more children into poverty in 2011.
- ✓ Family support, child abuse and neglect prevention programs, family group decision-making, and marriage and fatherhood initiatives have experienced deep cuts.

Yet, Michigan has maintained funding for the comprehensive Great Start system that is working around the state to help support parents with young children. This statewide network of 54 Great Start Collaboratives and 68 Great Start Parent Coalitions, supported by the Early Childhood Investment Corporation, has also leveraged other public and private resources to support parents and young children. Michigan needs to continue and increase investment in proven programs – investments that pay off.

What We Should Expect Our Policymakers To Do in 2011:

- ✓ Provide access for at-risk families to proven family support programs including home visiting services.
- ✓ Establish incentives for schools to create community partnerships aimed at strengthening educational opportunities and increasing parent involvement.
- ✓ Ensure that at least 20 percent of all new funding in Michigan's state-funded preschool program is used to support evidence-based services for children ages 0-3 and their families.

Children Need: TO RECEIVE A HIGH QUALITY EDUCATION THAT BEGINS IN EARLY CHILDHOOD AND EXTENDS THROUGH A CAREER THAT LEADS TO ECONOMIC SELF-SUFFICIENCY.

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 students, teachers and schools are meeting the learning standards set for them.
- ✓ The dropout rate is improving, with significantly fewer young people leaving before completing four years of high school.

However, Michigan's assessment standards don't stack up to national testing and more than two-thirds of all Michigan 4th and 8th graders don't score at a proficient level on nation reading tests. Academic failure in later grades is linked to many risky behaviors that also compromise educational and life success, including substance use/abuse and depression. Too many kids still lack a high school diploma and the high school graduation rate isn't improving, indicating that many young people aren't finding the system there to help them reach that credential. This educational failure is particularly critical to the more than one in six Michigan babies born to a mother without a high school diploma or GED.

- ✓ A lack of investment in early care and education from birth directly impacts student's ability to read by the end of third grade.
- ✓ 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.
- ✓ Severe cuts in the higher education and community college budgets impede successful partnerships and transitions.

What We Should Expect Our Policymakers To Do in 2011:

- ✓ Increase access to high quality learning programs, including child care and preschool programs for at-risk four-year-olds. Specifically,
 - preserve existing programs with demonstrated outcomes, such as the Michigan Great Start Readiness Program; and
 - allow low-income teen parents in school or training to be eligible for child care subsidies.
- ✓ Create a prenatal-to-age-20 (P-20) council or task force that can develop and maintain a high quality cradle to career education system.
- ✓ Support innovative after-school programs in middle and high schools, including credit recovery programs and apprenticeships.
- ✓ Provide incentives for schools to establish effective discipline alternatives, and support truancy prevention and credit recovery initiatives that utilize strong out-of-school time, higher education and workforce development partners.
- ✓ Support multiple pathways to graduation, including alternative and community education options and partnerships between community college, four year institutions and workforce agencies.
- ✓ Commit to meaningful education reform by supporting consistent funding for schools and programs in order to see real improvement in school success for those most challenged schools, communities and young people.

Children Need: TO LIVE IN COMMUNITIES THAT WORK TOGETHER TO PROVIDE SERVICES TO CHILDREN AND FAMILIES FROM CRADLE TO CAREER 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.

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.

Children Need: ADVOCATES TO TALK TO LEGISLATORS ABOUT LOCAL KIDS COUNT DATA AND THE IMPACT OF LOCAL PROGRAMMING ON CHILD AND FAMILY WELL-BEING

This legislative session has many members serving for the first time and they face a huge challenge to invest in critical policy and program in the face of our economic crisis in Michigan. 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. Policymakers will need your expertise and guidance to make sure that they have all of the information they need to make good policy choices.

Data from the Kids Count 2010 Data Book provides a picture of the status of children and their families all over the state. The discussion also illustrates how successes and failures in the social safety net, the health system, the child welfare system, the economic system and overall family supports impact the

educational and life success of children around the state. Policy makers need access to that information in order to make informed decisions about programs and initiatives that impact communities, favorably or unfavorably.

Kids Count is a useful conversation starter. Even when people haven't talked with their elected officials before, county 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?

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.

For more information about talking with your elected officials, contact Michele Corey at corey.michele@michiganschildren.org or via phone at 517/485-3500. Michigan's Children's Issue Primers on Early Childhood, Children's Health, High School Graduation and the Prenatal to 20 Continuum are available in our Library, under Issues for Michigan's Children www.michiganschildren.org Our Action Networks can be accessed at the web site as well.

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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