



Issues for Michigan's Children

An in-depth look at some of the
public policy issues affecting
children and youth in Michigan

Michigan's
Children

April 2017

2017 Kids Count in Michigan Data Book: Using Data to Inform Current Policy Priorities

The *2017 Kids Count in Michigan Data Book* was released on April 18, 2017. Kids Count continues to provide an annual look at trends in program participation and other outcomes for children and families.

As good public policymaking can contribute positively to well-being, inadequate or misguided public policymaking contributes negatively. The role that economic security, health and personal safety play in a child's ability to learn and succeed cannot be ignored, nor can the undeniable link between the educational success of their parents and their own later success. This year's Data Book helps to illuminate where policymakers must put their energies. We know where better investments can and should be made, and we need to invest in what works.

The annual Michigan budget is the single, most powerful expression of the state's policy priorities. It is during the budget process that decisions are made about how we spend our public revenues, and policymakers must consider competing interests when dividing up tax dollars. The Governor, House and Senate have weighed in with their recommendations for the state budget. As the budget process progresses through the Legislature over the next few months, what does the Kids Count data tell us about how to shape those investment priorities?

STARTING EARLY. Do budget investments ensure that children are healthy and developmentally on track, and that they can access high-quality early experiences that prepare them for school and life?

What does the Data Book tell us? The Data Book indicators reflect some continued improvement in early health indicators, but rates of inadequate prenatal care are rising and 3rd grade reading proficiency is stagnate and inequitable.

What do we expect the FY18 budget to prioritize?

1. Maintain the state's investment in quality preschool that's proven to increase school readiness.
2. Continue to expand investments in voluntary, evidence-based home visiting.
3. Invest state resources into *Early On* so children with developmental delays and disabilities can receive adequate early intervention services.

SUPPORTING FAMILIES. Do budget investments provide opportunities that simultaneously help children thrive while their parents get ahead in life?

What does the Data Book tell us? The Data Book again highlights the most serious challenge to the largest number of children, youth and families in Michigan: child poverty. The Data Book highlights the failures to adequately support the neediest families with income and child care assistance and illustrates the difficulty in raising education levels of parents contributing to child poverty.

What do we expect the FY18 budget process to prioritize?

1. Increase access to child care subsidies to better mirror the economic need of families, support parents' work and provide quality settings beyond preschool, expanding learning opportunities.
2. Increase support for adult education, particularly literacy skill-building and credential attainment.

ADDRESSING TRAUMA. Do budget investments support parents to provide a safe and stable home essential for their children’s education and development; and do they promote stability and opportunity for youth who have been in the foster care system to reach education and career success?

What does the Data Book tell us? As in the past several years, the Data Book again indicates disturbing trends in the share of children who have been identified and confirmed as victims of child abuse or neglect. Despite this trend, fewer children and youth are entering the foster care system. Increases in economic stressors for families impact their stability, and there are clear connections between child maltreatment and limited parenting skills, social isolation, domestic violence, untreated substance abuse and behavioral health problems.

What do we expect the FY18 budget process to prioritize?

1. Increase investment in child abuse and neglect prevention services, including consistent, accessible behavioral health services for parents, after more than a decade of disinvestment.
2. Ensure quality and timely services to children and youth in the foster care system, including investing in secondary and post-secondary educational service options, and supporting public-private partnerships like the Michigan Youth Opportunities Initiative (MYOI).

EXPANDING EDUCATIONAL SERVICES. Do budget investments provide opportunities that are flexible and reach outside the school building so that all young people can obtain a high school credential and family-supporting employment?

What does the Data Book tell us? Without being able to see long trends, the Data Book illustrates stagnant levels of proficiency. Improvements have been made on-time graduation rates over the last several years, but one in five Michigan students still fail to earn a diploma in four years. These education outcomes are significantly worse for African American, Hispanic and American Indian youth.

What do we expect the FY18 budget process to prioritize?

1. Increase investment in expanded learning to provide before-school, after-school, and summer learning opportunities that extend beyond the school building.
2. Increase investment in integrated services that better serves the most challenged children, youth, families, schools and communities. These include school-based health services, and services that emphasize access to behavioral health supports.
3. Use dedicated funding support for the most challenged schools, communities and students, like At-Risk funding through section 31a, in specific ways that close equity gaps.

What Now? Use the Kids Count Data Book an Advocacy Tool. County data 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 your community, favorably or unfavorably. The *2017 Kids Count in Michigan Data Book* can be purchased or downloaded from the [Michigan League for Public Policy website](http://www.michiganleagueforpublicpolicy.org).

Use Kids Count as a conversation starter. Even if you haven't talked with your elected officials before, your county Kids Count data can provide a topic of conversation. Ask your policy makers what they think about the data, and what plans they have to help address some of the issues of concern. Help your policy makers understand the context behind some of the numbers. If you've seen improvements in an area, have there been community efforts that have impacted the situation? Have there been cuts in programs or services that have resulted in worsening outcomes?

More information about talking with your elected officials, or about Michigan’s Children’s priority issues and connections to other resources are available at www.michiganschildren.org