

# Iowa Kids Count 2008

**T**he new Iowa Kids Count data book, *Iowa Kids Count 2008: Trends in the Well-Being of Iowa Children*, is the latest annually produced book containing data on 18 different indicators of child and family well-being for the United States, Iowa and its 99 counties.

The 18 indicators provide a wealth of health, education, welfare and economic data from infant mortality to teen births, child abuse and neglect to student test scores, and unemployment to child poverty. The indicators in the data book present an extensive cross-section of data and information for educators, researchers, policy makers and others to use.

While 2008 data were available for the majority of indicators, Iowa Kids Count had to rely on older data for a few of the indicators. The child poverty data provided by the Census Bureau and the earned income tax credit data from the Internal Revenue Service have 2007 and 2006 as their most recent years of data, respectively. In addition, full samples of county-level data for 2007 and 2008 for prenatal care from the Iowa Department of Public Health were not available and 2006 data were used.

In addition to providing data at the county, state and national levels, Iowa Kids Count also groups the counties in Iowa together by population size (see county maps on page five for further review and analysis). Counties whose largest city has a population of less than 5,000 people are in the rural category; counties whose largest city has a population of 5,000 – 49,999 are considered small urban; and counties with the largest city's population being 50,000 or more are in the metropolitan county category.

As in the past few years, Iowa Kids Count was unable to provide certain birth and mortality indicator data. In an effort to protect the confidentiality of individuals, the Iowa Department of Public Health does not make available administrative data that include incidences of three or less at the county level. Iowa Kids Count was able, however, to provide full data for the substate, state and national levels.

The Annie E. Casey Foundation annually produces and disseminates a National Kids Count Data Book comparing the 50 states and the District of Columbia. In comparison to the other states, Iowa always has

done quite well and, almost without exception, ranks among the top ten percent of states.

It is important, however, to compare Iowa to itself, or Iowa in 2008 to Iowa in 2000. When done so, unfortunately, the results are mixed. Of the 18 indicators included in this year's data book, six have shown improvement and nine have worsened at the state level from 2000 to 2008, with three showing virtually no change. This reflects a slight deterioration from the last few years' data books where there was almost an equal number of indicators showing improvement as deterioration.

Only one of the three education indicators presented in this year's Iowa Kids Count data book improved while one worsened and the other remained unchanged. Student tests scores, which measures the percentage of students who are proficient in fourth grade reading and eighth grade math on the Iowa Tests of Basic Skills (ITBS), showed moderate improvement in 2008 with fourth grade reading improving four percent and eighth grade math improving six percent.

The percentage of students who were eligible for free or reduced-price lunches increased 26 percent and was the one education indicator that deteriorated from 2000 to 2008. Currently, one-third of the students in

Iowa are eligible for free or reduced-price lunches. High school graduation, or students entering ninth grade who graduate with their class four years later, showed no overall improvement from 2000 to 2008.

Two of the three welfare indicators included in the data book, food assistance (formerly known as food stamps) and child abuse and neglect, deteriorated from 2000 to 2008. The percentage of individuals receiving financial assistance for food increased 49 percent during this time period while the rate of children confirmed to have been abused or neglected increased 19 percent. The third welfare indicator, the percentage of individuals receiving Family Investment Program (FIP) financial assistance, decreased 27 percent.

Only three of the nine health indicators presented in this year's data book have shown improvement during the 2000 to 2008 time period while four deteriorated and two remained unchanged. Two of the three mortality indicators, infant mortality (before age one) and child deaths (age 1-14), both have seen significant rate decreases the past few years with infant mortality decreasing 11 percent and child deaths decreasing 10 percent. The third mortality indicator, teen deaths (age 15-19), remained virtually unchanged during this same time period.

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Of the birth-related indicators in the health area, the percentage of births to unmarried teens experienced a rate decrease of four percent from 2000 to 2008 while the percentage of births to women age 15-19 was the same in 2008 as it was in 2000. The two remaining birth-related indicators, the percentage of mothers receiving prenatal care (health care during their first trimester of pregnancy) and the percentage of babies born at low birthweight (less than 5.5 pounds) both deteriorated. Prenatal care decreased one percent from 2000 to 2006 while low birthweight increased nine percent from 2000 to 2008.

The two other indicators in the health area are children receiving WIC (Women, Infants and Children Program) services, which showed a rate decrease of two percent and child immunization (children fully immunized at age 24 months), which showed a decrease of 15 percent.

Two of the three economic indicators in this year's data book deteriorated while the other showed improvement. The percentage of individuals in the labor force but unemployed increased 60 percent from 2000 to 2008 while the percentage of children who lived below the poverty level increased 27

percent from 2000 to 2007. The one economic indicator experiencing improvement was the percentage of income tax filers who received an earned income tax credit, with this indicator increasing 25 percent from 2000 to 2006.

As mentioned earlier in this report, Iowa does very well on these child and family well-being indicators in comparison to other states and the United States as a whole. Unfortunately, some of the indicators, particularly a few health indicators, have slipped the past few years showing deterioration or stagnation instead

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of improvement. Also, some economic-related indicators have shown a more rapid deterioration than in previous years.

2010 will be a very difficult year financially for the state of Iowa with regard to child and family well-being, among other areas. Resources for improvements to and expansions of child and family programs and services, if available at all, most likely will be small. That being said, however, the data presented by these 18 child and family indicators show that Iowa needs to keep the well-being of children and families in the forefront as we move into the new decade.