

# Iowa Kids Count: 2006 in Review

Iowa Kids Count annually produces a data book with child and family data, and information for use by policy makers, researchers and others. This year's book, *Iowa Kids Count 2006: Trends in the Well-Being of Iowa Children*, reports on 19 different indicators of child and family well-being for the United States, Iowa and its 99 counties.

The 19 indicators present a wealth of health, education, welfare and economic data from infant mortality to teen births, high school graduation to child abuse and neglect, and unemployment to child poverty. The indicators provide a rich cross-section of data and information for policy makers, researchers, educators and others to use.

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 was the case in 2004 and 2005, 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 accurate data for the substate, state and national levels.

There is one change in the methodology of the high school graduation indicator from the 2005 to the 2006 data book. Iowa Kids Count now uses data for students in ninth through twelfth grade to determine the number of graduates and graduation rate. Previously, data for students were used from seventh through twelfth grade. This change allows the Iowa data to be more consistent with data produced nationally and with most of the other states.

The Annie E. Casey Foundation annually produces and disseminates a National Kids Count Data Book comparing the 50 states and the District of Columbia. Almost without exception, Iowa ranks among the top ten percent of states. In comparison to the other states, Iowa always has done remarkably well. However, when Iowa Kids Count compares Iowa to itself, or Iowa in 2006 to Iowa in 2000, the results, unfortunately, are mixed. Of the 19

indicators included in this year's data book, 10 have shown improvement and nine have deteriorated from 2000 to 2006. This is a slight drop from last year's figures (2000-2005).

Three of the four education indicators presented in this year's Iowa Kids Count data book improved slightly while the other worsened. High school graduation (students entering ninth grade who graduate with their class four years later) showed a slight improvement, increasing two percent from 2000 to 2006.

Student math and reading test scores measure the percentage of students in fourth and eighth grade who are proficient in math and reading on the Iowa Tests of Basic Skills (ITBS), and the percentage of students in 11th grade who are proficient in math and reading on the Iowa Tests of Educational Development (ITED). Collectively, the proficiency percentages showed an overall improvement from 2003 to 2006, while, individually, they ranged from a very slight decrease to moderate improvement.

The final education indicator, the percentage of students who are eligible for free or reduced-price lunches, increased 21 percent and is the one education indicator that deteriorated from 2000 to 2006. Currently, almost one-third of the students in Iowa (32.0%) are eligible for free or reduced-price lunches.

Five of the nine health indicators presented in this year's data book have shown improvement during the 2000 to 2006 time period. 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 (infant mortality - 19 percent and child deaths - 29 percent). The third mortality indicator, teen deaths (age 15-19), unfortunately, has experienced a rate

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increase of 19 percent during this same time period, even though its rate did decrease eight percent from 2005 to 2006.

Two birth-related indicators in the health area, teen births and teen unmarried births, have seen rate decreases since 2000. The percentage of births to women age 15-19 and the percentage of births to unmarried teens have decreased eight and nine percent, respectively. The two remaining birth-related indicators, the percentage of babies born at low birthweight (less than 5.5 pounds) and the percentage of mothers receiving prenatal care (health care during their first trimester of pregnancy) both deteriorated. Low birthweight increased 13 percent while prenatal care decreased one percent from 2000 to 2006. Low birthweight, however, did experience a four percent decrease from 2005 to 2006.

The other two indicators in the health area are child immunization (children

fully immunized at age 24 months), which showed a rate increase of 10 percent and children receiving WIC (Women, Infants and Children Program) services, which showed a decrease of six percent.

Two of the three welfare indicators included in the data book, child abuse and neglect, and food assistance (formerly known as food stamps), deteriorated from 2000 to 2006. The rate of children confirmed to have been abused or neglected increased 46 percent during this time period while the percentage of individuals receiving financial assistance for food increased 81 percent. The third welfare indicator, the percentage of individuals receiving Family Investment Program (FIP) financial assistance, decreased 15 percent.

Of the three economic indicators in this year's data book, two deteriorated while the other showed improvement. The percentage of children who live below the poverty level increased 22 percent from 2000 to 2004 (the most recent year data were available), while the

percentage of individuals in the labor force but unemployed increased 43 percent from 2000 to 2006. The unemployment rate did show a 20 percent decrease, however, from 2005 to 2006.

The one economic indicator showing improvement was the percentage of income tax filers who received an earned income tax credit. This percentage increased 22 percent from 2000 to 2004 (the most recent year data were available).

**Improvement on each of the 19 indicators of child and family well-being tracked by Iowa Kids Count is a realistic goal for the state to attempt to achieve.**

Child and family well-being indicator data presented annually for Iowa in comparison to the other states in the country continually show Iowa as a good place to raise

children. Iowa has a good quality of life. It is important, however, to present the Iowa data in a comparative context to itself. Improvement on each of the 19 indicators of child and family well-being tracked by Iowa Kids Count is a realistic goal for the state to attempt to achieve. These improvements not only will benefit the lives of the children and adults in the state, but also be a positive reflection of Iowa as a whole.