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THE NEW THREE “R’s” FOR TEXAS KIDS: RELIEF, REVENUES, AND RESERVES

National 2010 KIDS COUNT Data Book shows Texas kids are depending on state leaders to take a balanced approach to balancing the state budget

(AUSTIN, Texas)—Texas kids learn the “Three R’s:” reading, ’riting (writing), and ’rithmetic (arithmetic). And with a looming threat of deep cuts to state services vital to their well-being, Texas kids are depending on state leaders to learn three new R’s: relief, revenues, and reserves.

Key Findings for Texas 2010 KIDS COUNT Data Book

- **In 2007, 54,261 babies were born to Texas girls ages 15-19. Despite a 7 percent improvement since 2000, Texas’ teen birth rate was 64 births per 1,000 females ages 15-19—much higher than the national rate of 43 births per 1,000. Among the 50 states, Texas ranked 48th on this measure—above only New Mexico and Mississippi.**
- **Between 2000 and 2008, the number of Texas children living in poverty grew by more than 240,000, reaching nearly 1.5 million kids total. At 23 percent of the total child population, Texas’ child poverty rate is well above the national rate of 18 percent. Texas ranked 43rd among the 50 states on this measure. (A family of two adults and two children were considered poor if their income in 2008 fell below \$21,834.)**

Texas Ranks 34th Nationally on Child Well-Being

Texas ranks in the bottom third of states—34th nationally—in a state-by-state study of our children’s well-being, according the 2010 KIDS COUNT Data Book. The study released today reveals that Texas has the third highest teen birth rate in the nation, and a child poverty rate well above the rest of the U.S.

Child well-being experts say the study demonstrates the degree to which Texas kids are depending on state leaders to take a balanced approach to balancing the state budget.

“Failure to invest in our kids has clear consequences,” says F. Scott McCown, executive director of the Center for Public Policy Priorities (CPPPP). “Too many cuts today pose harm to our children’s well-being and will ensure they will not be properly prepared to take advantage of prosperity when it returns. We will not have made the investment.”

McCown says a balanced approach should draw down all available federal relief funds, finds new sources of state revenue, and spends all of the state’s Rainy Day Fund.

"We did not spend our way into a recession, and we will not be able to cut our way out," he says. "The revenue dried up on us because of the recession."

Ups and Downs

The Data Book reveals Texas did improve on four of the 10 measures affecting child well-being since 2000: child and teen death rate, teen birth rate, and high school dropout rate. But on four other measures, conditions got worse for Texas’ kids: low-birth weight, infant mortality, child poverty, and the number of single-parent households.

- **Between 2000 and 2008, the share of Texas teens ages 16-19 who were not enrolled in school and were not high school graduates has been cut in half—from 14 percent to 7 percent.**
- **At 21 deaths per 100,000 children ages 1-14, Texas' child death rate in 2007 was 13 percent better than in 2000. Similarly, the state's teen death rate improved 17 percent between 2000 and 2007, to 63 deaths per 100,000 teens ages 15-19. Yet infant mortality has not improved. In 2007, over 2,500 Texas babies died before their first birthday, or nearly 500 more than in 2000. Texas' 2007 infant mortality rate of 6.3 infant deaths per 1,000 live births was 11 percent worse than in 2000.**

Texas KIDS COUNT Director Dr. Frances Deviney says the key to improving on all measures is to invest in our kids.

"Texas must prioritize investing in our children," says Deviney. "Texas is clearly a low-tax, low-spend state. While this may appear to be sound fiscal policy, in truth, the numbers show that states that make greater investments in kids have better child well-being outcomes."

According to the National Association of State Budget Officers, Texas is 50th in per capita spending, and the KIDS COUNT Data Center shows Texas ranks 43rd in per pupil spending. States that have higher per pupil education spending also have significantly higher 4th grade reading scores, lower dropout rates and lower teen birth rates.

Eva DeLuna Castro, CPPP senior budget analyst, says it would be a mistake for state leaders to take a cuts-only approach, considering how poorly Texas ranks on the data book's 10 key indicators. For instance, she points out cuts to the state's child support collection efforts would be particularly harmful to our children, given the number who already live in poverty.

"Child support enforcement is a critical state-level, anti-poverty program for Texas kids," says DeLuna Castro. "In 2008, over 83,000 Texas children were lifted out of poverty because of the amount of child support their families received."

With Texas children faring worse in low-birth weights and infant mortality, DeLuna Castro also says it is critically important not to cut health care provider rates.

"The \$64 million in state reductions taking effect in September 2010 will cost Texas \$115 million in federal dollars and will limit Texans' access to health care."

And Deviney says what is most concerning is the data in the 2010 Data Book do not reflect the current period of economic recession, as they come from the 2008 American Community Survey, the most current data available. The economic downturn effects were not felt by most Texas families until the end of 2008 and into 2010, with unemployment peaking at 8.6 percent during January 2010.

"Many of our kids have lost their college savings during the recession, and some have even had their homes taken away, as a result of their parents losing a job," says Deviney. "We simply cannot continue taking away from our children."

About the Data Book

The data described in the book aims to show the importance of tracking indicators of child well-being. The 21st annual Data Book is produced by the Annie E. Casey Foundation and is also complemented by an online Data Center containing hundreds of measures of child well-being at the national, state, county and city level. To access information for Texas, go to <http://datacenter.kidscount.org>.

For more state- and county-specific data on the well-being of Texas children, look for the release of the Texas KIDS COUNT Annual Data Book in early 2010. To learn more, visit <http://www.cppp.org/kidscount>.

For additional information, please contact [Dr. Frances Deviney](#) at 512-320-0222, ext. 106.

The Center for Public Policy Priorities (CPPP) is a nonpartisan, nonprofit policy institute committed to improving public policies to better the economic and social conditions of low- and moderate-income Texans. CPPP is home to the Texas KIDS COUNT project. You can learn more about CPPP at <http://www.cppp.org>.

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