



THE STATE OF TEXAS CHILDREN 2008-09 NEW REPORT SHOWS NEED FOR BROADER APPROACH TO CLOSING EDUCATIONAL GAPS

Austin, Texas--The Center for Public Policy Priorities today released *The State of Texas Children: Texas KIDS COUNT Annual Data Book 2008-09*, a resource that provides the latest look at the well-being of children in Texas and for every county in the state. This year's data book includes a special essay on "Closing the Educational Gaps," revealing that community and statewide factors play a pivotal role in a child's academic achievement. CPPPP released the book today at a breakfast briefing at the University of Texas at San Antonio sponsored by the Methodist Healthcare Ministries of South Texas.

"In every grade, fewer economically disadvantaged kids succeed in school or graduate than their peers. This is not simply about poor kids from poor families. This is about the broader social and community problems that hold kids back, such as access to quality prenatal care, exposure to more environmental hazards, hunger, and lack of affordable housing. In combination, these factors can have a powerful affect on a student's ability to learn," Texas KIDS COUNT Director Frances Deviney said.

Only 80 percent of Texas' economically disadvantaged students pass the TAKS Reading, and 68 percent pass the TAKS Math tests compared to 93 percent and 84 percent of their non-disadvantaged peers, respectively.

The data book shows the need for Texas to take a broader approach to improving academic achievement. While the state should hold schools accountable for adhering to high standards, Texas must also address the underlying causes of poor academic achievement.

Factors Driving the Education Gaps

Poverty in Texas

With nearly 1 in 4 kids living in poverty (24.7 percent), Texas' child rate exceeds most other states' (U.S. = 18.5 percent). That means 1.5 million Texas children live in families making less than the federal poverty level (e.g., less than \$17,600 for a family of 3 in 2008). Compared to their peers, these children:

- are less likely to pass the TAKS test;
- drop out of school at higher rates; and
- earn less in future employment.

Child Health in Texas

Sick children cannot learn well, and Texas' uninsured rate exceeds that of every other state. Texas had the worst uninsured rate nine of the last 10 years, with 21 percent of children under 17 uninsured in 2006. Children without regular health care are more likely to contract illnesses that will keep them out of school. They are more likely to have poorer oral health, vision, and hearing. They are also more likely to suffer from asthma, which keeps them up

at night, arriving at school drowsy and less attentive. It is estimated that about half of the uninsured children in Texas currently qualify for Medicaid or CHIP.

Child Nutrition in Texas

Children without enough to eat lack the fuel to engage in learning. They have lower levels of academic achievement, are less likely to be in school or attentive when they are, and are more likely to fail, be held back, and drop out of school than their peers. Unfortunately, low-income children have poorer nutrition when compared to middle-income children. According to the U.S. Department of Agriculture, from 2004-2006, 15.9 percent of Texas households (approximately 1.3 million households with 1.4 million children) were classified as food insecure, ranking Texas as 48th in the nation. One resource for these children is the Food Stamp program.

Additional state and county-level data available online includes:

- child and total population
- family economic data (e.g., poverty, TANF)
- early care and education (e.g., Pre-K, Head Start, Child Care)
- public education
- violent crime
- vital statistics (e.g., birth and death data)
- maternal and infant health (e.g., low birth weight and prenatal care)
- nutrition
- child abuse/neglect
- health care

“Both school-based and socio-economic reforms are essential. Unless we target the broader social and community problems that keep students back in addition to continuing to improve the quality of our school systems, the achievement gaps will remain,” Deviney said.

For more information, visit <http://www.cppp.org/factbook08>.

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