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## **More Children In Poverty Near Mexico Border**

**By Rene Romo**

*Journal Southern Bureau*

LAS CRUCES— Children living in border communities face tougher challenges due to poverty than children in the rest of New Mexico, according to a new report released Wednesday by the private, nonprofit group New Mexico Voices for Children.

The report, a distillation of census data from Southwest border states, showed that 34 percent of children in six New Mexico counties near the Mexican border live in poverty, compared to 23 percent of children in the rest of the state.

The statistics are worse for Hispanic children. Forty percent of Hispanic children in those border counties live in poverty, compared to 17 percent of Anglo children in the same counties.

In Hidalgo and Luna counties in the state's southwest corner, a little more than half of Latino children live in poverty, compared to 17 and 28 percent, respectively, for Anglo children in those counties.

The data were released as a special Kids Count report titled "A Snapshot of Children on the New Mexico Border," funded by the Annie E. Casey Foundation. The Annie E. Casey Foundation tracks children's health data nationwide.

The report's findings support efforts to strengthen the health services infrastructure available to children statewide, said Sara Beth Koplik, the Kids Count project manager of New Mexico Voices for Children.

"Without adequate access to quality health care, children cannot learn, they cannot thrive, and they cannot grow into healthy, contributing adults," Koplik said at a news conference Wednesday at Las Cruces High School.

Gov. Bill Richardson last month announced plans to double the number of school-based health centers statewide from 34 to 68.

Dr. Bert Garrett, director of the Southern New Mexico Family Medicine Residency Program, which supplies doctors to the Las Cruces High health center, said students will talk about important health issues far more readily at a school clinic than in a doctor's office.

That means physical and mental health needs are more likely to be met, and students are better prepared to succeed in school, officials said.

The report also found that the teen pregnancy rate for border counties— 19 percent— is higher than the statewide average (17 percent) and the national average (12 percent).

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