Border KIDS COUNT 2007

A Special Report on Child Well-Being in New Mexico's Border Districts

The Barriers to the Well-Being of Border Kids in House District 56

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New Mexico VOICES for Children

The U.S./Mexico border region is home to a dynamic multicultural environment and in New Mexico, a state in which 42 percent of the residents are Hispanic,[1] that proximity adds to the rich cultural heritage celebrated by all New Mexicans. The state has also experienced a strong and expanding economy. However, those living on or near the U.S./Mexico border have largely been left behind in this expansion. Child poverty rates are generally higher than in the state as a whole and many jobs do not pay very well. Moreover, colonias, unincorporated communities on or near the border, lack basic infrastructural needs, such as access to clean water, adequate solid waste disposal, and safe housing, among other basic necessities.[2] Not only does this make an already difficult life of poverty more burdensome, but these inadequate living conditions present immediate and long-term public health concerns.[3] A compassionate society is one that not only ensures universal access to these essential needs, but also supports a strong economic infrastructure built on a solid public educational system and workforce development. Such a society cultivates a healthy and sustainable economy that can compete globally, provide better economic security for families, and ultimately alleviate childhood poverty.

This report provides information for District 56, and most indicators are paired with corresponding New Mexico data. As the tables below indicate, the child population in District 56 is roughly the same as in the state as a whole.

Many of District 56's children live in poor and low-income families and the poverty rate is most likely much higher for children living in the colonias. The annual median household income in 2000 was a little over $28,000 for the entire U.S./Mexico border region, but yearly average incomes in colonias were estimated to be as little as $5,000.[4] In Otero County, there are 16 communities, or parts of communities, designated as colonias by the U.S. Housing and Urban Development.[5]

Table I - General Population

	District 56		New Mexico	
General Population	Number	Percentage	Number	Percentage
Total population	25,385	100	1,819,046	100
Population under age 18	6,916	27.2	508,574	28

Source: Population Reference Bureau, analysis of data from the U.S. Census Bureau, 2000 Census Summary File 1 and Summary File 3 (via the Annie E. Casey Foundation at www.aecf.org)

Table II - Child Population by Race and Hispanic Origin

	District 56		New Mexico	
	Number	Percentage	Number	Percentage
Population under age 18	6,916	100	508,574	100
Children of one race	6,502	94	480,210	94.4
White children	4,109	59.4	291,862	57.4
Black or African American children	205	3	10,683	2.1
American Indian or Alaska native children	1,391	20.1	64,953	12.8
Asian children	39	0.6	4,537	0.9
Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander children	5	0.1	478	0.1
Children of some other race	753	10.9	107,697	21.2
Children who marked two or more races	414	6	28,364	5.6
Hispanic children	2,070	29.9	258,806	50.9

Source: Population Reference Bureau, analysis of data from the U.S. Census Bureau, 2000 Census Summary File 1 and Summary File 3 (via the Annie E. Casey Foundation at www.aecf.org)

Children living in poverty are growing up without the resources they need to fulfill their potential. As the table below illustrates, some of District 56's children reside in neighborhoods where 20 percent or more of their neighbors live in poverty. Families living in neighborhoods with high poverty rates do not have access to the same economic and social opportunities that other families take for granted; their children are less likely to graduate from high school, more likely to be caught up in criminal activity, and less likely to work steadily either because of the distance to good jobs or poor public transportation systems.[6]

Table III - Where Our Children Live

	District 56		New Mexico	
	Number	Percentage	Number	Percentage
Population under age 18	6,916	100	508,574	100
Living in neighborhoods where 20% or more of the population is below poverty	1,645	23.8	209,296	41.2

Source: Population Reference Bureau, analysis of data from the U.S. Census Bureau, 2000 Census Summary File 1 and Summary File 3 (via the Annie E. Casey Foundation at www.aecf.org)

When looking at child poverty, several factors must be considered, such as how many parents live in the household and how many members contribute to the family income. For instance, children living in single-mother families have higher poverty rates due to childcare expenses, the gender wage gap, and uncollected child support among other factors.[7] The following tables show how many children live in poor or low-income families and the living arrangements of children in poverty. In addition to single motherhood, other factors contributing to long-term child poverty are minority status and educational status.[8]

Table IV - How Many of Our Children Live in Poverty?

	District 56		New Mexico	
	Number	Percentage	Number	Percentage
Population under age 18 for whom poverty is determined	6,932	100	500,345	100
Below poverty	1,698	24.5	125,218	25
Below 50% poverty	688	9.9	53,542	10.7
Below 200% poverty	3,914	56.5	264,684	52.9

Table V - Family Living Arrangements

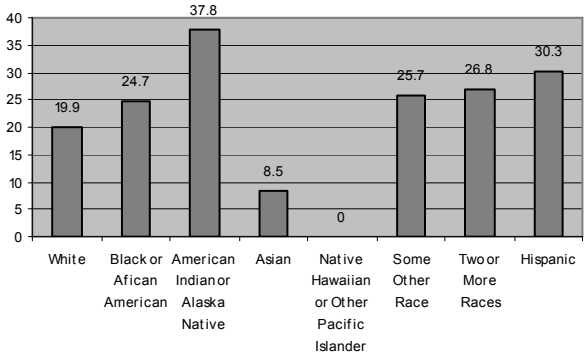
	Total	Living Below Poverty	
		Number	Percentage
Families with related children under age 18	3,627	721	19.9
Married-couple families with related children under age 18	2,399	239	10
Single-mother families with related children under age 18	942	426	45.2
Single-father families with related children under age 18	286	56	19.6

Source (Tables IV and V): Population Reference Bureau, analysis of data from the U.S. Census Bureau, 2000 Census Summary File 1 and Summary File 3 (via the Annie E. Casey Foundation at www.aecf.org)

The Role of Race

Race and ethnicity also play a major role in a child's well-being and the effects can carry into successive generations. In the 1930s, 1940s, and 1950s, two federal programs – the Home Owners Loan Corporation and the Federal Housing Authority – used mortgage redlining, local control, and blatant discrimination to prevent racial minorities from qualifying for mortgages.[9] Because of these policies, banks would not insure loans to African-Americans, for example, making it harder for them to move out of low-income neighborhoods and build equity.[10] This institutionalized racism – which created a white American middle-class that left racial minorities out – eventually led to the degradation of low-income neighborhoods.[11] Home ownership allows people to accrue personal wealth not available to renters, who cannot amass equity. This ownership/renter gap leads to further disparities for racial and ethnic minorities.[12] Without asset-building opportunities, many families have difficulty breaking out of the cycle of poverty. The chart to the right indicates the percentage of children in District 56 living in poverty by race and ethnicity.

Chart I - Percent of Children Below Poverty by Race* and Hispanic Origin in the 2000 Census



*Hispanics, who can be of any race, are included in the racial figures shown here.

Source: Population Reference Bureau, analysis of data from U.S. Census Bureau, 2000 Census Summary File 3 (Tables P87 & P159A-P159H)

Language isolation can be another factor contributing to child poverty. The percentage of those who are foreign-born in Otero County is 11 percent and 18 percent of these individuals live below the poverty level. [13] The table below shows how many children in District 56 are either linguistically isolated or do not speak English well. A linguistically isolated household is one in which those over the age of 14 have difficulty speaking English.[14] When linguistically isolated, a child's involvement in school can be hampered and it is harder for the family to adapt to the mainstream culture, access public, medical, and other social services, find employment, and vote.[15]

Table VI Children's Language Abilities

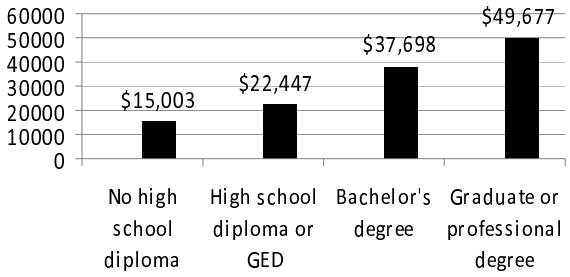
	District 56		New Mexico	
	Number	Percentage	Number	Percentage
Children ages 5 to 17	5,423	100	378,433	100
Speak language other than English at home	1,023	18.9	118,218	31.2
Speak English less than "very well"	329	6.1	38,436	10.2
Linguistically isolated	235	4.3	25,143	6.6

Source: Population Reference Bureau, analysis of data from the U.S. Census Bureau, 2000 Census Summary File 1 and Summary File 3 (via the Annie E. Casey Foundation at www.aecf.org)

Educational Attainment and Income-Earning Potential

Children living in poor or low-income families are less likely to stay in school and get the preparation necessary for future success. In fact, students from low-income families in 2001 were six times more likely to drop out of high school than their more affluent counterparts.[16] The income-earning potential of New Mexico's children is reduced if they drop out of high school, and they are more likely limited to low-paying jobs with little or no opportunities for advancement.

Chart II - 2005 Median Earnings in New Mexico



Source: 2005 American Community Survey

In New Mexico, a person with a bachelor's degree earns two-and-a-half times more than a high school dropout; earning a graduate or professional degree yields even higher wages. The personal benefits of staying in high school and going to college are obvious, and the local economy benefits as well. An educated workforce encourages new ideas and methods for providing goods and services among local businesses, and potential employers consider educated citizens an asset when deciding where to locate new establishments.[17]

Furthermore, the state of New Mexico loses almost $260,000 over the lifetime of each high school dropout in wages and taxes; with about 12,700 of New Mexico's children dropping out of high school every year, this translates into $3.3 billion lost in wages, taxes and productivity.[18] The table below illustrates the percentage of those youths in 2000 who dropped out of high school and are idle (meaning they are neither working nor in school) in District 56.

Table VII - Children's Educational Attainment

	District 56		New Mexico	
	Number	Percentage	Number	Percentage
Children ages 16 to 19	1,465	100	113,028	100
High school dropouts	158	10.8	13,665	12.1
Not in school and not working	153	10.4	13,447	11.9

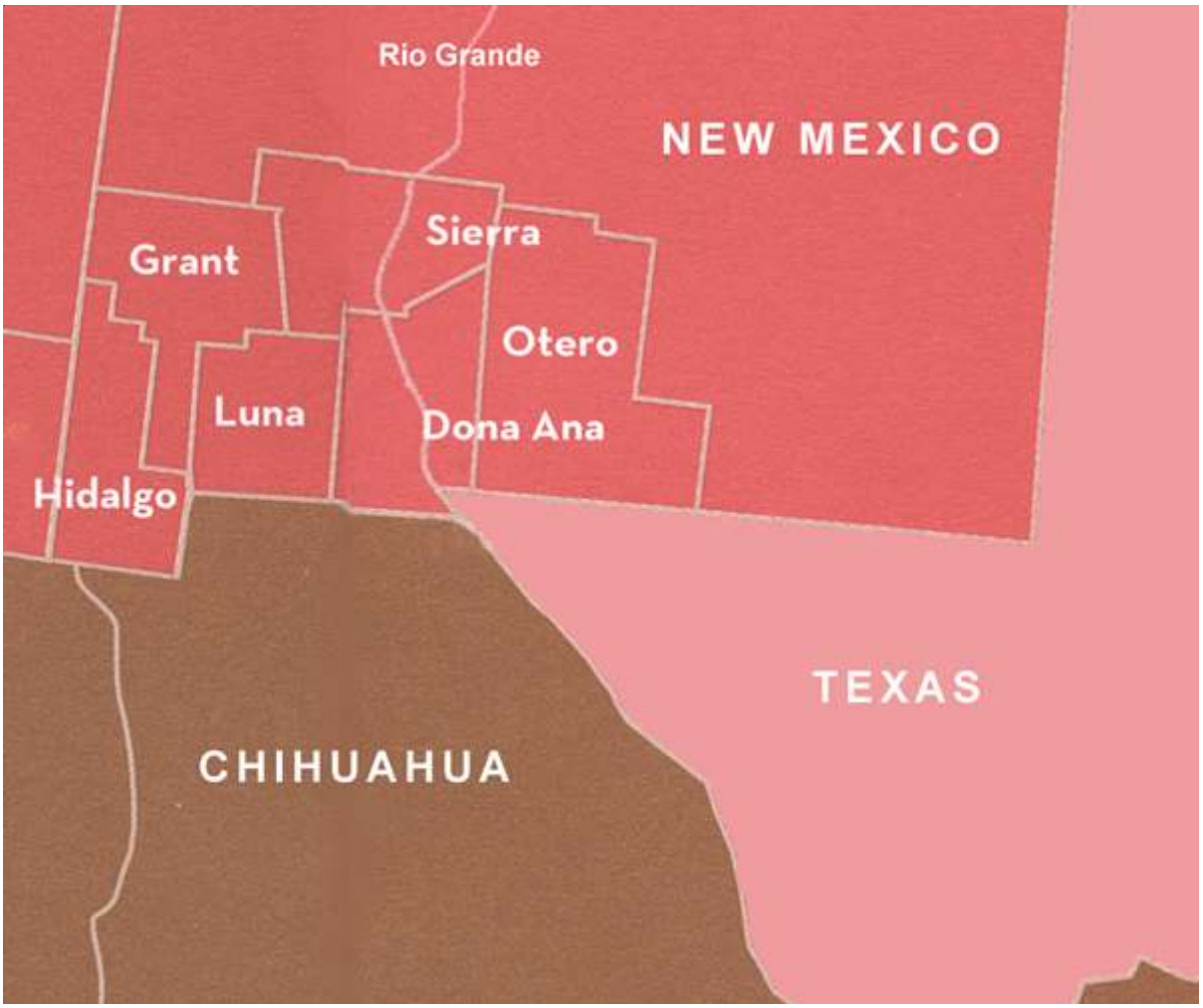
Source: Population Reference Bureau, analysis of data from the U.S. Census Bureau, 2000 Census Summary File 1 and Summary File 3 (via the Annie E. Casey Foundation at www.aecf.org)

Where Parents Work

Some of the largest industries in Otero County in 2006 were retail trade and accommodation/food services.[19] The turnover rates during the first quarter of this period were 13.3 percent and 35 percent respectively, compared with a rate of 7.1 percent for public administration.[20] A high turnover rate is generally associated with low wages.[21] An educated workforce can attract industries that pay living wages or better, which offer hope for communities wanting to help its families break out of the cycle of poverty. Job creation, in and of itself, does not do that very well.

Conclusion

If children are windows on the future, then the economic future of the border region looks bleak as these children do not tend to have the necessary foundation from which to create a viable, if not prosperous, life for themselves and their families. If the communities in District 56 are to survive, the children who will one day make up their workforces must have an incentive to stay in their hometowns and neighborhoods. They must also be adequately prepared for the level of skills required for higher paying jobs – jobs that should be in their communities – in order to break through the economic barriers that challenge poor and low-income families from one generation to the next. Several initiatives and businesses around the border region recognize this. Some examples include the Silver City MainStreets initiative, the City of Deming's enterprise community strategic plan, the Santa Teresa border crossing development, and the Spaceport. This vibrant and promising region is one in which all its children can grow up to fulfill their potential, contribute greatly to their communities, and provide economic security for their families.



Endnotes

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[3]Ibid.
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[5]These colonias are located in Bent, Mayhill, Boles Acres, Orogrande, Chaparral, Pinon, Cloudcroft, Sacramento, Dog Canyon, Timberon, Dungan, Twin Forks, High Rolls, Weed, La Luz, and the Village of Tularosa. Designated Colonias in New Mexico, (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, 2007), http://www.hud.gov/local/nm/groups/coloniasnm.cfm.
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[11]Ibid., 17- 18.
[12]Ibid., 17.
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