

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 Senate District 35

Senator John Arthur Smith

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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 35, and most indicators are paired with corresponding New Mexico data. As the tables below indicate, the child population in District 35 is about the same as in the state as a whole, and Hispanic children comprise a majority of that population.

Many of District 35'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 Hidalgo County, there are seven communities, or parts of communities designated as colonias by the U.S. Housing and Urban Development; in Luna County there are five such communities while Sierra County has one (Butte City).⁵

Table I - General Population

	District 35		New Mexico	
	Number	Percentage	Number	Percentage
Total population	41,875	100	1,819,046	100
Population under age 18	11,703	27.9	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 35		New Mexico	
	Number	Percentage	Number	Percentage
Population under age 18	11,703	100	508,574	100
Children of one race	11,239	96	480,210	94.4
White children	8,264	70.6	291,862	57.4
Black or African American children	120	1	10,683	2.1
American Indian or Alaska native children	140	1.2	64,953	12.8
Asian children	25	0.2	4,537	0.9
Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander children	4	0	478	0.1
Children of some other race	2,686	23	107,697	21.2
Children who marked two or more races	464	4	28,364	5.6
Hispanic children	8,076	69	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, the majority of District 35'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 35		New Mexico	
	Number	Percentage	Number	Percentage
Population under age 18	11,703	100	508,574	100
Living in neighborhoods where 20% or more of the population is below poverty	10,202	87.2	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 35		New Mexico	
	Number	Percentage	Number	Percentage
Population under age 18 for whom poverty is determined	11,428	100	500,345	100
Below poverty	4,918	43	125,218	25
Below 50% poverty	2,350	20.6	53,542	10.7
Below 200% poverty	8,377	73.3	264,684	52.9

Table V - Family Living Arrangements

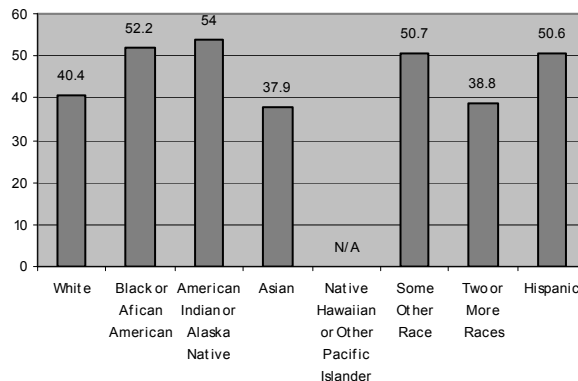
	Total	Living Below Poverty	
		Number	Percentage
Families with related children under age 18	5,602	2,001	35.7
Married-couple families with related children under age 18	3,677	912	24.8
Single-mother families with related children under age 18	1,483	910	61.4
Single-father families with related children under age 18	441	179	40.6

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 35 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 percentages of those who are foreign-born in Hidalgo, Luna, and Sierra Counties are 11 percent, 19.5 percent, and 6.5 percent respectively.¹³ Of these individuals, 15.8 percent in Hidalgo County, 28.7 percent in Luna County, and 10.5 percent in Sierra County live below the poverty level.¹⁴ The table below shows the percentages of children in District 35 who 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.¹⁵ 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.¹⁶

Table VI Children's Language Abilities

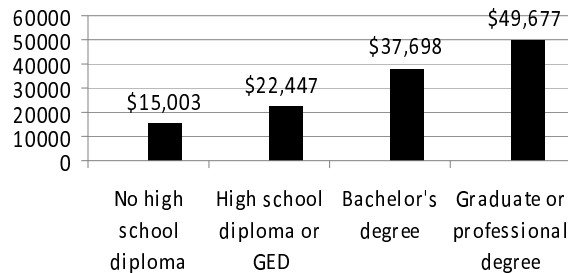
	District 35		New Mexico	
	Number	Percentage	Number	Percentage
Children ages 5 to 17	8,702	100	378,433	100
Speak language other than English at home	4,074	46.8	118,218	31.2
Speak English less than "very well"	1,436	16.5	38,436	10.2
Linguistically isolated	1,010	11.6	25,143	6.6

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 who live 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.¹⁷ 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 employers consider educated citizens an asset when deciding where to locate new establishments.¹⁸

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.¹⁹ 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 35.

Table VII - Children's Educational Attainment

	District 35		New Mexico	
	Number	Percentage	Number	Percentage
Children ages 16 to 19	2,466	100	113,028	100
High school dropouts	381	15.5	13,665	12.1
Not in school and not working	359	14.6	13,447	11.9

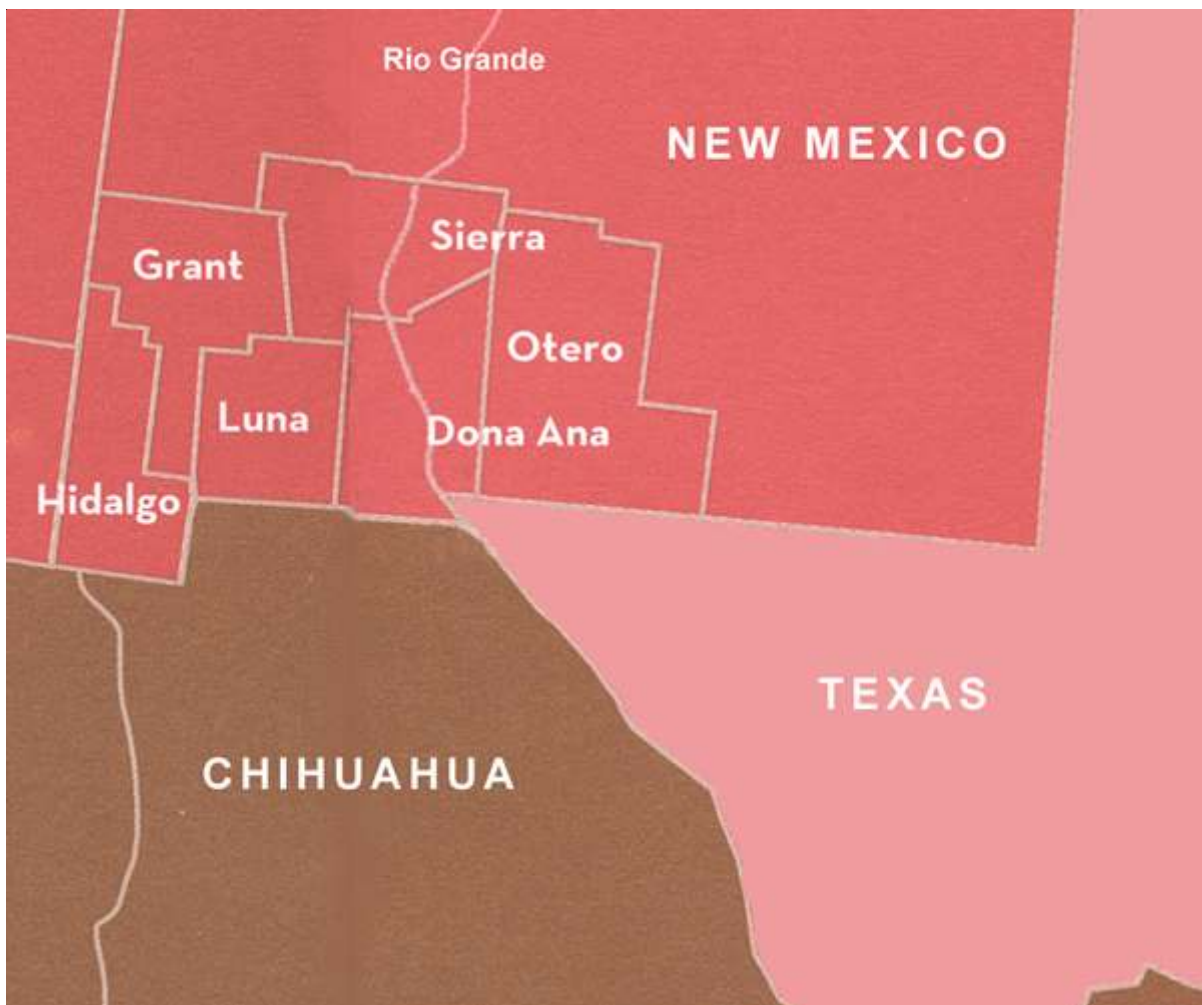
Source: Population Reference Bureau, analysis of data from the U.S. Census Bureau, 2000 Census Summary File 1 and Summary File 3 (via the Annie E. Casey Foundation at www.aecf.org)

Where Parents Work

Some of the largest industries in Hidalgo, Sierra, and Luna Counties in 2006 were health care/social assistance, retail trade, accommodation/food services, and manufacturing.²⁰ The turnover rate during the first quarter of this period for health care/social services in Sierra County was 29.9 percent.²¹ The turnover rates for accommodation/food services were 17.3 percent in Hidalgo County, 20 percent in Luna County, and 17.4 percent in Sierra County.²² The turnover rates in Luna County for retail trade and manufacturing was 19.1 percent and 18.6 percent respectively; by contrast, the turnover rate for educational services in Luna and Sierra Counties was only 2.8 percent and 3.1 percent respectively.²³ A high turnover rate is generally associated with low wages.²⁴ An educated workforce can attract industries that pay living wages or better, which offers 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 many of 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 35 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

¹Census 2000, (Washington, DC: U.S. Census Bureau), <http://www.census.gov>.

²Colonias Facts: Colonias Background and History, (Washington, DC: Environmental Protection Agency, 2003), <http://www.epa.gov/owm/mab/mexican/clnfncts.pdf>.

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⁵The colonias in Hidalgo County are located in Cotton, Rodeo, Del Sol, Windmill, Glen Acres, the City of Lordsburg, and the Village of Virden; in Luna County the colonias are located in Catfish Farms, Keeler Farm Road, Franklin, Sunshine, and the Village of Columbus. 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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⁸Lawrence Michel, Jared Bernstein, and Sylvia Allegretto, *The State of Working America 2006/2007*, (Washington, DC: Economic Policy Institute, 2007), 292.

⁹John a. powell [sic] and Stephen Menendian, *Progressive Politics: The Strategic Importance of Race*, (Columbus, OH: Kirwan Institute, Ohio State University, 2006), 17, <http://kirwaninstitute.org/publications/kirwanpublications.html>.

¹⁰Ibid., 17.

¹¹Ibid., 17- 18.

¹²Ibid., 17.

¹³Census 2000.

¹⁴Ibid.

¹⁵Paul Siegel, Elizabeth Martin, and Rosalind Bruno, *Language Use and Linguistic Isolation: Historical Data and Methodological Issues*, (Washington, DC: U.S. Census Bureau, 2001), 3, <http://www.census.gov/population/socdemo/language/li-final.pdf>.

¹⁶Ibid., 2.

¹⁷Phillip Kaufman, Martha Naomi Alt, and Christopher D. Chapman, *Dropout Rates in the United States: 2001*, (Washington, DC: National Center for Educational Statistics, U.S. Department of Education, 2004), 8, <http://nces.ed.gov/pubs2005/2005046.pdf>.

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¹⁹Gabriela C. Guzman, "Dropouts a Drag on State Economy," *Albuquerque Journal*, May 5, 2007, sec. A.

²⁰Labor Market Services – Area Profile, (Santa Fe, NM: New Mexico Department of Labor), <http://www.laser.state.nm.us>.

²¹LEHD New Mexico Industry Reports, (Santa Fe, NM: New Mexico Department of Labor), <http://www.dol.state.nm.us/lehd/newmexico.html>.

²²Ibid.

²³Ibid.

²⁴Julia Lane, "The Low-Wage Labor Market: Challenges and Opportunities for Economic Self-Sufficiency," *The Role of Job Turnover in the Low-Wage Labor Market*, (Washington, DC: The Urban Institute, 1999), 4, <http://www.aspe.hhs.gov/HSP/lwlm99/lane.htm>.

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