New Mexico KIDS COUNT Issue Brief:
Improving the Well-being of New Mexico's Children

This issue brief is a supplement to the 2009 national KIDS COUNT Data Book published by the Annie E. Casey Foundation. The Data Book, released on an annual basis, ranks all 50 states on ten key measures of child well-being—low birth weight, infant mortality, child death, teen death, high school dropout rate, teens not attending school and not working, children living in families where parents do not have secure employment, children living in poverty, and children living in single-parent families. The 2009 Data Book ranks New Mexico 43rd among the states using these ten measures. This is an improvement from 2008 when New Mexico ranked 48th, and can be attributed in part to an improvement in infant mortality and teen dropout rates. This brief report reviews each of the ten KIDS COUNT measures and suggests steps New Mexico can take to improve outcomes for New Mexico's children.

Low Birth Weight Babies			
(percent* of low birth weight babies in 2006/2007)			
Where does NM rank now?	What would it take to rank #1?	What will it take to have an average** ranking?	What can we do to reach this?
➢ New Mexico ranks 36th nationally in percent of low weight births ➢ 8.9 percent of births in 2006 were low birth weight (2,668 births) ➢ The national average is 8.3 percent	➢ Alaska, ranked #1 in the nation, with the lowest rate (6 percent) ➢ New Mexico needs to reduce the number of low birth weight babies by 877 to achieve 6 percent	➢ New Mexico must reduce the number of low weight births by 191 to achieve the national average rate of 8.3 percent	➢ Increase health care coverage for low-income pregnant women through Medicaid and other sources ➢ Support programs to increase access to prenatal care ➢ Fund programs to prevent drug, alcohol and tobacco use during pregnancy ➢ Fully support WIC programming ➢ Provide education for pregnant women on nutrition, controlling chronic health conditions, taking supplements

Number of low birth weight babies born divided by total number of births.

** Average rank is based on the national or U.S. rate or percent.

Infant Mortality			
(number of infant deaths per 1,000 live births in 2006/2007)			
Where does NM rank now?	What would it take to rank #1?	What will it take to have an average ranking?	What can we do to reach this?
➢ New Mexico ranks 14th among states in infant mortality ➢ Of every 1,000 babies born, 5.8 died before their first birthday (total: 173 infant deaths)	➢ Washington has the lowest infant mortality rate, 4.7 infant deaths per 1000 births ➢ To reduce its infant mortality rate to 4.7/1000, New Mexico must achieve 32 fewer infant deaths per year (total: 141 infant deaths)	➢ New Mexico already has an infant mortality rate that is below or better than the national average rate of 6.7/1000 births.	➢ Increase health care coverage for pregnant women through Medicaid and other sources ➢ Increase access for mothers to prenatal care and programs to help them avoid drug/alcohol use ➢ Support outreach/home visiting programs, or the use of *promotoras*/CHWs to identify prenatal or post-natal problems early ➢ Support SIDS communication/education programs

Child Death Rate
(number of deaths per 100,000 children ages 1-14 in 2006/2007)

Where does NM rank now?	What would it take to rank #1?	What will it take to have an average ranking?	What can we do to reach this?
➢ New Mexico ranks 34th in the nation in child deaths ➢ New Mexico's child death rate is 22 per 100,000 (total: 86 children) ➢ The national average is 19/100,000	➢ Connecticut has the lowest child death rate, 9 per 100,000 children ➢ New Mexico must reduce child deaths by 51 per year to attain a rate of 9 per 100,000	➢ New Mexico must reduce child deaths by 12 per year to achieve a national average rate of 19/100,000.	➢ As motor vehicle accidents are the leading cause of child death in NM, support public education on use of child car seats ➢ Fund and support efforts to stop/reduce drunk driving, including aggressive drug and alcohol prevention and treatment programs ➢ Increase health care coverage for kids through aggressive outreach efforts and simplified enrollment procedures ➢ Support programs to secure weapons and harmful substances in the home, and water safety education

Teen Death Rate
(number of deaths per 100,000 teens ages 15-19 in 2006/2007)

Where does NM rank now?	What would it take to rank #1?	What will it take to have an average ranking?	What can we do to reach this?
➢ New Mexico ranks 37th in the nation in teen deaths ➢ New Mexico's teen death rate is 84 per 100,000 (total: 124 youth) ➢ The national average is 64 per 100,000	➢ Rhode Island has the lowest teen death rate, 34 per 100,000 teens ➢ New Mexico must reduce teen deaths by 74 per year to achieve a rate of 34/100,000	➢ New Mexico must reduce teen deaths by 30 per year to achieve the national average rate of 64/100,000.	➢ As motor vehicle accidents are the leading cause of teen death in NM, fund and support efforts to: (a) stop/reduce drunk driving, (b) prevent and treat alcohol abuse, (c) enhance young driver education/strengthen young driver licensing, (c) enforce laws restricting cell phone use while driving ➢ As firearms are involved in many teen deaths, use evidence-based violence prevention programs in schools; support programs to secure weapons in the home ➢ Increase health care coverage for children through better outreach efforts and simplified enrollment procedures ➢ Target youth suicide with prevention programs/hotlines ➢ Support mental health screening in schools ➢ Support NMDOH, Office of Injury Prevention programs ➢ Fully fund school-based health centers, including adequate mental/behavioral health counselors or staff

Teen Birth Rate
(number of births per 1000 females ages 15-19 in 2006/2007)

Where does NM rank now?	What would it take to rank #1?	What will it take to have an average ranking?	What can we do to reach this?
➢ New Mexico ranks 49th among the states in teen births ➢ In New Mexico, 64 births took place for every 1000 teen females (total: 4,628 births) ➢ The national average is 42 per 1000	➢ New Hampshire has the lowest teen birth rate, 19 births per 1000 female teens ➢ To attain a teen birth rate of 19/1000, New Mexico must reduce its teen births by 3,256 per year	➢ New Mexico must achieve 1,595 fewer teen births per year to achieve a national average rate of 42/1000.	➢ Fully fund and provide more school-based health centers ➢ Support quality out-of-school time programs that offer a variety of learning experiences tied to school academic goals ➢ Increase quality and number of service learning programs through schools ➢ Consider economic incentives to delay parenthood ➢ Improve access to contraceptives ➢ Provide comprehensive sexuality education

High School Dropouts
(percent of teens, ages 16-19, who are high school dropouts in 2006/2007)

Where does NM rank now?	What would it take to rank #1?	What will it take to have an average ranking?	What can we do to reach this?
➢ New Mexico ranks 36th among the states in high school dropouts ➢ Of New Mexico youth ages 16-19, 8 percent are high school dropouts ➢ The national average is 7 percent	➢ North Dakota has the lowest rate (2 percent) of high school dropouts ➢ New Mexico would have to retain at least 7,413 more students per year in school to achieve this rate	➢ To achieve the national average high school dropout rate of 7 percent, New Mexico would need to retain at least 1,343 more teen students per year who will graduate	➢ Invest earlier in children to increase likelihood they will stay in school – universal pre-K for 3- and 4-year-olds can improve 4th grade reading proficiency and school success ➢ Improve funding for education programs, including quality after-school programs ➢ Improve educational accountability ➢ Support coordinated services in schools (including health, mental/behavioral health care, family supports, and good nutrition) to help address other issues that negatively impact school performance ➢ Support positive truancy prevention programs

Youth Not Attending School and Not Working
(percent of teens, ages 16-19, not working and not attending school in 2006/2007)

Where does NM rank now?	What would it take to rank #1?	What will it take to have an average ranking?	What can we do to reach this?
➢ New Mexico ranks 23rd in the nation in youth who are not working and not in school ➢ Of New Mexico's teens, 8 percent are not working and not in school ➢ The national average is also 8 percent	➢ North Dakota and Minnesota have the lowest rate (4 percent) of teens not working and not in school ➢ New Mexico would have to reduce the number of its idle teens from 10,172 to 4,856 (a drop of 5316 teens) to attain this rate	➢ New Mexico is at the average rate for having idle youth, which is 8 percent	➢ Support adequate childcare policies (so students do not need to stay home to care for younger siblings) ➢ Support out-of-school/after-school programs that connect student academic learning with workforce/job skill training, service learning, apprenticeships, etc ➢ Increase and improve access to family economic supports such as health coverage, childcare, and living wage, so teens do not have to skip school to help family survive

Insecure Parental Employment
(percent of children living in families where no parent has full-time, year-round employment in 2006/2007)

Where does NM rank now?	What would it take to rank #1?	What will it take to have an average ranking?	What can we do to reach this?
➢ With more than a third (38 percent) of its children living in families where no parent has secure employment, New Mexico ranks 44th among the states ➢ The national average is 33 percent	➢ Utah ranks 1st in the nation, with 24 percent of its children living in families without secure employment ➢ New Mexico must reduce the number of children living in families without secure employment by 71,237 per year to achieve a rate of 24 percent	➢ To attain the national average rate of 33 percent, New Mexico would need to decrease the number of children living in families without secure employment by 26,528 per year.	➢ Fund and maintain family support programs that inform, screen and assist families with access to such income supports as refundable tax credits, Individual Development Accounts, low-income housing or mortgage assistance, employment guidance, reasonable credit and financial literacy courses ➢ Increase literacy rates through adult literacy programs ➢ Expand (innovative) workforce development and career training opportunities ➢ Provide access to universal two-year post-secondary education

Children in Poverty
(percent of children living in families with incomes below the federal poverty level of $20,444 for a family of four, in 2006-07)

Where does NM rank now?	What would it take to rank #1?	What will it take to have an average ranking?	What can we do to reach this?
➢ With one-fourth (25 percent) of its children living in poverty, New Mexico ranks 47th in the nation ➢ The national average is 18 percent	➢ New Hampshire is 1st among the states, with a 9 percent child poverty rate ➢ To attain a 9 percent child poverty rate, New Mexico must reduce the number of children living in poverty by 80,030 per year.	➢ The number of children living in poverty in New Mexico would have to decrease by 36,252 to achieve the national average rate of 18 percent	➢ Increase the minimum wage level and index it to inflation ➢ Require public incentives for businesses to offer higher wage jobs ➢ Provide universal health care to all children and families ➢ Support appropriate job training programs and adult basic education ➢ Update the federal poverty measure ➢ Support policies that put an end to predatory lending ➢ Fund and maintain family support programs that inform, screen and assist families with access to such work supports as refundable tax credits, Individual Development Accounts, low-income housing or mortgage assistance, reasonable credit and financial literacy courses

Single-Parent Families
(percent of children living in single-parent families in 2006)

Where does NM rank now?	What would it take to rank #1?	What will it take to have an average ranking?	What can we do to reach this?
➢ New Mexico ranks 48th in the nation ➢ More than one-third (39 percent) of New Mexico's children live in single-parent families (176,741 children) ➢ The national average is 32 percent	➢ Utah ranks 1st with 18 percent of its children living in single-parent families ➢ To attain a rate of 18 percent, the number of children living in single-parent families in New Mexico would have to decrease by approximately 94,355.	➢ The national average of children living in single-parent families is 32 percent ➢ To be at the average level, New Mexico must reduce the number of children living in single-parent families by 30,277	➢ Support appropriate school-based life-skills and positive relationships courses ➢ Increase eligibility and benefit level for unemployment benefits ➢ Provide universal health care to all children and families ➢ Fund and maintain family support programs that inform, screen and assist families with access to such work supports as refundable tax credits, Individual Development Accounts, low-income housing or mortgage assistance, reasonable credit and financial literacy courses

Discussion

The 2009 KIDS COUNT Data Book, which documents 20 years of data on child well-being in the nation, has special meaning for New Mexico Voices for Children. We oversee the KIDS COUNT program in the state, and have been working to improve life for children and their families in the state for more than 20 years. Last year, New Mexico was ranked 48th among all the states in terms of overall child well-being. This year, thanks to some critical investments and policy changes, the state moved up to a rank of 43. In particular, the state has improved its infant mortality rate (5.8 infant deaths per 1,000 live births), ranking 14th in the nation; decreased the number of teens not attending school and not working; and it has improved its child death rate (22 deaths per 100,000 children ages 1-14), moving up from a rank of 48 in 2008 to 34 in 2009. Though these changes are good news for the state's children and families, New Mexico continues to face serious challenges in pulling its children out of poverty, reducing its teen birth rate, decreasing the percent of children living in single-parent families, and decreasing the number of families in which no parent has full-time, long-term employment.

NM Voices has pushed for policy-level progress in addressing these issues. Among shorter-term measures taken to address pervasive child poverty and families without secure employment, NM Voices advocated in 2008 to increase the state's eligibility level for childcare assistance to 200 percent of the federal poverty level and from 2003-2007 pushed for funding to raise eligibility levels for the State Children's Health Insurance Program (SCHIP) to 300 percent of the federal poverty level. Both these actions increase the number of children and families who benefit from these programs. In addition, the Medicaid budget was increased by 7 percent to allow more eligible children to be enrolled. NM Voices also fought for an increase in weekly unemployment benefits (for the next two years) to help families ride out the recession, and is advocating that ARRA stimulus monies be distributed and spent more quickly in the state. However, these positive changes are short-term and subject to budget cutbacks; a greater, long-term effort is needed in New Mexico, on both the policy and program levels, to improve the well-being of our children. Such a strategy should include establishing a positive economic development strategy that includes investing in and attracting better-paying jobs to provide families with a living wage and benefits, as well as universal health care. To supply a better-educated workforce for these jobs, the state needs to invest in early childhood education and strengthen workforce development—adult literacy programs, job and career training, and access to two-year post-secondary education. The state minimum wage must be indexed to rise with inflation. New Mexico has made progress but the state risks losing what gains have been made. Now is not the time to scale back on a commitment to and investment in our children and families.

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