SUMMARY AND FINDINGS

North Dakota KIDS COUNT seeks to examine critical issues for North Dakota children and families.
Population

Energy development activity in western North Dakota has significantly changed historical population trends within the state. After decades of population loss, shifting migration patterns and an increase in total births has resulted in significant growth for the state. According to the 2012 population estimates from the U.S. Census Bureau, North Dakota has 699,628 residents, a record high. In fact, from 2011 to 2012, North Dakota was the fastest growing state in the U.S. growing at 2 percent, which is three times the national average.

In 2011, there were 683,932 North Dakota residents. Children ages 0 through 17 comprised 22 percent of the total population (i.e., 151,156 children). After nearly two decades of continuous loss, the number of children has grown consistently since 2008, by approximately 2 percent annually through 2011.

Nearly half of North Dakota counties (24 of 53) had an increase in their child population from 2010 to 2011, with the fastest growth counties located in western North Dakota (e.g., McKenzie 11%, Williams 9%, Burke 7%, Golden Valley 7%, Slope 6%, and Stark 5%).

Total Births

The number of young children ages 0 through 5 began to grow in 2003, which parallels the upswing in total births. After decades of decline, total births began to increase in 2002 when there were 7,755 births. By 2011, there were 9,234 births recorded statewide by the North Dakota Department of Health.

Births to teenagers in North Dakota totaled 634 in 2011, which is 7 percent of all births statewide. While this proportion is relatively unchanged since 2006 and down from the earliest part of the decade, the teen birth rate (i.e., teen births per 1,000 girls ages 15 through 19) rose from 25.6 in 2004 to 27.6 in 2011. Nationally, the teen birth rate dropped by 24 percent since 2004, from 41 per 1,000 to 34.

Race and Ethnicity

Race and ethnicity have important implications for culture, identity, and well-being. Children of different races and ethnicities often show large variation in well-being including health, mortality, school performance and attainment, and access to family and community resources.

The racial mix among North Dakota children is changing modestly. Over the past decade, the proportion of the state’s child population that is white (i.e., 139,008 children in 2011) decreased from 88 percent in 2000 to 86 percent in 2011. During the same time, the state has seen an increase in the number of minority children. Native American children, North Dakota’s largest minority group, grew 14 percent from 2000 to 2011. The state’s smaller minority child populations grew much faster. From 2000 to 2011, the number of Asian children grew 59 percent, Hispanic children grew 87 percent, and children reported as black grew 124 percent.
Living Arrangements
While the majority of all North Dakota children ages 0 through 17 live with their parents, the composition of families is changing. Currently, 2011 data indicate that nearly three-fourths of North Dakota children live with both parents (72%). This proportion is down from 82 percent in 1990. At the same time, the proportion of children living with a single parent is growing. In 1990, 14 percent of children lived with a single parent. This proportion increased to 22 percent in 2011. Other family arrangements include children living with their grandparents. In 2011, 3 percent of North Dakota children lived in a grandparent-headed household (5,049 children), which is up from 2 percent in 1990 (2,628 children).

The number of North Dakota children receiving foster care services totaled 1,878 in 2012 (i.e., 1% of all children statewide). The majority of children in foster care in 2012 were in a family home (76%). Nearly one in four children in foster care was in a group home or institution (24%).

One-third of all North Dakota births in 2011 were to unmarried women (33%). The proportion of births to unmarried women was 23 percent in 1994 and grew an average of 3 percent per year through 2005 where it has remained relatively unchanged at 33 percent through 2011. Approximately one in five births to unmarried women in 2011 was to a teenager (18%). Births to unmarried teens ages 12 through 19 totaled 558 in 2011, or 6 percent of all births statewide.

Working Parents
Most North Dakota children live with their mothers (whether she is married or single) and most North Dakota mothers work. In 2011, 88 percent of all North Dakota children lived with their mother (i.e., with both parents or with a single mother), the largest proportion in the nation. In addition, 83 percent of North Dakota mothers were in the labor force in 2011, the second highest proportion nationwide (behind South Dakota). Nationally, 73 percent of mothers with children ages 0 through 17 were in the labor force in 2011.

A major contributor to financial stability and well-being of children is parents having secure employment1. In 2011, 78 percent of children ages 0 through 13 in North Dakota lived in situations for which all parents were in the labor force, which is the third highest proportion among states (behind South Dakota and Iowa). Nationally, 68 percent of children live with parents who are all in the labor force.

Employed Youth
Employment can provide valuable experience for youth. In moderation, work experience can help youth build skills and can open up valuable opportunities as youth prepare for work and a career2. In North Dakota, nearly half of teens ages 16 through 19 were employed in 2011 (46%), which is the largest proportion among states (tied with South Dakota). Among young adults ages 20 through 24 in North Dakota, 73 percent were employed.
ECONOMIC WELL-BEING

North Dakota’s child poverty rate remains unaffected by the state’s economic prosperity.

SUMMARY AND FINDINGS

Income and Poverty

Experiencing unprecedented economic growth, North Dakota is leading the nation in low unemployment\(^1\), growth in GDP\(^2\), and increases in per capita personal income\(^2\). In addition, the median household income for families with children grew to $66,042 in 2011. Despite this economic boom, child poverty has been largely unaffected by the state’s prosperity. Approximately one out of every seven children living in North Dakota is considered impoverished (14% in 2011, or 21,129 children). This proportion has remained unchanged for the past 11 years (since 2000). An additional 14,170 North Dakota children live in families with incomes just above the poverty line (i.e., near poverty) (10% in 2011).

Younger children (i.e., ages 0 through 4) in the state had a higher poverty rate than older children in 2011 (19% compared to 13%, respectively); in six of North Dakota’s 53 counties, at least one in three young children was living in poverty. Children living on Native American Indian reservations tend to have the highest poverty rates in North Dakota. Data from 2011 indicate that half of all children in Sioux, Benson, and Rolette counties was impoverished (51%, 51%, and 47%, respectively).

Poverty refers to a condition in which one is unable to afford basic human needs, such as clean water, nutrition, health care, education, clothing, and shelter. Income thresholds used to determine poverty are updated annually by the Census Bureau. In 2011, a four-person family earning $23,021 or less was considered impoverished\(^3\).

Public Assistance

Public benefit programs are available to help low-income families and children in North Dakota. The federal Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (i.e., SNAP, formerly the Food Stamp Program) helped provide food to 38,493 North Dakota children ages 0 through 18 in 2012 (24% of children statewide). The free or reduced price lunch program served 34,012 North Dakota school children in 2012 (32% of total school enrollment). In five of North Dakota's 53 counties, at least half of students received free or reduced price lunches in 2012 (Sioux, Benson, Rolette, Sheridan, and Mountrail).

The Temporary Assistance to Needy Families Program (TANF), designed to help families in need achieve self-sufficiency, provided assistance to 6,268 North Dakota children ages 0 through 19 in 2012, which is down 10 percent from 2011.

In an effort to allow parents to work or attain the education necessary to become employed and self-sufficient, 6,097 North Dakota children received child care assistance in 2012 (5% of all children ages 0 through 13 statewide).

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SUMMARY AND FINDINGS

Enrollment  
North Dakota's public schools averaged 98,734 students daily during the 2011-12 academic year. After several years of continued decreases in enrollments, North Dakota's average daily membership in public schools has increased an average of 1 percent per year since 2008-09.

Billings, Divide, and McKenzie counties, all located within western energy development areas, had some of the fastest growth in average daily membership in 2011-12 (26%, 20%, and 10%, respectively). These remarkable growth rates follow years of declines (i.e., 4% per year, on average, for the three-county area from 1996-97 through 2007-08). Overall, 16 of North Dakota's 53 counties reported a loss in average daily membership in 2011-12.

Average expenditures per student were $10,203 statewide in 2011-12, a 0.5 percent increase from 2010-11.

The number of high school students who were enrolled in school and then dropped out in 2012 totaled 687 (2% of high school enrollment).

In 2012, 13,269 North Dakota children were enrolled in special education (13% of public school enrollment): 31 percent had a specific learning disability, 23 percent had a speech impairment, 6 percent were emotionally disturbed, 6 percent had an intellectual disability, and 6 percent had autism.

Achievement  
The ability to read proficiently is a fundamental skill that affects the learning experiences and school performance of children and adolescents. Students who are competent readers are more likely to perform well in other subjects, such as math and science. According to the National Center for Education Statistics, only a handful of states have higher performance scores for 4th grade reading and 8th grade math than North Dakota. Even so, only half of the 2012 North Dakota high school graduates were considered ready for college-level reading courses, as measured by the ACT.

ACT, Inc. has developed benchmarks in the areas of English, math, reading, and science to measure what it takes to be successful in standard first-year college courses. Based on these benchmarks, 64 percent of the 2012 ACT-tested North Dakota high school graduates were ready for college English, 45 percent were ready for college math, 49 percent were ready for college reading, and 30 percent were ready for college science. Approximately one in four (23%) were ready for all four courses.

Overall, 2012 high school graduates in North Dakota averaged 20.7 out of a possible 36 on the ACT. The national average was 21.1.

Licensed child care providers in North Dakota numbered 1,533 in Feb. 2013 with the capacity to care for 34,545 children, which is 40 percent of the state’s potential need.


SUMMARY AND FINDINGS

Child Care
As indicated in the Economic Well-Being section, North Dakota is experiencing a financial boom, largely the result of energy development. In addition to low unemployment, North Dakota also ties South Dakota with the largest multiple job holding rate in the nation1. This means that most parents are working and are in need of quality child care and early education for their children. As noted in the Family and Community section, 78 percent of North Dakota children live in families where all the parents are in the labor force (i.e., 86,004 children statewide).

Reliable and affordable child care helps children, families, and communities prosper. With dependable child care, parents can be productive at work and school. In addition, research on child care reveals that, on average, for each new dollar spent on child care, the total statewide economic impact is two dollars2.

As of February 2013, North Dakota reported 1,533 licensed child care programs with the capacity to care for 34,545 children. This means that licensed child care programs in the state have the ability to meet 40 percent of potential need. According to North Dakota Child Care Resource and Referral, national child care standards recommend that licensed care should meet at least 50 percent of potential need3. Currently, only two counties in North Dakota – Cass and Ramsey – meet that minimum.

In the western portion of the state (i.e., Planning Regions 1 and 8), licensed care is meeting less than 30 percent of the potential need. In contrast, licensed care in Planning Region 5 (i.e., Cass, Ransom, Richland, Sargent, Steele, and Traill) is meeting 52 percent of the potential need, the largest proportion among planning regions in the state.

Unlicensed Child Care
Legally recognized yet unlicensed child care providers in the state included 425 self-certified and in-home providers, 52 registered tribal child care providers, and 401 approved relatives in February 2013.

Informal networks of relatives, friends, and neighbors provide care for many North Dakota children. These situations are difficult to track and the number of providers and quality of care are not monitored.

Child Care Cost and Assistance
Child care has become part of the daily routine for thousands of North Dakota families, many of whom are struggling financially. According to 2012 North Dakota Child Care Resource & Referral data, care for one infant in a licensed center averages $8,066 annually4.

As mentioned in the Economic Well-Being component of this report, the Child Care Assistance Program helped low-income families in North Dakota pay child care bills for 6,097 children in 2012, or 5 percent of all children ages 0 through 13 statewide.
SUMMARY AND FINDINGS

Vital Records
A healthy mother is vital to the health of her child. Prenatal care can improve birth outcomes and is more likely to be effective if begun early in pregnancy\(^1\). Of the 9,234 North Dakota births in 2011, 502 (5%) were to mothers receiving inadequate prenatal care.

In 2011, 602 babies were born weighing less than 5.5 pounds (or 2,500 grams) in North Dakota. These low birth weight babies comprised 7 percent of all births in 2011. North Dakota consistently ranks among states with the lowest percentage of low birth weight births in the nation\(^2\).

In 2011, 60 North Dakota babies died within one year of life (0.7% of all births). Of all North Dakota deaths in 2011, 55 were youth ages 1 through 19 (1% of all deaths).

Hearing Impairment
Hearing loss can affect a child's ability to develop communication, language, and social skills. The earlier that children with a hearing impairment get services, the more likely they are to reach their full potential. In 2012, nearly every newborn in North Dakota was screened for hearing loss (99%); of those screened, 10 percent did not pass the initial screening and were referred for further testing.

Assistance
The supplemental nutrition program for women, infants, and children (WIC) provides nutritious foods, nutrition counseling, and health and social service referrals to eligible participants at no charge. The number of North Dakota WIC participants totaled 23,471 in 2012.

To assist North Dakota children needing health care, 52,757 children ages 0 through 20 received health care assistance through Medicaid (28% of youth ages 0 through 20 statewide) in 2012. To help children from working families that earn too much to qualify for full Medicaid coverage but not enough to afford private insurance, the state's Healthy Steps Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP) provided premium-free health coverage to 4,076 enrollees in January 2013.

Uninsured Children
Children without health insurance have limited access to health care, which can lead to a greater risk of illness and hospitalization. In addition, a lack of health insurance can have a negative influence on school attendance and participation in extracurricular activities, and increased financial and emotional stress among parents\(^3\).

While most children in North Dakota are covered by some form of health insurance, 9,515 were uninsured in 2010, which is 6 percent of all children statewide. The majority of uninsured children live in families with low to moderate incomes and are potentially eligible for coverage programs such as Medicaid, Healthy Steps, or Caring for Children. In 2010, 5,675 uninsured North Dakota children were living at or below 200 percent of poverty, which is 60 percent of all uninsured children statewide.


SAFETY AND RISKY BEHAVIOR

SUMMARY AND FINDINGS

Juvenile Court Referrals

Juvenile delinquency has potentially high stakes for both individuals and society as a whole. Delinquency is linked to higher crime rates in adulthood and other negative outcomes. One estimate suggests that between 50 and 75 percent of adolescents who have spent time in juvenile detention centers are incarcerated later in life¹.

A total of 4,473 North Dakota juveniles ages 10 through 17 were referred to court a total of 8,512 times in 2012. Each time a juvenile is referred to court, he or she may be charged with multiple offenses. In 2012, North Dakota juveniles were charged with a total of 8,954 offenses. While each referral may have charges for multiple offenses, an offense description is available for the major offense only. Major offenses associated with the 8,512 juvenile court referrals in 2012 include: unruly behavior (23%), offenses against property (22%), alcohol offenses (15%), offenses against person (9%), and other offenses not included in the previously mentioned categories (e.g., disorderly conduct, controlled substance, traffic) (31%).

North Dakota juveniles referred to court as a proportion of all youth ages 10 through 17 has decreased slightly over the past decade. In 2012, 7 percent of all children ages 10 through 17 (4,473 juveniles) were referred to court for various offenses, which is down from 9 percent in 2003.

Child Abuse, Neglect, and Domestic Violence

Providing children with safe and secure environments free from abuse and neglect will improve the likelihood of positive educational, emotional, and social outcomes that extend well into adulthood. In 2012, there were 6,856 children suspected of being abused or neglected in North Dakota. When a suspected case of abuse or neglect is investigated by the North Dakota Child Protection Services Program, a determination is made as to whether services are required to provide for the protection and treatment of an abused or neglected child. Following assessments of the 2012 cases by Child Protection Services social workers, it was determined that 1,442 children (21% of all suspected victims) were in high-risk situations requiring immediate services. In eight North Dakota counties, at least one in three reported victims required services.

Idle Teens

The transition from youth into independent adulthood involves many challenges. While there are multiple pathways to success, the consequences of unemployment, under-employment, or not acquiring post-secondary education can be damaging and enduring. Males who are neither enrolled in school nor working are more likely to engage in delinquent behavior or illegal activities. Females in this group are more likely to become dependent on welfare². North Dakota youth who were not in school, not high school graduates, and not in the labor force (referred to as idle teens) comprised 3 percent of all children ages 16 through 19 in 2011, a rate similar to the national average.

Research indicates that challenges do not affect North Dakota children equally.