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

Following seven years of continuous, rapid growth from 2008 to 2015, North Dakota’s population began to stabilize. Increasing an average of 2.1 percent annually, the state’s population grew from 641,421 in 2008 to 754,022 in 2015. There was relatively no change in the state's population in 2016 and 2017. Current 2018 numbers show a 1 percent increase to 760,077 people in North Dakota.

North Dakota’s population growth was partly due to an increase in the number of births. Total births began to increase in 2002 when there were 7,755 babies born in North Dakota. By 2014, there were 11,352 births recorded statewide. Following this rapid increase, there was relatively little change in the number of births in 2015 and 2016. In 2017, births decreased by 6 percent to 10,738. This decade-long trend in births along with an in-migration of families has resulted in a growing child population in North Dakota. Similar to the overall population change in the state, the total child population ages 0 through 17 grew an average of 2.3 percent per year from 2008 to 2017, reaching 175,772 children.

During the period of rapid population growth from 2008 through 2015, the majority of counties in the state (all but eight) had an increase in child population, with the fastest growth located in the far western portion of the state (i.e., Regions 1 and 8). Current estimates suggest the growth has moderated, with 31 counties losing child population in 2017.

Teen Births

In contrast to the growing number of total births in the state, the number of teen births is decreasing. In 1982, the 1,264 teen births comprised 10 percent of all resident births in North Dakota. In 2017, there were 370 teen births representing about 3 percent of all births statewide. Since 2008, the teen birth rate has dropped an average of 6 percent per year for American Indian, white, and Hispanic teens; 5 percent per year for black teens. Despite these improvements, the teen birth rate is 3 to 6 times higher for racial and ethnic minority teens than for white teens in North Dakota.

Race and Ethnicity

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

While racial and ethnic minority children continue to represent a relatively small percentage of North Dakota’s youth, the state is continuing to become more diverse. Comprising 17 percent of North Dakota’s children in 2017, the number of black, Asian, and American Indian children combined grew four times faster than white children from 2010 to 2017. The number of Hispanic youth (6% of all children in North Dakota) grew nine times faster than the number of non-Hispanic children. Despite the increase in racial and ethnic diversity among North Dakota’s child population, the state is less diverse than most states, ranking 44th out of 50 states in 2017 (in the percent of non-white and Hispanic youth).
SUMMARY AND FINDINGS

Living Arrangements
The majority of all North Dakota children ages 0 through 17 live with their parents, and most children live with both parents. When compared with other states, North Dakota had the third largest percentage of children living with both parents in 2017 (69%). Despite this ranking, the composition of families in North Dakota, and throughout the nation, is changing. While 69 percent of North Dakota children live with both parents, this percentage is down from 82 percent in 1990. During the same period of time, the percentage of children living with a single parent has increased. In 1990, 14 percent of children lived with a single parent. This percentage increased to 23 percent in 2017. Also on the rise is the number of children living with a grandparent. In 2017, 4 percent of children lived with a grandparent (7,443 children), which is up from 2 percent in 1990 (2,628 children).

About 2 percent of North Dakota children received foster care services in 2018 (2,738 children). The majority of children in foster care are in a family home (86% in 2018), which is up from 76% in 2010. Nationally, 86% of foster children were placed in families in 2017. Parental drug abuse is the leading reason for a child’s placement in North Dakota foster care (36% of cases in 2018).

While most North Dakota babies are born to married mothers, nearly one-third of births in 2017 were to unmarried women (31%). Births to unmarried women comprised 23 percent of all births in 1994 and grew an average of 3 percent annually through 2005 where it has remained relatively unchanged through 2017. About 10 percent of births to unmarried women were to teenagers. Births to unmarried teens ages 12 through 19 totaled 339 in 2017, which is 3 percent of all births statewide.

Working Parents
Taking care of young children while holding down a job can be challenging. Yet, a major contributor to financial stability and well-being of children is secure parental employment. In 2017, 80 percent of North Dakota mothers were in the labor force, the seventh largest percentage among states; nationally, 73 percent of mothers were in the labor force. In addition, 75 percent of children ages 0 through 13 in North Dakota lived in situations where all parents residing in the household were in the labor force - the eight largest percentage among states in 2017. Nationally, 68 percent of children lived in households where all parents were 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 career. In North Dakota, nearly half of teens ages 16 through 19 were employed in 2017 (46%), which is the second largest percentage among states (behind South Dakota). Among young adults ages 20 through 24 in North Dakota, 76 percent were employed in 2017 - which is the second largest percentage among states (behind Minnesota).

North Dakota had the second largest percentage of employed teens in the nation (46%) as well as the second largest percentage of employed young adults ages 20-24 (76%) in 2017.

ECONOMIC WELL-BEING

Many families face significant barriers to financial stability. In North Dakota, nearly 1 in 3 children lived in low-income families (those earning less than twice the poverty threshold) in 2017.

Income and Poverty
A family's economic situation has important implications for the health and well-being of a child. Financially stable families have resources to cover their expenses and save for the future. This stability helps provide their children with a foundation for future success. In North Dakota, the median household income for families with children grew to $79,077 in 2017, up 10 percent from 2010 after adjusting for inflation. In addition, the child poverty rate in North Dakota was 12 percent in 2017, which is down from 15 percent in 2012.

Despite continued improvement in the child poverty rate, significant disparities exist in North Dakota with respect to age, race and ethnicity, family type, and place. Younger children are more likely than older children to live in families struggling to cover basic expenses for housing, food, transportation, health care, and child care (15% and 12%, respectively). Hispanic and racial minority youth are 2 to 6 times more likely than white children to live in poverty. Children living with a single parent are eight times more likely to live in poverty than children living with married parents (34% and 4%, respectively). Children living on reservations tend to have the highest child poverty rates in North Dakota. Currently, about half of all children in Rolette, Sioux, and Benson counties live in families with incomes below the poverty line.

In 2017, the official income amount considered sufficient for a family of four (2 adults, 2 children) to afford basic necessities was $24,858 (i.e., poverty threshold)\(^1\). However, research shows that families need an income of at least twice the threshold to cover basic living expenses\(^2\). In North Dakota, 30 percent of children lived in families earning less than twice the poverty threshold in 2017 (i.e., low income families).

Public Assistance
Many families face significant barriers to financial stability. For some children, growing up in an impoverished family can create cumulative disadvantages that can powerfully influence the direction of a child's life, especially if those disadvantages are not mitigated by other sources of support. Efforts to assist families that are struggling include various public programs such as the federal Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) which helped provide food to 36,141 North Dakota children ages 0 through 18 in 2018 (20% of children statewide). In North Dakota public schools, 37,533 children were eligible for free or reduced price lunches in 2018 (31% of total school enrollment). In five of North Dakota's 53 counties, at least half of students were eligible for free or reduced price lunches in 2018 (Rolette, Sioux, Benson, Grant, and Mountrail).

The Temporary Assistance to Needy Families Program (TANF), designed to help families in need achieve self-sufficiency, provided assistance to 4,425 North Dakota children ages 0 through 19 in 2018, which is down an average of 7 percent per year since 2010. In an effort to allow parents to work or attain the education necessary to become employed and self-sufficient, 4,982 children benefited from the North Dakota Child Care Assistance program in 2018 (4% of all children 0 through 13 statewide).


**SUMMARY AND FINDINGS**

**Enrollment**

Mirroring the growth in the state's child population, North Dakota school enrollment continues to grow. As the result of a growing number of births and net in-migration to North Dakota, school enrollment began to increase beginning in 2009-10, averaging about 2 percent annually through 2017-18. Daily enrollment in North Dakota public schools averaged 112,269 in 2017-18, a 3 percent increase from the previous year. Despite this growth, overall expenditures, which averaged $11,604 per student in 2017-18, decreased by 1 percent from 2016-17.

Effective and appropriate education is an important resource for improving long-term outcomes for children and youth with special needs. In 2018, there were 15,881 North Dakota children enrolled in special education (14% of total enrollment). Of children enrolled in special education, 29 percent had a specific learning disability, 19 percent had a speech impairment, 9 percent were identified with an Autism Spectrum Disorder, 8 percent were emotionally disturbed, and 5 percent had an intellectual disability - a distribution unchanged from the previous year.

According to decades of research, the best way to ensure successful students and productive adults is to invest in early childhood development\(^1\). In North Dakota, 33 percent of children ages 3 and 4 were enrolled in early education programs in 2017 (i.e., programs offering educational experiences preceding kindergarten, including Head Start) - which is down from 37 percent in 2012 and currently the smallest percentage among states.

**Achievement**

Most teenagers in North Dakota are engaged in school or work (95% in 2017)\(^2\) and most high school students graduate on time (88% in 2018). Of those students who graduate, many go on for higher levels of education. In Fall 2016, approximately three-fourths of recent North Dakota high school graduates were enrolled in college (4,877 students)\(^3\). Of all young adults ages 18 to 24, 64 percent had some college or a college degree in 2017 - second only to the District of Columbia.

In preparation for college, nearly all North Dakota high school students take the ACT which is a national college admissions examination. 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 four benchmark areas, 57 percent of the 2018 ACT-tested North Dakota high school graduates were ready for college English, 39 percent were ready for college math, 43 percent were ready for college reading, and 34 percent were ready for college science. Approximately one in five graduates (23%) was ready for all four courses.

When disaggregated by race and ethnicity, data show that minority youth face significant obstacles to college readiness. However, overall ACT composite scores showed improvement in 2018 for American Indian and African American high school students in North Dakota\(^4\).


Among young adults ages 18-24 in North Dakota, 64% had some college or a college degree in 2017 - the second highest percentage among states.
SUMMARY AND FINDINGS

Child Care

North Dakota has the highest proportion of working adults in the nation (80% in 2017) and the fourth lowest unemployment rate among states (2.6% in 2018). This means that for working parents, the need for quality early care and educational opportunities is significant. In fact, 75 percent of children ages 0 through 13 live in families where all the parents are in the labor force (i.e., 97,905 children statewide) - which was the eighth largest percentage among states in 2017. In four of North Dakota’s 53 counties, more than 90 percent of children ages 0 through 13 live in families where all the parents are in the labor force (Golden Valley, Ramsey, Bowman, and Griggs).

With most parents working, reliable and affordable child care can help provide parents with greater opportunity to be productive at work and school. In addition, high-quality child care nurtures, stimulates, and supports children as they build the confidence and critical capacities they need to thrive in school and in life.

As of February 2019, there were 1,577 licensed child care providers in North Dakota with the capacity to care for 43,405 children. This means that licensed child care programs in the state have the ability to meet approximately 44 percent of potential need (children ages 0 through 13 living in families with all parents in the labor force). According to Child Care Aware of North Dakota, national child care standards recommend that licensed care should meet at least 50 percent of potential need.

Currently, 13 counties in North Dakota meet this recommended minimum, which is an increase from five counties in February 2018.

Unlicensed Child Care

Legally recognized yet unlicensed child care providers in the state included 129 self-certified and in-home providers, 22 registered tribal child care providers, and 157 approved relatives in February 2019. Combined, these providers had the capacity to care for 1,119 children.

Informal networks of relatives, friends, and neighbors provide care for many North Dakota children. These cases are difficult to track and the number of providers and quality of care are not monitored. Yet these providers play an important role in helping prepare North Dakota children for school and future success.

Child Care Costs 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 2018 data from Child Care Aware of North Dakota, care for one infant in a licensed center averages $9,060 annually - and can reach up to $16,640.

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 4,982 children in 2018, or 4 percent of all children ages 0 through 13 statewide.
SUMMARY AND FINDINGS

Vital Records
A healthy mother is important to the health of a child. Prenatal care can improve birth outcomes and is more likely to be effective if begun early in pregnancy\(^1\). Of the 10,738 North Dakota births in 2017, 13 percent were to mothers receiving no prenatal care or to mothers beginning care after the first trimester, which is an improvement from 16 percent in 2010. Mothers who do not receive prenatal care are much more likely to give birth to a low birth weight baby\(^1\). In 2017, 724 babies were born with a low birth weight (i.e., less than 5.8 pounds or 2,500 grams), which is 7 percent of all births. North Dakota had the fourth lowest percentage of low birth weight babies in the nation in 2017\(^2\).

The death of a child is a tragedy for family and friends, and a loss to the community. For every 1,000 babies born in 2017, about four died within the year — an improvement from 7 per 1,000 in 2010. Of all deaths in 2017, 49 were children and youth ages 1 through 19. The majority of these deaths was due to injury (47% were accidents and 25% were suicides)\(^3\).

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 receive services, the more likely they are to reach their full potential. In 2017, nearly all resident live births in North Dakota were 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 19,496 in 2018. The number of WIC participants decreased an average of 3 percent annually since 2008.

To assist North Dakota children needing health care, 57,213 youth (27% of youth 0 through 20) received health care assistance through Medicaid in 2018, which is down 5 percent from 59,899 in 2017. To help those children in working families that earn too much to qualify for Medicaid but not enough for private insurance, the Healthy Steps program provided coverage to 2,870 children in 2018 (2% of children ages 0 through 18).

Uninsured Children
Children without health insurance have limited access to health care, which can lead to a greater risk of illness and hospitalization. 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\(^4\). While most children in North Dakota have some form of health insurance, 13,590 lack coverage. Relative to other states, North Dakota has the seventh highest uninsured rate for children at 8 percent in 2017. About 44 percent of uninsured children live in families with low incomes and are potentially eligible for programs such as Medicaid and Healthy Steps.

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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. In many states, up to 80 percent of youth who are incarcerated are arrested within three years of release. A total of 3,248 North Dakota youth were referred to court (at least once) for delinquent or unruly behavior in 2018 (5% of all youth ages 10 through 17). Similar to a national downward trend, the number of North Dakota juveniles referred to court decreased an average of 5 percent annually from 2010 to 2018.

In 2018, the five most common delinquent referrals received by the Juvenile Courts were simple assault (14%), theft of property and shoplifting (11%), disorderly conduct (11%), possession of a controlled substance (9%), and possession of drug paraphernalia (8%).

Of the unruly referrals received in 2018 (offenses which only a child can commit), 25 percent were for youth who had runaway, 23 percent were for unlawful possession/consumption of alcohol, 27 percent were for ungovernable behavior, 14 percent were for school truancy, and 11 percent were for such things as tobacco and curfew violations.

Child Abuse and Neglect

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 into adulthood. Yet, in 2018 there were 7,297 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 a child.

Following assessments of the 2018 cases by social workers in North Dakota, it was determined that 2,097 children were in high-risk situations requiring immediate services. The number of children requiring services for abuse and neglect has increased an average of 8 percent each year since 2010. Overall, for every 1,000 children in North Dakota, approximately 11.9 were maltreated in 2018; nationally, the rate was 9.1 per 1,000 in 2017.

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 welfare. Similar to the national average, North Dakota youth who were not in school, not high school graduates, and not in the labor force (i.e., idle) comprised 2 percent of all teens in 2017 (847 teens).