



*The Independent Voice for Kentucky's Children*

KENTUCKY  
YOUTH  
ADVOCATES

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## **2008 Kentucky KIDS COUNT County Data Book Sees More Improvement than Decline Tax Credits, Corporal Punishment and Breastfeeding among New Indicators**

**Louisville, KY** –Kentucky Youth Advocates releases its 18th annual Kentucky KIDS COUNT Data Book on December 4, showing more improvement than decline in 51 indicators of child well being. The book provides state and county-level data in order to measure and track improvements in the lives of children, including economic well-being, education, health, and safety. This year's book includes eight new indicators, such as tax credits for families, corporal punishment in schools and breast feeding, which provide a deeper picture of factors that influence opportunities for children in Kentucky.

### **Earned Income and Child Dependent Care Tax Credits**

As a new measure of economic well-being, the book reports the number and percent of families taking advantage of the federal Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC) and Child and Dependent Care Tax Credit (CDCTC). The percent of Kentucky tax filers claiming the EITC increased from 17 to 20 percent between 2000 and 2005, ranging from 39 percent of McCreary County filers to 9 percent of filers in Oldham County. The percent of CDCTC filers in Kentucky also increased from 4 to 5 percent. These credits work to supplement the earnings of low-income working families and help to lift millions of children in the United States out of poverty every year.

“The EITC as an anti-poverty measure has been championed by leaders ranging from Richard Nixon and Ronald Reagan to Bill Clinton,” says Terry Brooks, executive director of Kentucky Youth Advocates. “Thanks to diligent efforts throughout the state to help low-income families learn about the credit, more than 345,000 Kentuckians are capitalizing on this opportunity and we hope the numbers continue to increase.”

### **Academic Achievement, Corporal Punishment in Schools, and College Success**

The 2008 book introduces three new measures of educational well-being, including academic achievement for at-risk students, corporal punishment in schools, and college success.

The data book finds that low-income students and students with disabilities continue to lag behind their peers in math and reading proficiency. For instance, while 60 percent of all students in Kentucky scored proficient or above in Math, only 35 percent of students with disabilities scored similarly.

Kentucky is one of 21 states nationwide that still allow corporal punishment in schools, and one of 13 states that actively uses it, with 2,847 incidents in school year 2007. Out of 175 school districts, the KIDS COUNT data show that 46 used corporal punishment in 2007, with rates ranging from a high of 14.7 incidents per 100 students in McCreary County to a low of 0.1 per 100 students in Clark County.

“While the number of corporal punishment incidents in schools continues to decline, one out of five students in Kentucky is vulnerable to the unintended consequences that go along with this type of discipline, such as low self-esteem and increased likelihood of dropping out,” says Brooks. “The use of corporal punishment in schools is as ineffective as it is unprofessional.”

The book also takes a new look at college success, finding that 46 percent of students entering Kentucky colleges in 2004 were underprepared in one or more subjects, and less than half (46 percent) graduated from college within six years. Due to differences in access to college preparatory classes and high-quality college counseling, African-American students in Kentucky are often less prepared for succeeding in college and are less likely than their white peers to graduate within six years.

“We need to create a culture of rigor, relevance and personalization for every single student in Kentucky,” says Brooks. “High schools can do a better job of preparing students, but universities must also step up and provide the supports needed to help bridge achievement gaps and address the transition process for students. Increasing college graduation rates is an imperative for Kentucky’s economic and civic sectors.

### **Very Low Birthweight and Breastfeeding**

The 2008 book includes new data on the number of babies born at very low birthweight (less than 3 lbs. 4 oz.) and the percent of newborns who are breastfed.

The number of babies born at very low birthweight increased from 2,606 births in 1999-2001 to 3,412 births in 2004-2006. Babies born at low birthweight face the highest risk of long-term health problems, such as cerebral palsy, and cognitive or physical disabilities. The highest numbers of babies born at very low birthweight occurred in Christian and Jefferson Counties.

“Each week in Kentucky there are 165 babies born preterm and 99 of these babies are low birthweight,” says Lisa Echsner, State Director for March of Dimes. “Knowing where we are is helping us to focus on what needs to be done in order to help solve this problem.”

The KIDS COUNT book reports that Kentucky has the second lowest rate in the nation of babies who were ever breastfed, with just over half (52 percent) of all newborns in Kentucky being breastfed upon discharge from the hospital in 2006. This percentage dips down to only one in five newborns in Harlan, Knott, Martin, Owsley, and Perry Counties.

Babies who are breastfed have fewer ear and respiratory infections, are at less risk for Sudden Infant Death Syndrome and obesity, and score higher on cognitive development tests. Women who breastfeed have decreased postpartum bleeding, increased time between pregnancies, lower risk of osteoporosis, earlier return to pre-pregnancy weight, and decreased risk of breast cancer.

“Breastfeeding is linked to so many positive outcomes for both babies and mothers,” says Tara Grieshop-Goodwin, deputy director of Kentucky Youth Advocates. “Health professionals, hospitals, and communities can all pitch in and support new mothers in successfully initiating and continuing breastfeeding through their newborns first year of life.”

### **Kinship Care**

The book also looks at the number of children in Kinship Care as a new indicator of child safety. When suitable, child victims of abuse or neglect who cannot remain safely with their parents are placed with relatives to maintain family connections and cultural ties. Being placed with family members helps keep siblings together, encourages greater stability for children, and is often less traumatic. Many relative guardians are eligible to receive kinship care payments to help with the costs of caring for the child.

Some 8,800 children in Kentucky were in Kinship Care placements in May of 2008, however this is an underestimate since many children live with relatives but do not receive monthly payments. Almost two-thirds (64 percent) of children receiving Kinship Care payments lived with their grandparents.

“Kinship Care is a great tool to help potential relative caregivers afford the added costs of caring for a child, and helps children receive the permanency and stability they all need,” says Grieshop-Goodwin.

### **Improvements over Time**

Kentucky saw more improvements than declines in the 51 indicators, including the following:

- Kentucky’s child support program collected nearly \$410 million in FY 2008, a 70 percent increase over FY 2000 collections. The percent successfully collected increased from 53 percent of child support owed, to 59 percent.
- The high school graduation rate improved from 79 percent in school year 2003 to 84 percent in school year 2007.
- The teen birth rate declined from 54 per 1,000 girls ages 15-19 in 1999-2001 to 51 per 1,000 in 2004-2006, and repeat births to teens decreased from 21 percent to 19 percent of all teen births over the same time period.
- The rate of asthma hospitalizations decreased from 24 per 10,000 children ages 0-17 in 2000-2002 to 22 per 10,000 children in 2005-2007.

### **Place, Income, and Race**

Underlying each of the data points measured in the book are differences in outcomes among children based on where they live, how much money their parents earn, and their race. Too often, low-income children and children of color lack the opportunities enjoyed by their peers to succeed in life. For example, 10 percent of births primarily covered by

Medicaid are low-weight births compared to 8 percent of births covered by private health insurance or other sources. And while no differences exist by race in actual child abuse or neglect, families of color are more likely to be investigated for abuse and have allegations substantiated.

“As we look for ways to build on successes and tackle challenging areas, we have to make sure every Kentucky child has a fair shot at success,” said Brooks. “A child’s well-being in Kentucky cannot be a matter of luck. We do not have to accept that region or race are determinants of a child’s fair shot at success.”

The data book will be released to the public on Thursday, December 4 with a press conference and community forum at Metro United Way in Louisville from 10:00 a.m. to 12:00 p.m. Members of the media who would like an embargoed copy of the KIDS COUNT data book should contact Patricia Tennen at 502-895-8167 ext. 120, [ptennen@kyyouth.org](mailto:ptennen@kyyouth.org).

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***Kentucky Youth Advocates** is a non-partisan, non-profit, children's advocacy organization. KYA represents a voice for Kentucky's most precious asset – its youth. We believe that Kentucky's youth deserve the opportunities and resources necessary to ensure their productive development and health.*