THE MEASURE OF SUCCESS

WHAT ARE THE POLICY IMPLICATIONS OF THE NEW NATIONAL INDICATORS OF CHILD WELL-BEING?

Special Report #11

by
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The Institute for Educational Leadership
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See the center spread of this publication for a Summary List of the 1997 Indicators.

INTRODUCTION

The IEL Policy Exchange seminar, ***What Are the Policy Implications of the New National Indicators of Child Well-Being?***, brought together nearly 60 participants from Executive Branch agencies, Congressional committee offices and nonprofit organizations to discuss *America's Children: Key National Indicators of Well-Being*. For a list of seminar participants, see Appendix A.

The seminar featured a distinguished bipartisan panel who commented on this report by the Federal Interagency Forum on Child and Family Statistics:

> Ron Haskins, staff of the U.S. House of Representatives' Committee on Ways and Means;
>
> Con Hogan, of the Vermont Agency of Human Services and the American Public Welfare Association;
>
> Anna Kondratas, of the Urban Institute;
>
> Wendell Primus, of the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities; and
>
> Katherine Wallman, of the White House Office of Management and Budget.

The panelists' remarks sparked a wide-ranging and open discussion about how collecting and reporting data can—and should—directly influence the way government works. Too often, public perceptions turn on a riveting but atypical anecdote that makes a good story, but bad social policy. Too rarely do the hard facts have sufficient energy to galvanize public opinion, much less public action. *America's Children* is a promising effort to bridge this gap by painting a coherent picture of the lot of children in America that informs the public and helps leaders sort the statistical wheat from chaff.

"How many of us are used to having discussions where you try to look at the connections among these issues?" Con Hogan remarked at the seminar. "We just get lost in our own silos. We may not come up with the answers here, but we're going to have a much better perspective."

The Federal Interagency Forum on Child and Family Statistics

In the fall of 1994, the White House Office of Management and Budget (OMB) and the heads of six federal statistical and research agencies created the Federal Interagency Forum on Child and Family Statistics. The Forum–which President Clinton formally created through an April, 1997 Executive Order–now has participants from 16 federal agencies, as well as partners from private research organizations. The Forum's mission is to foster coordination, collaboration and integration among the federal statistical agencies that collect and report data about children and families.

Members of the Federal Interagency Forum on Child and Family Statistics

Office of Management and Budget
Statistical Policy Office

Department of Commerce
Bureau of the Census

Department of Education
National Center for Education Statistics

Department of Labor
Bureau of Labor Statistics
Women's Bureau

Department of Health and Human Services
National Institute of Child Health
and Human Development
Office of the Assistant Secretary
for Planning and Evaluation
National Center for Health Statistics
Maternal and Child Health Bureau
Administration for Children and Families

Department of Agriculture
Food and Nutrition Service

Department of Justice
Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention
National Institute of Justice
Bureau of Justice Statistics

Department of Housing and Urban Development
Office of Policy Development and Research

National Science Foundation
Science Resource Studies Division

The Forum meets two or three times each year. Through three staff groups, it works to:

Improve the ***reporting*** and dissemination of data about children across the agencies;

Develop priorities to improve ***data collection*** about children and youth; and

Meet the challenge of producing ***state and local*** data about children.

The Forum's work to develop meaningful child and family indicators that can promote, as well as measure, accountability for results is not an isolated federal phenomenon. Efforts to develop indicators of children's well-being have sprung up at the local, state and national levels in the past few years as the federal government has devolved more responsibility to states and localities. Redefining Progress, a California-based nonprofit organization, is focusing on developing state and local indicators. The President's Council on Environmental Quality is developing indicators of sustainable development that include measures of social conditions as well as economic and environmental quality. The *Kids Count* project of the Annie E. Casey Foundation is a national and state-by-state effort to track the status of children in the United States. And a network of

state-level *Kids Count* projects provides a detailed community-by-community picture of the condition of children.

The IEL Policy Exchange has followed and supported the work of the Forum since it began. Policy Exchange staff have actively participated in meetings of the Forum and its subcommittees: for example, providing suggestions for disaggregating data by specific gender, ethnic, and regional populations to help policy makers understand the important "story." The work of the Forum complements the continuing interest of the Policy Exchange in promoting accountability for results in programs and policies affecting children, youth and families.

America's Children: Key National Indicators of Well-Being

America's Children, released in July of 1997, reflects the commitment and involvement of members of the Federal Interagency Forum on Child and Family Statistics. It was prepared by the Forum's Reporting Committee with input from many other agency staff members, and technical assistance from Child Trends, Inc., a nonprofit, nonpartisan organization that studies children, youth and families.

America's Children includes 25 key indicators of the condition of children, organized into four clusters: economic security, health, behavior and social environment, and educational status.

With assistance from federal policy makers, foundations, academic researchers, and state and local children's service providers, the Forum developed tough guidelines to select the final indicators. They required that the indicators be:

See the center spread of this publication for a Summary List of the 1997 Indicators. For a description of why the Forum believes that each of the 25 indicators is important to understanding the condition of children, see Appendix B: Rationale for the Key National Indicators of Child Well-Being.

Easy to understand by a variety of audiences;

Objectively based on substantial research connecting them to child well-being and based on *reliable* data;

Balanced so that no single area of children's lives dominates the report;

Measured regularly so that they can be updated and show trends over time; and

Representative of large segments of the population, rather than one particular group.

Data for the key indicators come primarily from national surveys and from birth and death records maintained at the federal level. Although state and local agencies often have administrative data on important areas of children's lives, the report did not use these data since their availability and quality can be affected by both policy differences across localities and resource constraints.

For a free copy of America's Children: Key National Indicators of Well-Being, contact:

National Maternal and Child Health Bureau Clearinghouse,, 2070 Chain Bridge Road, Suite 450, Vienna, Virginia, 22182

Telephone: (703) 356-1964

The full text of the report is also available on the Internet at:
http://www.ccdc.gov/nchswww/nchshome.htm

The Forum's report complements other key data collection efforts at the national, state and local levels. In creating *America's Children,* the Forum aimed to raise awareness of the condition of children in the United States to the same level of attention as the national economy. "The Federal Government measures the condition of our economy and our environment with great frequency and in varied ways," the report states. "The Nation's children deserve no less."

PANEL MEMBERS AT THE POLICY EXCHANGE SEMINAR

RON HASKINS, STAFF DIRECTOR
HUMAN RESOURCES SUBCOMMITTEE
COMMITTEE ON WAYS AND MEANS
U. S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

CORNELIUS "CON" HOGAN, SECRETARY
VERMONT AGENCY OF HUMAN SERVICES, AND
PRESIDENT, AMERICAN PUBLIC WELFARE ASSOCIATION

ANNA KONDRATAS, CO-DIRECTOR
ASSESSING THE NEW FEDERALISM PROJECT
THE URBAN INSTITUTE

WENDELL PRIMUS, DIRECTOR OF INCOME SECURITY
CENTER ON BUDGET AND POLICY PRIORITIES

KATHERINE WALLMAN, CHIEF STATISTICIAN
OFFICE OF MANAGEMENT AND BUDGET

POLICY IMPLICATIONS OF *AMERICA'S CHILDREN*

Margaret Dunkle, Director of the IEL Policy Exchange, moderated the seminar, *What Are the Policy Implications of the New National Indicators of Child Well-Being?* The diverse panelists discussed the relationships among the indicators and the policies and programs intended to support the well-being of children and families. And they candidly shared their perspectives on what the indicators mean—or should mean—for future programs and policies.

OMB's Katherine Wallman began by describing the background and history of the Forum, saying that *America's Children* "presents a serious challenge to the federal statistical agencies. We believe that, by displaying what the government knows, and what it does not know, this report will challenge the federal statistical agencies to do better."

Each succeeding panelist responded to the report, bringing his or her unique perspective to the issues. As the following section shows, the panelists were in general agreement on some issues. In other areas, they definitely were not.

The report is a "spectacular achievement."

Panelists across the political spectrum commended the Forum for being a model of effective collaboration in government—something all too rare in the world of policies and politics.

"These people came together from all these different agencies and put together this magnificent report. This is an example for everyone in this city to follow . . . a spectacular achievement," said Republican Ron Haskins.

"It's an important first step," said Wendell Primus, a former Clinton Administration official who was involved in the earliest stages of developing the report.

The report shines the policy spotlight on results.

Anna Kondratas praised the report, calling it an important tool for measuring the outcomes of programs and policies that affect children and families. "I think the positive aspect of having a report like this," she said, "is that it finally focuses on outcomes as a proper measure for social policy." Furthermore, she stressed the importance of integrating data from many different agencies—data about education, training, income, employment, health, housing, crime and food security. "This kind of statistical collection," she explained, "emphasizes the fact that you need to look at all of these things together to understand the well-being of children, not just [data about the] programmatic boxes."

Policy makers need to pay attention to post-welfare reform safety net issues.

Because the report provides information about the well-being of *all* children, not just those receiving public assistance, several panelists pointed out that it is a good start for thinking about broader safety net issues—that is, how to provide the supports and services children and their families need to function effectively in our society.

Even if welfare reform succeeds in reducing dependency on public cash assistance, Kondratas contended, "we may simply end up with a larger working poor population. And both old and new working poor will still have the same need for assistance with child care, health care, transportation and other services." Ending welfare dependency does not end the need for a social safety net. Rather, it means that policy makers must update the net to address new conditions and new needs.

Kondratas underscored the need to pay attention to the condition of children in a time when changes in the welfare system are affecting many Americans. "We don't have a vision in this country," she commented, "of what the safety net is going to look like post-welfare reform. There is no articulated ideal for a work-support system, whom it's supposed to help and what it's supposed to accomplish. Even if welfare reform is successful, and there are plenty of jobs for all who are able to work, people still need to think about the fact that many of these jobs will be low-paying."

The official federal measure of poverty should reflect the impact of safety net programs.

According to Primus, the federal government's official poverty rate, which is used as a benchmark in *America's Children*, is not very useful for evaluating the effectiveness of public safety net programs and policies. He pointed out that the number of people who are poor according to the government's definition of poverty, "shows little variation across years and. . . doesn't vary with the strength of the safety net."

What Constitutes "Poverty?"

The official definition of poverty—called the "poverty thresholds" by the Census Bureau and the "poverty guidelines" by the Department of Health and Human Services—is an annual family income level that varies by family size. To determine if a family is poor, the government compares the family's resources to the "poverty threshold" for a family of that size. In assessing a family's resources, the government only counts *pre-tax money income* (such as wages, interest and dividends). This includes cash benefits from government programs. But it does *not* include the value of any *noncash* benefits from government or other sources (such as Food Stamps, Medicaid or child care services).

Primus suggested an alternative approach to measuring poverty[1] that would compare two measures: the number of people who would be poor if no government benefits were counted as part of their income, and the number who would be poor after counting as income the value of *all* government benefits—cash and noncash—that they received. *The difference between these two figures is the number of people lifted out of poverty by the safety net.*

Primus stressed the importance of counting as income the value of noncash government benefits—such as Food Stamps, housing, and Medicaid—as well as after tax transfers through the Earned Income Tax Credit. Primus explained the practical effect of his proposed change: "If you have a measure that incorporates all of the safety net, you can show something about the strength of that safety net."

Primus' proposal has implications for evaluating the effects of recent changes in welfare laws. For example, he explained that the large reductions to the Food Stamp program contained in the 1996 welfare reform bill "will not, by definition, be reflected in the official poverty rate. And therefore, the official poverty statistics will not pick up any change in child well-being as a result of the enactment of welfare reform."

Too many young black men are killed with handguns.

Primus and other panelists echoed Haskins' blunt assessment: "This should be the headline of the report," noting the alarming rates at which teenage black males die from handgun violence.

In 1994, more than 150 out of every 100,000 black males age 15 to 19 died from firearm injuries—six times the overall rate of deaths from firearms for that age group. Between 1985 and 1990, the overall death rate for adolescents age 15 to 19 rose from 80.4 to 89.0 per 100,000. In contrast, in the same time period, the death rate for adolescent black males rose dramatically, from 125.3 to 231.6 deaths per 100,000. Most of this increase was due to a threefold increase in firearm-related injuries among black male teens.

"In the short term," Haskins said, "this is something that, as a society, we really have to commit ourselves to. I don't know what the answer is, but we had better find it."

The dispassionate data in *America's Children* make the stark realities of handgun violence and its effects on young black men clear, showing how statistics can "tell the story" and turn public attention to an important public policy issue. We can expect future editions of *America's Children* to shine light on other issues in years to come.

The relationship between out-of-wedlock births and children's well-being is important.

Haskins and William Galston, of the University of Maryland, commented on the high rate of births to unmarried women, especially teens. The data show that birth rates for unmarried teens continue to rise, and fewer teenage mothers are married. "There's no figure in our society that is more important than the percentage of kids who are born outside marriage," said Haskins explaining that children born out of wedlock are likely to be poor, especially during their early years. Haskins noted that the Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF) block grant includes bonus payments to states that reduce their overall rates of out-of-wedlock births.

Participants across the political spectrum agreed that the data were correct. They similarly acknowledged that the rate of births to unmarried teens is a key indicator of the well-being of children. While there was little consensus about the best policy response to

these disturbing figures, *America's Children* provided something all too rare in policy debates—having all sides start from the same factual point. This "common starting point" could be one of the most important contributions of the indicators report.

Policy makers need state and local data comparable to the national indicators.

Con Hogan spoke convincingly of the power of data to mobilize communities. "The power of this stuff," he said, "is your data driven down to a local school district level." Addressing the Rotary Club in a small Vermont city, he brought two charts showing child abuse levels. When he showed that the overall level of child abuse in Vermont was decreasing, the Rotarians applauded. But when he showed that the level of child abuse in their community was high and increasing, he said, "I had a group of angry businessmen who said: 'This is unacceptable. This is wrong.'" The community went to work on its problem and, in four years, their rates of child abuse plummeted. "That's where the [data] ultimately come to life," asserted Hogan. "It's how it interacts with the citizens of the country."

Kondratas added that "we need all of these systems replicated at the state and local levels because our decentralization of social policy means that we need that level of information. But it is so expensive just to get state data, let alone county and local data that are uniform and comparable across the country. In California, for example, counties need specific information to evaluate the success of their own welfare reforms because counties have some ability to direct policy. The cost implications are so huge. Yet, somehow, we need to begin doing it."

Bill O'Hare, who directs the Annie E. Casey Foundation's *Kids Count* initiative, echoed the need for more solid data at the state and local levels with a plea for an "extremely strong federal presence in that data collection." Although he has tried to find state-level indicators that are comparable across the country, he has found that the only equivalent data are those collected by the federal government.

O'Hare was also concerned about the federal costs: "Given the way we're headed in the federal budget situation, I think it's going to be tough to make the resources available to get the kind of information needed to understand issues across the states."

Some panelists cautioned against assuming that states would be

willing to collect data just because the federal government thinks they should. Kondratas noted that "the federal government has block-granted welfare, yet the data requirements have increased. The centralization of child support information has increased." She pointed out the tension between devolving authority for programs to the states and requiring states to set up new data collection systems to meet federal requirements. "It's a huge expense, and it's a contradiction," she said.

Brett Brown of Child Trends, who helped the Forum develop *America's Children*, suggested that the federal government take a different role in data collection, providing "both flexibility and technical assistance to states to develop their own data capacities in ways that may or may not be comparable across states." Brown thinks that states are more interested in developing quality measures that are available at both the state and local levels than they are in providing state-level data that mirrors federally developed indicators.

IDEAS FOR STRENGTHENING FUTURE REPORTS

The seminar discussion generated many suggestions—from seminar participants as well as panelists—for improving future reports. The following suggestions reflect the Forum's priorities for having indicators that are easy to understand, objectively based, balanced and representative.

Consider data about children in the context of their families.

"Sometimes people forget that children who are poor are poor because their parents are poor," Kondratas said. "Children's problems do not necessarily require a public policy response to children directly. They may require a public policy response to families and parents. That is something that is lost when one emphasizes children as an entirely separate social problem."

She noted that *America's Children* describes the status of children, but not that of their families and parents. Primus agreed, noting that "there are no indicators in the report relating to the family, either in terms of the percentage of children born out of wedlock, or the percentage of children living with their natural father." He suggested that—since there is a strong connection between family well-being and children's well-being—data on family structure be included as key indicators and not just as part of the background section of *America's Children*.

Identify better indicators in some areas.

While panelists and participants alike generally agreed that the report looked at the right areas, several of the indicators were criticized as being imperfect proxies. For example, Kondratas noted the weakness of the measure for food security: the percentage of children under age eighteen in households reporting that there is sometimes or often "not enough to eat." She questioned the significance of this indicator which, she said, "is really just a proxy for income." She suggested that a better measure would be nutritional status, which would take into account the nutritional value of the foods children eat. Acknowledging the limitations of the current indicator, staff of the Department of Agriculture's Food and Nutrition Service at the seminar reported that the Department is working to develop a more sophisticated measure for future editions of the report.

As a special feature, *America's Children* includes a 1993 indicator of child abuse and neglect. The report notes that "the incidence of child abuse and neglect is very difficult to measure." The 1993 data are the most recent available, and the Forum is working to develop a reliable and regularly available indicator of child abuse and neglect to include in future reports.

Forum members welcomed suggestions for improving the indicators. In fact, each section of *America's Children* contains a section outlining "Indicators Needed."

Use more positive indicators?
Or use negative indicators to get the public's attention?

Hogan reminded the audience that the report employs "some of the old categorical ways of organizing information" and challenged the Forum to organize the indicators along lines that would connect more closely to policy development, as well as child development. For example, Vermont organizes its indicators to represent the stages of healthy development: "pregnant women and newborns thrive," "infants and children thrive," "children are ready for school," "children succeed in school," "children live in stable, supported families," "youth choose healthy behaviors," "youth successfully transition to adulthood," and "families and individuals live in safe and supportive communities." The table here shows specific indicators that relate to these categories of positive outcomes.

Vermont's Assets
Children and Youth: 1996

Infants born not with low birthweight	94%
Two-year-olds fully immunized	85%
Children ready for kindergarten	73%
High school students who graduate in 4 years (1995)	89%
Children not in poverty (1991-95)	87%
Children born to married parents	74%
Families with children headed by married parents (1993-95)	78%
Out-of-wedlock child support cases with paternity established (1997)	84%
Children with health insurance (1997)	95%
Children not abused or neglected	99%
8th-12th graders who talk to parents about school at least weekly (1997)	73%
Girls aged 15-17 not becoming pregnant	97%
Girls aged 15-19 not giving birth	97%
First births not to "new families at risk"	91%
Youth (ages 16-19) in school or employed (1993-95)	93%

Haskins and others disagreed, noting that it is difficult to get the media and the public to pay attention to "good news." Haskins asserted, "it won't sell if it's positive. If you want the country to be ready to spend some money and get a message to their political friends here in Washington, you've got to be negative. You've got to convince them that Chicken Little is here. So negative is good."

One participant suggested that including positive indicators in the report would have an additional benefit: "One of the challenges of getting people to adopt

performance measurement is the fear of measurement by those being measured. . . . Positive indicators provide motivation. If you're not as good as somebody else on a positive measure, then you know there's something better you can achieve."

Some participants argued that *America's Children* should strike a balance between positive and negative indicators, noting that negative indicators grab headlines, but positive indicators convey the "good news" that most children and youth are already leading positive lives. The spirited discussion generated a variety of opinions, but little agreement.

Reduce the number of indicators.

Haskins proposed that the Forum use just five indicators to focus attention on children's essential needs. "We're in Washington, DC," he said, "and if it doesn't fit into a headline, people are not going to pay attention to it." His personal "big five" were:

> Child poverty (perhaps a version of the measure proposed by the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities);
>
> Children born outside marriage;
>
> Children living in two-parent families;
>
> Achievement in reading; and
>
> A yet-to-be developed measure of the level of welfare dependency.

Haskins' proposal generated strong responses, both pro and con. "Maybe you should make an Executive Summary for people who don't have the time or the inclination to pay attention to facts," said Chris Shearer of the National Geographic Society's Education Foundation.

Forum staff who developed the report reminded the audience that it was extremely difficult to narrow the initial list of more than 200 indicators to the final 25. As statisticians, they were concerned that further reducing the number of indicators would politicize the

indicators and connect them too closely to specific programs, policies or political ideologies.

Several Forum representatives expressed their desire to let the facts speak for themselves. "I think it would be a very difficult task to narrow the list down to five and still not be partisan or policy-driven," said a member of the Forum's reporting committee.

LOOKING TO THE FUTURE

A lively discussion about ways to use and improve the indicators continued throughout the seminar, lasting well beyond the "official" ending time. There were so many suggestions for improvement that Jean Nelson, Director of the President's Crime Prevention Council, cautioned against "letting the perfect become the enemy of the good."

Participants reiterated their support for collecting and using the indicators, and pointed out the challenges ahead for government at all levels, as well as foundations and nonprofit organizations.

Policy makers, the press and the public need to pay attention to the indicators.

Because *America's Children* is now an annual report, seminar participants suggested strategies to draw attention to these social indicators, with the goal of raising them to the level of attention of the national economic indicators.

Ron Haskins said that he would like to include the indicators in the *Green Book*, which contains extensive materials about programs in the jurisdiction of the House of Representatives' Committee on Ways and Means, as well as many other programs affecting children and families.

Anna Kondratas emphasized the need to bring together those responsible for policy in the various federal departments to discuss these issues in the same way that their counterparts in the statistical agencies work together in the Forum. She remarked: "It would be great if the people from HHS who make policy studied the education statistics and the housing statistics, and the people from HUD who make policy studied the HHS statistics and the education statistics to see how all of this really fits together." (*continued on page 18*)

SUMMARY LIST OF INDICATORS

Indicator Name	Description of Indicator	1995 (except where noted)
Economic Security		
Child poverty	Percentage of children in poverty	20%
Food security	Percentage of children in households that report that there is sometimes or often "not enough to eat."	3% (1994)
Housing problems	Percentage of households with children in housing with any of three problems	34% (1993)
Secure parental employment	Percentage of families with at least one parent working full-time full-year	78%
Health insurance	Percentage of children covered by health insurance	86%
Health		
Summary health	Percentage of children in very good or excellent health	79% (1994)
Prenatal care	Percentage of mothers receiving prenatal care	81.2%
Infant mortality	Infant mortality rate per 1000 live births	7.5
Low birthweight	Percentage of newborns with low birthweight	7.3%
Childhood immunization	Percentage of children ages 19 to 35 months with recommended vaccination coverage	74.2%
Activity limitation	Percentage of children ages 5 to 17 with any limitation in activity from chronic conditions	8% (1993-94)
Child mortality	Mortality rate ages 1 to 4 per 100,000 children Mortality rate ages 5 to 14	42.9 (1994) 22.5 (1994)
Adolescent mortality	Mortality rate ages 15 to 19 per 100,000	87.4 (1994)
Teen births	Birth rate (per 1000 women ages 15 to 17)	37.6 (1994)

This excerpt summarizes the 25 indicators and the "special" indicator on child abuse and neglect in *America's Children: Key National Indicators of Well-Being.*

SUMMARY LIST OF INDICATORS

Indicator Name	Description of Indicator	1995 (except where noted)
Behavior and Social Environment		
Cigarette smoking	Percentage of 12th graders who report smoking cigarettes daily	22% (1996)
Alcohol use	Percentage of 12th graders who report consuming alcohol on more than two occasions in the previous 30 days	31%
Substance abuse	Percentage of 12th graders who report having used illicit drugs in the previous 30 days	25% (1996)
Victims of violent crimes	Violent criminal victimization rate of youth ages 12 to 17 (per 1000 youth)	118 (1994)
Education		
Difficulty speaking English	Percentage of children ages 5 to 17 who speak another language at home and who have difficulty speaking English	5%
Family reading	Percentage of children ages 3 to 5 who are read to daily by an adult family member	57% (1996)
Early childhood education	Percentage of children ages 3 to 4 enrolled in nursery school (who have not yet entered kindergarten)	47%
Math and reading proficiency	Average math proficiency of students age 17 Average reading proficiency of students age 17 (on a scale from 0-500)	306 (1994) 288 (1994)
High school completion	Percentage of youth ages 18 to 24 who have completed high school	85%
Detached youth	Percentage of youth ages 16 to 19 who are neither in school nor working	9% (1996)
Higher education	Percentage of high school graduates ages 25 to 29 who have completed a bachelor's degree	31% (1996)
Special Feature		
Child abuse and neglect	Rate of child abuse and neglect (per 1000 children under age 18)	23.1 (1993)

This excerpt summarizes the 25 indicators and the "special" indicator on child abuse and neglect in *America's Children: Key National Indicators of Well-Being.*

Jan Chaiken, of the Justice Department's Bureau of Justice Statistics, suggested releasing a different indicator each month to draw attention to one specific aspect of children's lives at a time.

States and localities need to develop the capacity to collect good and comparable data.

Several participants suggested that the federal government help build state capacity to collect good data on children and families by providing technical assistance. As an example, Brett Brown cited the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's Behavioral Risk Factors Surveillance System, which provides states with models to help develop state systems of measurement.

Also, as federal agencies develop "performance partnerships" with states, federal and state partners need to agree on specific results and identify benchmarks to measure progress. They cannot do this without good data at the state and local level.

Governments at all levels can use the indicators to develop systems of accountability.

Barbara Dyer, of The Public's Work, pointed out that the indicators of child well-being provide a source of cross-agency outcomes data. She recommended that agencies incorporate these indicators as part of the strategic plans and outcomes required under the Government Performance and Results Act (GPRA).[2]

States and localities can use the federal indicators as a frame of reference as they develop their own systems of results-based accountability.

Nongovernmental organizations can play a catalytic role with states and localities.

Membership organizations and associations—including the American Public Welfare Association (APWA), the National Governors Association (NGA), the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO), and the National Council of State Legislators (NCSL)—can use *America's Children* to help their constituents understand the importance of paying attention to results, and to draw attention to the important policy issues that the report raises.

Foundations can support efforts—such as the *Kids Count* report of the Annie E. Casey Foundation—that supplement federal data concerning

the well-being of children and families. Many foundations support initiatives at the state and local levels, and they can learn from federal efforts to measure progress and program effectiveness.

The IEL Policy Exchange has an ongoing interest in accountability for results in federal, state and local programs that affect children and families. The Policy Exchange will continue to partner with the Forum, to raise policy questions relevant to the work of the Forum, and to promote dialogue about how to use and improve the national indicators of child well-being.

IN CONCLUSION

One morning's conversation will not put the condition of children at the top of the national news. But *America's Children* is a good beginning. And it is now an annual report.

It is important to push this dialogue into broader forums, reaching policy makers, the press and the public. And it is important to continually connect these indicators and other data to results that matter to the American people. If we do this, these national indicators of children's well-being can provide the basis for increasing productive policy debates in cities, counties, states and the federal government.

ENDNOTES

1 Porter, K., Primus, W., Rawlings, L., and Rosenbaum, E., *Strengths of the Safety Net: How the EITC, Social Security and other Government Programs Affect Poverty.* Washington, D.C.: Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, March 1998.

2 For more information about Vermont's social indicators, see the World Wide Web site for the Vermont Agency of Human Services at http://www.dsw.state.vt.us/ahs/. This table can be found at http://www.dsw.state.va.us/ahs/98swb10.htm.

3 The Government Performance and Results Act of 1993 (Public Law 103-62) requires federal agencies to develop strategic plans before fiscal year 1998, prepare annual plans setting performance goals beginning with fiscal year 1999, and report annually on actual performance compared to goals beginning in the year 2000. For a more detailed description of the "Results Act," see Appendix II of the IEL Policy Exchange publication, *Steer, Row or Abandon Ship,* by Margaret C. Dunkle, 1997, available on the Internet at http://www.policyexchange.iel.org/.

APPENDIX A
PARTICIPANTS AT THE IEL POLICY EXCHANGE SEMINAR

WHAT ARE THE POLICY IMPLICATIONS OF THE NEW NATIONAL INDICATORS OF CHILD WELL-BEING?

September 22, 1997

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APPENDIX B
RATIONALE FOR THE KEY NATIONAL INDICATORS OF CHILD WELL-BEING

The following excerpts from America's Children: Key National Indicators of Well-Being *describe why each of the 25 indicators identified by the Federal Interagency Forum on Child and Family Statistics is important to understanding the condition of children.*

ECONOMIC SECURITY

Child Poverty

Childhood poverty has both immediate and lasting negative effects. Children in low-income families are worse off than children in more affluent families for many of the indicators presented in this report, including indicators in the areas of economic security, health and education. Research suggests that children who are poor are more likely than children who are not poor to have difficulty in school, to become teen parents and as adults, to earn less and be unemployed more. The child poverty rate provides important information about the percentage of U.S. children whose current life circumstances are hard and whose futures are potentially limited as a result of their family's low income.

In 1995, a family of four with an annual income below $15,569 was below the Federal poverty line.

Food Security

Children's good health and development depend on a diet sufficient in nutrients and calories. Food security is a measure of the extent to which children have access at all times to enough nourishment for an active, healthy life. At a minimum, food security includes the ready availability of sufficient, nutritionally adequate and safe food, and the assurance that families can obtain adequate food without relying on emergency feeding programs or resorting to scavenging, stealing or other desperate efforts to secure food.

Housing Problems

Research suggests that inadequate, crowded or costly housing can pose serious problems to children's physical, psychological or material well-being. The percentage of households with children living in physically inadequate, crowded and/or costly housing provides an estimate of the percentage of children whose well-being may be affected by their family's housing.

Secure Parental Employment

Secure parental employment enables most families to avoid poverty and its attendant risks to children. Employment is also the means by which most families obtain health insurance and thus ensure that their children have access to health care. Research suggests that secure parental employment may also enhance children's psychological well-being and improve family

functioning by reducing stress and other negative effects that unemployment and underemployment can have on parents. One measure of secure parental employment is the percentage of families with children with one or both parents employed full time during a given year.

Health Insurance
Children with health insurance (private or public) are much more likely than children without insurance to have a regular and accessible source of health care. The percentage of children with health insurance coverage is one measure of the extent to which families, at a minimum, can obtain health care for a sick or injured child.

HEALTH

Summary Health
The health of children and youth is basic to their well-being and optimal development. Parental reports of their children's health provide one indication of the overall health status of the nation's children.

Prenatal Care
Women who receive early and consistent prenatal care enhance their likelihood of giving birth to a healthy child. Health care providers therefore recommend that women begin prenatal care as early as possible in the first trimester of their pregnancies. The percentage of women receiving early prenatal care is one measure of the extent to which expectant mothers seek and/or have access to an important preventive health service.

Infant Mortality
Infant mortality is defined as the death of an infant before his or her first birthday. The infant mortality rate is an important measure of the well-being of infants, children and pregnant women because it is associated with a variety of factors, such as maternal health, quality and access to medical care, socioeconomic conditions and public health practices. In the United States, about two-thirds of infant deaths are associated with events surrounding the prenatal period and the delivery. About one-third are associated with conditions or events that arise after the delivery, which often reflect social or environmental factors.

Low-Birthweight
Low-birthweight infants (infants born weighing less than 2,500 grams, or about 5.5 pounds) are at higher risk of death or long-term illness and disability than are infants of normal birthweight. Low-birthweight infants are a diverse group: some are born prematurely, some are full-term but small for their gestational age, and some are both premature and small.

Childhood Immunization
Adequate immunization protects children against several diseases that killed or disabled many children in past decades. Rates of childhood immunization are one measure of the extent to which children are protected from serious preventable illnesses.

According to the immunization schedule approved by the Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices (ACIP), the American Academy of Pediatrics and the American Academy of Family Physicians, U.S. children should receive the following set of immunizations by the age of 19 months: four doses of DTP (diphtheria, tetanus, pertussis), three doses of polio vaccine, three or four doses of HiB (Haemophilus influenzae type b), depending on the specific vaccine given, three doses of Hepatitis B vaccine, and one dose each of MMR (measles, mumps, rubella), and the newly approved varicella (chicken pox) vaccine.

Activity Limitation

Children whose activity is limited by one or more chronic health conditions may need more specialized health care than children without such limitations. Their medical costs are generally higher; they are more likely to miss days from school; and they may require special education services. Persons are not classified as limited in activity unless one or more chronic conditions are reported as the cause. Chronic conditions are those conditions that usually have a duration of more than 3 months, such as asthma, hearing impairment or diabetes.

Child Mortality

Injuries accounted for 44 percent of all deaths of 1- to 4-year olds and 53 percent of all deaths of 5- to 14-year olds in 1994. Injury-related deaths include deaths from motor vehicle crashes, fires and burns, drowning, suffocation and injuries caused by firearms among others. Information about the age and causes of death among children can help prevent injuries and deaths.

Adolescent Mortality

Compared with younger children, adolescents have much higher rates of death from motor vehicle crashes and firearm-related injuries. This difference illustrates the importance of looking separately at mortality rates and causes of death among 15- to 19-year olds. In this age group, injuries from motor vehicles and firearms accounted for 33 and 32 percent respectively of all deaths in 1994, more than any other cause of death.

Teen Births

Research indicates that for a young woman, bearing a child during adolescence is associated with long-term difficulties for herself, her child and society. These consequences are often attributable to the poverty and other adverse socioeconomic circumstances that frequently accompany early childbearing. Compared with babies born to older mothers, babies born to adolescent mothers, particularly young adolescent mothers, are at higher risk of low birthweight and infant mortality. They are more likely to grow up in homes that offer lower levels of emotional support and cognitive stimulation and they are less likely to earn a high school diploma. For the mothers, giving birth during adolescence is associated with limited educational attainment, which in turn can reduce future employment prospects and earnings potential. The birth rate for young women ages 15 to 17 is one measure of adolescent childbearing.

BEHAVIOR AND SOCIAL ENVIRONMENT

Cigarette Smoking

Smoking has serious long-term consequences, including the risk of smoking related diseases, increased health care costs associated with treating these illnesses, and the risk of premature death. Many adults who are today addicted to tobacco began smoking as adolescents, and it is estimated that more than 5 million of today's underage smokers will die of tobacco-related illnesses. These consequences underscore the importance of studying patterns of smoking among adolescents.

Alcohol Use

Alcohol use by adolescents is associated with motor vehicle accidents, injuries and deaths, problems in school and in the workplace, fighting and crime. Regular drinking by adolescents is a risk-taking behavior that can have serious harmful consequences.

Substance Abuse

Research indicates that drug use by adolescents can have immediate as well as long-term health and social consequences. Cocaine use is linked with health problems that range from eating disorders, to disability, to death from heart attacks and strokes. Marijuana use poses both health and cognitive risks, particularly for damage to pulmonary functions as a result of chronic use. Hallucinogens can affect brain chemistry and result in problems with learning new information and retaining knowledge. Possession and/or use of drugs is illegal and can lead to a variety of penalties and a permanent criminal record. As is the case with alcohol use, drug use is a risk-taking behavior by adolescents that has serious negative consequences.

Victims of Violent Crimes

Violence affects the quality of life of young people who experience it, witness it, or feel threatened by it. In addition to the direct physical harm suffered by young victims of violence, research suggests that violence can adversely affect victims' mental health and development, and increase the likelihood that they themselves will commit acts of violence. Youths ages 12 to 17 are more likely than adults to be victims of violent crimes, which include simple and aggravated assaults, rape and robbery (stealing by force or threat of violence).

EDUCATION

Difficulty Speaking English

Children who speak languages other than English at home and who also have difficulty speaking English may face greater challenges progressing in school and in the labor market. They may need special instruction in school to improve their English. Difficulty speaking English is most common among immigrant children and the U.S.-born children of immigrants. In the last three decades, the great majority of immigrants to the United States have come from Asia, Latin America and the Caribbean.

Family Reading
Research indicates that reading to young children promotes language acquisition and correlates with literacy development and later on, with achievement in reading comprehension and overall success in school. The percentage of young children read aloud to daily by a family member is one indicator of how well young children are prepared for school.

Early Childhood Education
Research suggests that participation in an early childhood program prepares all children for success in kindergarten and subsequent grades. It may particularly help ready children from low-income families for elementary school. Like family reading, participation in an early childhood program is a measure of young children's preparation for school.

Math and Reading Proficiency
The extent and content of students' knowledge, as well as their ability to think, learn and communicate, affect their ability to succeed in the labor market, well beyond their earning of a degree or attending school for a given number of years. On average, students with higher test scores will earn more and will be unemployed less often than students with lower test scores. Math and reading achievement test scores are important measures of students' skills in these subject areas, as well as good indicators of achievement overall in school. To measure progress in math and reading, the National Assessment of Educational Progress conducts national assessments of 9-, 13- and 17-year olds.

High School Completion
A high school diploma or its equivalent represents mastery of the basic reading, writing and math skills a person needs to function in modern society. The percentage of 18- to 24-year olds with a high school diploma or an equivalent credential is a measure of the extent to which young adults have completed a basic prerequisite for higher education and many entry-level jobs.

Detached Youth
The term "detached youth" refers to young people ages 16 to 19 who are neither in school nor working. Research suggests that this detachment, particularly if it lasts for several years, increases the risk that a young person, over time, will have lower earnings and a less stable employment history than his or her peers who stayed in school and/or secured jobs. The percentages of youth who are detached measures the proportion of young people who, at a given time, are in circumstances that may seriously limit their future prospects.

Higher Education
Higher education, especially completion of a bachelor's or more advanced degree, generally enhances a person's employment prospects and increases his or her earning potential. The percentage of high school graduates who have completed a degree is one measure of the percentage of young people who have successfully applied for, financed and persisted through a program of higher education.

SPECIAL FEATURE INDICATOR

Child Abuse and Neglect

Research on the effects of child abuse and neglect document both immediate and long-term harm to children. In extreme cases, the physical consequence of abuse and neglect is death; in many other cases, the outcome is serious injury, permanent disability, and/or a range of social, psychological and cognitive problems. The incidence of child abuse and neglect is very difficult to measure. Presented here is the best current estimate, available from a survey conducted in 1993. Despite the importance of consistent monitoring over time, trend data from a survey administered at frequent intervals on this subject are unavailable.

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