

# **Our Kids At Risk:**

## **A Statistical Portrait of Texas Children in Crisis**

### **CONTENTS**

**Introduction**

**Population**

**General Situation of Children Worsening**

**Children in Poverty**

**Teen Pregnancy, Prenatal and Early Infant Care in Texas**

**Children's Access to Health Care in Texas**

**Child Care in Texas**

**Child Abuse in Texas**

**Violence in Schools**

**Education**

**Social Spending in Texas**

**Sources**

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## **Introduction**

Statistics reveal a grim reality for many Texas children. One in four children lives in poverty. 1.4 million children are uninsured—a higher percentage than any other state. Only 1 accredited child care center exists for every 2,637 children. 25% of Texas children are still not immunized by age 2.

Perhaps it should be no surprise that when the Children's Rights Council analyzed the best states to raise a child last year, Texas ranked a dismal 48<sup>th</sup>.

How is it that Texas, a state of such wealth and high hopes for the future, is failing our children so miserably?

Texans know that a brighter tomorrow for our kids means affordable child care, access to health care, a first class public education and safety from violence *today*.

Poll after poll shows that Texans want to secure a better future for our kids. But public policy doesn't match public opinion. Even many so-called 'pro-family' groups oppose family-friendly policies.

How can we turn the tide for Texas kids?

The first step is a broad-based public education campaign to tell our neighbors, co-workers and friends about Texas children in crisis.

We hope that *Our Kids At Risk: A Statistical Portrait of Texas Children in Crisis* will be a valuable resource for you in your efforts to build a better future for all Texas children.

*Samantha Smoot, Executive Director  
Texas Freedom Network Education Fund*

## **Population**

Texas has the second largest population in the nation, second only to California. The state has a relatively young, urbanized population.

According to the Texas State Data Center 1996 estimates, Texas also has the second largest population of children and the largest percentage of children to total population.

	Texas	U.S.
Population, 1999	20.0 million	272.7 million
Percent living in metropolitan areas, 1998	84.7%	80.1%
Percent under age 5, 1998	8.2 %	7.0%
Percent under age 18, 1998	28.5%	25.8%
Pace/Ethnicity (all ages), 1988		
Hispanic	29.7%	11.2%
Non-Hispanic White	55.9%	72.3%
Black	12.3%	12.7%
Other	3.3%	4.8%

Source: U.S. Bureau of the Census  
[www.census.gov/population/www/estimates/popest.html](http://www.census.gov/population/www/estimates/popest.html)

## **General Situation of Children Worsening**

In 1999, Texas ranked 48<sup>th</sup> in the Children's Rights Council's study of top states (including the District of Columbia) to raise a child. Texas' ranking has plummeted from 29<sup>th</sup> in 1995, suggesting that over the past five years general conditions for Texas children have substantially worsened in comparison to other states. Rankings reflect a composite score based on the following ten indicators:

- Percentage of children referred for investigation of alleged abuse and neglect,
- Percentage of children not immunized by age two,
- High school dropout rate,
- Percentage of children in poverty,
- Child death rate,
- Infant mortality rate,
- Percent of mothers not receiving prenatal care in the first trimester,
- Percentage of juvenile arrests,
- Percentage of teen births, and
- Percentage of divorces.

From 1994-1998, 15% of all Texas children under age 18 (827,059 children) lived in "high-risk" families, based on Child Protective Services' five-year averages. This is higher than the national average (14%) and makes Texas 9<sup>th</sup> among states with the highest percentage of high-risk children. –Kids Count Data Book (1999).

The Kids Count study defined high-risk as children living in families with four or more of the following characteristics:

- Child is not living with two parents (31% of Texas children).
- Household head is a high school dropout (29% of Texas parents).
- Family income is below the poverty line (26% of Texas families).
- Child is living with parent(s) who do not have steady, full-time employment (29% of Texas parents).
- Family is receiving welfare benefits (11% of Texas families).
- Child does not have health insurance (24% of Texas children).

Children in "moderate-risk" conditions live in families with two to three of the above factors. In 1996, 26% of all Texas children were at moderate risk, compared to 21% nation-wide. –Texas Kids Count Project (1999).

High-risk children are 26 times more likely to drop out of high school and 160 times more likely to become a teen mother than children with none of these factors. –Texas Kids Count Project (1999).

## **Children in Poverty**

According to the 1997 U.S. Census, the poverty rate for all persons in the United States in 1996 was 16.6%. The average poverty rate over this time for children under 6 was 30.3%. –*Map and Track*. National Center for Children in Poverty (1998).

In 1995, Texas ranked 5<sup>th</sup> in percentage of children in poverty, according to U.S. Census calculations from the Children's Defense Fund. According to this data, 26.9% of all Texas children were living in poverty, compared to 20.8% of the national population of children. –Children's Defense Fund (1999).

According to the national Kids Count study, in 1985, 23% of Texas children lived in poverty, compared to 21% nationwide. In 1996, while the percentage of children in poverty in the U.S. decreased slightly (20%), the percentage of Texas children increased to 25%. – Kids Count Data Book (1999).

Texas ranked second in the nation in the number of children living in poverty, with more than 1.5 million children in poverty, according to a 1999 report by Texas District Judge Scott McCown. –*Houston Chronicle*, 1/31/99.

In 1998, 11.7% of all children in Texas lived in “extreme poverty,” that is, in families with incomes below 50% of the poverty level, compared to 9% nationwide. At the same time, 44.2% lived in near-poverty (up to 185% of the federal poverty level). –Texas Kids Count Project (1999).

The Children's Defense Fund calculated that according to the 1990 U.S. Census, 18% of all poor Texas children were white, 39.3% were Black, and 40.2% were Hispanic (of any race). In 1998, the Center for Public Policy Priorities estimated that Texas Hispanics had a 25.5% poverty rate, compared to 23.3% for Texas Blacks and 6.9% for Anglos/Others. –Center for Public Policy Priorities (1999).

According to analysts from the Texas Kids Count Project, policy changes such as reductions in food stamps and welfare reform threaten to push even more children into poverty as mothers who have reached their time limits for benefits no longer have formal assistance. –Texas Kids Count Project (1998).

## **Teen Pregnancy, Prenatal and Early Infant Care in Texas**

21.5% of Texas mothers in 1997 did not receive prenatal care in the first trimester of pregnancy. –National Vital Statistics (1998).

While the actual percentage of Texas mothers not receiving any prenatal care at all fell from 8.9% in 1992 to 5.9% in 1994, the rate of babies born with low birth-weight (babies weighing less than 2,500 grams at birth) increased from 6.8% in 1985 to 7.2% in 1996. –Texas Kids Count Project (1999).

The teen birth rate in Texas was 74 births per 1,000 among 15-19 year-olds in Texas compared to 54 per 1,000 nationally. Only three states have higher birth rates among teens than Texas. The US still has the highest teen birth rate among developed nations. – Kids Count Data Book (1999).

According to the national 1999 Kids Count Data Book, Texas ranks among the 10 worst states in the nation on almost all factors related to teen pregnancy including the following:

- Teen birth rate 47th
- Percent change in teen birth rate 1991-6 44th
- Birth rate for younger teens 48th
- Percent teen births that are repeat births 44th
- Teen births as a percent of all births 40<sup>th</sup>
- Percent of births to teens receiving late or no prenatal care 44<sup>th</sup>

In 1997, only 75% of all Texas 2-year-olds were immunized, compared to 78% across the country. Texas ranked 39 in states immunizing by age 2. –Kids Count Data Book (1999).

## **Children's Access to Health Care in Texas**

From 1995 to 1997, the U.S. Census Bureau data showed that on average about 11 million children across the nation were without health insurance—and over 10% of those children lived in Texas. —*Deep in the Heart of Texas*. Families USA (1999).

In 1997, 24.5% of Texas children (an estimated 1,497,000) were without health insurance, compared to 15.3% of children nationwide. Texas had the highest rate of uninsured children in the country, alternating with Arizona at 25% uninsured), and the second highest number of uninsured children in the country (second only to California with 1.6 million uninsured). —*Deep in the Heart of Texas*. Families USA (1999).

In 1995, 36% of children in low-income, working families had no health insurance. —*Kids Count Data Book* (1999).

More than 500,000 Texas children in poverty are uninsured, despite the fact that children in poverty are eligible for Texas Medicaid. The Center for Public Policy Priorities attributes this in part to lack of outreach, public misconception of welfare law changes, ‘work-first’ policies of state agencies, and “unnecessary hassles” in Medicaid applications. —Center for Public Policy Priorities (1999).

In 1996, 24% of Texas children were covered by Medicaid or other public-sector health insurance, while 25% of the nation’s children were covered by the same. —*Kids Count Data Book* (1999).

On average from 1995-1997, only half (51%) of Texas children were covered by employment-based insurance, although six out of ten (63%) of those uninsured come from families whose head of households is employed full-time throughout the year. Nine of ten (88%) come from families where the head of household works all or part of the year. —*Deep in the Heart of Texas*. Families USA (1999).

A 1998 study by the Texas Department of Human Services reported that 60% of families who left welfare for work were not offered health insurance by their employers. —*Deep in the Heart of Texas*. Families USA (1999).

Almost two-thirds of uninsured children in Texas live in two-parent families (64%). Those who do not live in two-parent homes are more like to be uninsured (30% uninsured compared to 22% respectively). —*Deep in the Heart of Texas*. Families USA (1999).

Hispanic children make up the majority (56%) of uninsured children in Texas, white non-Hispanic children accounted for 28% of uninsured children, black children accounted for 14% and 2% were other children, based on averages from

1995-1997. Nine out of ten uninsured Texas children are U.S. citizens. –*Deep in the Heart of Texas*. Families USA (1999).

From 1996 to 1999 the Texas Health and Human Services Commission quarterly caseload reflects a 20.9% decline in the Medicaid rolls.

Two years after the passage of the Children's Health Insurance Program (1997), fewer children in Texas were enrolled in federally funded children's health programs than were enrolled in Medicaid alone in 1996. According to the study conducted by Families USA called *One Step Forward, One Step Back*, CHIP enrollment is increasing significantly, but gains have been more than offset by reductions in children's Medicaid coverage due to welfare reform. –Families USA (1999).

In Texas and four of the other states studied, there was a net decline in the number of children covered by Medicaid and CHIP from 1996-1999. Texas is one of the states with the largest numerical and percentage drop with a decrease of 193,000 children, or 14.2% --*One Step Forward, One Step Back*. Families USA (1999).

More specifically, Texas had 1,360,304 children enrolled in Medicaid in 1996. In 1999, that number decreased by 277,953. Texas enrolled 34,553 children in CHIP expansions, accounting for the overall declines above. --*One Step Forward, One Step Back*. Families USA (1999).

Texas has expanded Medicaid to 100 percent poverty for older teens as required by federal law. The general expansion of CHIP to 200 percent poverty recently approved by the Texas Legislature will take effect this year and is expected to make an additional 470,000 eligible for coverage. --*One Step Forward, One Step Back*. Families USA (1999).



## **Child Care in Texas**

In 1998, about two-thirds of all children under age 6 in Texas (63%) were living with working parents, 56% of children ages 6-12 were living with working parents, and 24% of children under age 13 were living in low-income families with working parents –Texas Kids Count Project (1998).

Of Texas children living in poverty, 48.5% are from families where at least one family member works full-time (more than 630,000 children). –Texas Kids Count Project (1998).

In 1997, there were 317,000 families receiving Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF). Unless legally exempt, TANF recipients are required to participate in an employment services program. Of these TANF families, women head 96% and 63% have children under age 6. –Kids Count Data Book (1999).

In Texas, the median hourly wage for child care workers is \$5.53, well below the median wage for all workers (\$9.42). –Texas Kids Count Project (1998).

1996 study by Working Mother Magazine reported that 2.8 million Texas children under age 18 live in families where both parents or their single parent works. The same study reported that for every 2,637 children in Texas, there is one child care center. For every 10,424 children, there is one accredited family child care home. –National Association for the Education of Young Children and the National Association for Family Care Standards.

In 1994 there were 56,400 children in state subsidized child care, a rate of 14.4 per 1,000 children age 0 to 12. In the same year, there were 51,521 children in Head Start programs, or 5.5% of all 3 to 5 year olds. –Texas Kids Count (1998).

A 1999 study by the Texas Association of Child Care Resources and Referral Agencies showed that more than 1 million children in child care (more than half of those in child care) are in unregulated facilities. –*Dallas Morning News*, 10/2/99.

## Child Abuse in Texas

Texas Child Protective Services reported there were 900,000 children at risk of child abuse or neglect in 1998. –Petition on Behalf of the Forsaken Children of Texas (1999).

While the Child Welfare League of America recommends that a CPS investigator have a caseload of no more than 12 children, Texas CPS investigators may have double that caseload. For example, Travis County investigators carry at least 22 cases each. –Petition on Behalf of the Forsaken Children of Texas (1999).

In 1997, 162,974 children (of a total 5,577,1550) were the subjects of a Child Protective Services report alleging maltreatment. The rate of children who were reported was 29.2 children per 1,000 children in the population, a slight increase from the rate of 27.4/1,000 in 1990, but still shockingly below the national rate of reporting, 42.0/1,000 children. –U.S. Dept. of Health and Human Services study, *Child Maltreatment 1997: Reports from the States to the National Child Abuse and Neglect Data System* (1999).

Not only does Texas underreport incidences of child abuse compared to other states, but Texas is falling further behind over time. Over the last years for which data is available (1993-97), the gap is widening between both the national and Texas reporting rates and between the national and Texas rates of confirmed victims. –Petition on Behalf of the Forsaken Children of Texas (1999).

According to the 1997 Statewide Child Survey, one in four Texans reported that they had witnessed an incident of child abuse or neglect in the past year. -Petition on Behalf of the Forsaken Children of Texas (1999).

In 1994, there were 16,904 children in family violence shelters, a rate of 3.2 per 1,000 children age 0 to 17. That same year, there were 16,843 children in foster care, also a rate of 3.2 per 1,000 children age 0 to 17. –Texas Kids Count Project (1998).

Consistent with national data, almost half (48.6%) of known child victims in Texas suffered neglect (22,192 children) in 1997, a quarter suffered physical abuse (11,839 children) and 14.1% suffered sexual abuse. Victims of psychological abuse, medical neglect and “other” types of maltreatment accounted for less than 5 percent each. –U.S. Health and Human Services (1999).

In Texas, infants under a year old were the largest single-year age group of maltreatment victims at 9.9% in 1997. At the national level infants made up 7% of child victims. –U.S. Health and Human Services (1999).

## **Violence in Schools**

In 1996, Texas saw a teen death rate of 68 teen deaths by accident, homicide or suicide per 100,000 teens ages 15-19. This is a drop from the rate of 80 deaths per 100,000 teens in 1985, but is significantly higher than the national rates for both years (63 and 62 respectively). –Kids Count Data Book (1999).

During the 1997-1998 school year, Texas public schools saw more than 63,000 incidences of assault and more than 8,000 weapons were confiscated. The number of assaults against both students and teachers/staff has been increasing since 1997, reversing a trend of low assault rates from 1994-97. –Texas Kids Count Project (1999).

While the rate of juvenile violent crime arrests has been on the decline since 1994 (consistent with national trends), violence in Texas schools continues to be a concern. A Texas A&M University study (1998) reported that 22% of Texas students surveyed carried a weapon to school, compared to 18.3% nationally. The study also showed that about 5% of respondents had been threatened with a weapon while at school, 3.5% currently belonged to a gang, 10% were former gang members, 13% had been in a physical fight at school, and 4% said they had missed at least one school day out of fear. –Texas Kids Count Project (1999).

Texas school violence is concentrated in the state's more populous counties. Five large urban counties were the scenes for close to half of all violent activity. Bexar, Dallas, El Paso, Harris, and Tarrant counties reported:

- 44 percent of all incidents of gang violence;
- 42 percent of assaults against students;
- 44 percent of assaults against teachers and staff; and
- 53 percent of all weapons confiscations.

–Texas Kids Count Project (1999).

According to a Texas Education Agency study, more than 60% of Texas public school teachers surveyed said that threats of violence were a concern, and 56% said they knew of assaults on students. –Texas Kids Count Project (1999).

From 1996 to 1997, the number of children firearm deaths increased by 12%, compared to an 8% decrease in the nation during the same time. The 1999 study also showed a 8% increase in the number of child firearm suicides. Texas was one of only 14 states across the country to see increases in this period. –Children's Defense Fund (1999).

## **Education**

Texas' average per pupil expenditure for FY1996 was \$484 less per student (\$5,168) than the national average per pupil expenditure (\$5,652.). –Texas Kids Count Project (1998).

Only 19 states spend less per student than Texas. –Texas Kids Count Project (1998).

Equal access to school funding continues to be a challenge in Texas. Although most districts spent between \$4,000 and \$8,000 per student in FY 1996, the total range extends from \$3,643 per student to \$20,859 per student. Four Texas counties spent more than \$10,000 per student and four counties spent less than \$4,000 per student. –Texas Kids Count Project (1998).

Between 1994 and 1998, TAAS math scores increased by 39 percent, reading by 14 percent, and writing by 11 percent. The greatest improvements have been in African American students' math scores, jumping from 55% passing in 1996 to 64 percent passing in 1997. Between 1994 and 1998, the percentage of students passing the 10th grade TAAS, thus becoming eligible to graduate, increased from 52 percent to 72 percent. –Texas Kids Count Project (1998).

While TAAS scores are improving statewide, the Texas Kids Count Project shows that many children are still not passing the tests and more still are not mastering the subjects tested. Only 60.2% percent of economically disadvantaged students (those living at or below 185% of the poverty line) passed TAAS in 1997—and 48% of Texas students are considered economically disadvantaged. –Texas Kids Count Project (1998).

13% of Texas teens (age 16-19) dropped out of high school in 1996. This is a drop from 16% in 1985, but is still higher than the national dropout rate in 1996 of 10%. –Texas Kids Count Project (1998).

Despite the recognized importance of early childhood education, less than a quarter of low-income children were enrolled in preschool in 1993, compared to over half of children from high-income families. –Texas Kids Count Project (1998).

147,313 students (or 43%) of Texas students who entered high school in the 1993-94 school year did not graduate in what would have been their senior year, 1996-97. The 1998-99 attrition rate for all Texas public schools was of 42%. – Intercultural Development and Research Association, *Missing: Texas Youth—Dropout and Attrition in Texas Public Schools* (1999).

A Texas state audit in 1996 estimated that actual dropout rate in 1994 was more than *double* that which was reported by TEA in the same year. The 1998 audit continued to recommend that TEA address the underreporting of dropouts. –IDRA, *Missing: Texas Youth—Dropout and Attrition in Texas Public Schools* (1999).

Data from the U.S. Bureau of the Census suggests that Texas' dropout rate is one of the highest in the nation—ranked 47<sup>th</sup> place in 1994. –IDRA, *Missing: Texas Youth—Dropout and Attrition in Texas Public Schools* (1999).

Education Week's *Quality Counts '98* State Report Card gave Texas public schools a C+ in adequate resources, a C+ in quality of teaching, a C in equity (relative inequality in spending per student among districts, 12.1 % in 1994) and a C- in resource allocation (percent of annual expenditures spent on instruction, 61.2 in 1995). –Education Week, *Quality Counts '98* (1998).

In 1995-96, Texas teachers' salaries averaged \$31,400 a year—placing Texas in 36<sup>th</sup> place nationally for teacher pay. Adjusting for cost of living, Texas teachers received \$35,610 in 1996, compared to 37,643 across the nation. –Education Week, *Quality Counts '98* (1998).

## **Social Spending in Texas**

Texas' spending on social services is low relative to the state's high poverty rates. Similarly, while Texas' budget shows "heavy reliance" on federal funds, it generally fails to take advantage of a large portion of these funds—even when it is eligible for them. –Center for Public Policy Priorities (1999).

In 1997, Texas state government spent \$2,270 in per capita general spending, compared to the \$2,951 per capita national average. When local government spending is factored in, the gap between Texas and the nation as a whole becomes even more pronounced. In 1996, Texas per capita direct general spending by state and local government was \$3,783, while the national average was considerably higher—\$4,483 per capita. –State Government Finance Data [www.census.gov/govs/www/state.html](http://www.census.gov/govs/www/state.html) and State and Local Government Finance Estimates [www.census.gov/govs/estimate.html](http://www.census.gov/govs/estimate.html).

In 1996, Texas state and local government spent far less than national averages on welfare, welfare cash assistance and public health—although the percentage of Texas poor did not diminish. While Texas' welfare spending was only \$536 per capita, national spending reached \$729 on average. Likewise, Texas' welfare cash assistance spending was only \$64 per capita, while national averages were \$102. Finally, Texas spent only \$93 per capita on public health programs, while the nation spent \$151 on average. –State Government Finance Data [www.census.gov/govs/www/state.html](http://www.census.gov/govs/www/state.html) and State and Local Government Finance Estimates [www.census.gov/govs/estimate.html](http://www.census.gov/govs/estimate.html).

According to the Center for Public Policy Priorities, "in spite of high levels of demonstrated need, Texas offers among the lowest levels of cash assistance to needy families. Its food stamp program reaches relatively few eligible households compared to other states and early evidence on those leaving the welfare rolls suggests that many remain poor." –Center for Public Policy Priorities (1999).

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