



**KIDS
COUNT
ON US**

Make Data Count for Kids

Contents

Overview:	
Using Data to Make Better Decisions	1
Introduction:	
Numbers Add Value to Our Daily Lives	2
Monitoring Change To Improve Outcomes for Children and Families	3
Finding and Accessing Data	4
Healthy Children	5
Children Ready for School	6
Children Succeeding in School	7
Stable, Self-Sufficient Families	8
Strong Communities	9
Create a Context – Using and Interpreting Complex Data	10
Challenges and Limitations	13
Let Data Drive Your Narrative	14



Overview

Using Data to Make Better Decisions

KIDS COUNT, a 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. KIDS COUNT seeks to enrich and inform local, state, and national discussions concerning ways to secure a brighter future for all children. By providing high-quality data and analyses, KIDS COUNT raises the visibility of children's issues through a nonpartisan, evidence-based lens.

Georgia Family Connection Partnership (GaFCP) is the state grantee designated to manage the Georgia KIDS COUNT project. Georgia KIDS COUNT compiles current data from reliable sources on child well-being in each of our state's 159 counties, and reports year-to-year data highlights, trends, and disparities on the well-being of children, families, and communities throughout Georgia.

Our vision is that all children in Georgia will be healthy, ready to start school and perform better when they get there, that all families will be stable and self-sufficient, and that communities will be strong.

The KIDS COUNT Data Center uses the best available data to measure the educational, social, economic, and physical well-being of children, families, and communities. The Data Center tracks and reports data at the urban city, school district, county, congressional district, and national levels.

Publications, Web-based tools, and mobile phone applications allow you to customize data for your particular needs.



Introduction

Numbers Add Value to Our Daily Lives

How much will it cost to fill my tank? How much can I pay toward my utility bill this month and still have enough to buy baby food? Can he kick a 45-yard field goal into this wind? Our lives revolve around numbers.

We use numbers, percentages, valuations, ratios, and other metrics to communicate facts, describe and depict the world around us, and help us interpret differences in our daily lives, both at work and at play.

Without numbers we have no way to quantify and evaluate, and no way to compare and measure. By tracking numbers over time, we can see whether things are getting better or worse, or staying the same.

This guide to using data is a resource to help you understand and use Georgia KIDS COUNT indicators of child, family, and community well-being. Staying informed about trends, relationships, differences, and patterns will help you better identify and talk about the challenges facing Georgia's children and families – but more importantly – about every opportunity available to help them improve their lives and contribute to their communities.



Monitoring Change To Improve Outcomes for Children and Families

Here in Georgia we track indicators of child and family well-being in five areas that serve as the framework for improving results. Keeping an eye on these indicators helps us to better understand the impact of policy decisions, and economic and demographic changes. Monitoring change in an indicator at the local level can help determine the effectiveness of strategies or programs aimed at improving child, family, and community well-being.

How We Select Indicators

The Georgia General Assembly charged key state and community partners in 1995 to select vital measures designed to achieve positive results for children. The original list of Georgia KIDS COUNT

Five Criteria for Inclusion

- 1. Reliable state data source**
- 2. Consistent data collection (at least annually)**
- 3. Available at county level**
- 4. Construct validity (accurately measures what it is supposed to measure)**
- 5. Face validity (makes common sense)**

Five Result Areas

- 1. Healthy children**
- 2. Children ready for school**
- 3. Children succeeding in school**
- 4. Stable, self-sufficient families**
- 5. Strong communities**

indicators has since gone through several stringent reviews and revisions. Each indicator committee, composed of a diverse group of stakeholders, guides the review and adoption process, and examines the viability of current and emerging indicators against five criteria for inclusion before finalizing a list of indicators.

The indicators we track best represent key concerns within our five result areas and among related indicators available on our partners' websites. Related indicators do not need to be replicated unless these data serve as the best markers of progress.

Finding and Accessing Data

Georgia KIDS COUNT works with state partners who analyze and manage data collected from across the state. After our partners release the data, we gather the information into one central location. This data repository is located at gafcp.org/kidscount. We update the site regularly throughout the year.

Our State Partners

- Georgia Department of Community Health
- Georgia Department of Early Care and Learning
- Division of Family and Children Services, Georgia Department of Human Services
- Georgia Department of Education
- Georgia Department of Labor
- Vital Records, Office of Health Information and Policy, Department of Public Health
- Georgia Bureau of Investigation
- Governor's Office of Student Achievement
- Georgia Secretary of State
- Technical College System of Georgia

Note: We also download data from the U.S. Census.



Healthy Children

Why Healthy Children Matter

Healthy births begin with healthy mothers. Women who receive appropriate and adequate care, nutrition, and support services before and during pregnancy are more likely to deliver a healthy, normal-weight infant.

Infants born to teen mothers are at increased risk of lower birthweight, infant mortality, greater health and behavioral problems, child abuse and neglect, and ultimately diminished education and economic outcomes.

As children grow and mature, access to medical and dental care, and other support services promote healthy development.

Risky behaviors often lead to serious diseases, accidents, and untimely deaths. Unprotected sexual intercourse and multiple sex partners place young people at risk for HIV infection, sexually transmitted diseases (STDs), and pregnancy. And even with stricter driving regulations and laws, motor vehicle accidents are the leading cause of teen deaths.

Healthy Children Indicators

- Low-birthweight babies*
- Infant mortality (per 1,000)
- Children receiving public health insurance
- Children without health insurance*
- Children, birth through 4, enrolled in the WIC program
- Child deaths, ages 1-14 (per 100,000)*
- Teen pregnancies, ages 15-17 (per 1,000)
- Teen births, ages 15-19 (per 1,000)*
- Teen mothers giving birth to another child before age 20 (ages 15-19)
- STD incidence for youth, ages 15-19 (per 1,000)
- Teen deaths, ages 15-19 (per 100,000)*
 - ◆ By homicide, suicide, and accident, ages 15-19 (per 100,000)*

**National KIDS COUNT indicators*



Children Ready for School

Why Children Ready for School Matter

Parents and caregivers play a vital role in preparing children for school. From birth through age 5, young children begin to develop the physical, emotional, social, and cognitive skills they will need for the rest of their lives.

Early experiences and interactions with caregivers determine whether a young child's developing brain architecture provides a strong or weak foundation for all future learning, behavior, and health.

Young children who receive proper care and nutrition, and engage in enriching experiences every day, are better prepared to develop language and problem-solving skills, form positive relationships, and cultivate other fundamental abilities.

Children Ready for School Indicators

- Children enrolled in the Georgia Pre-K program
- Children from low-income families enrolled in the Georgia Pre-K program
- Children ages 3 to 4 not attending pre-school*
- Child-care settings that have national or Georgia accreditation
- Babies born to mothers with less than 12 years of education

**National KIDS COUNT indicators*



Children Succeeding in School

Why Children Succeeding in School Matter

Students who do well in school early in life build a stronger educational foundation for future success.

A student must be present in school to learn. Health, financial, or transportation issues can pose barriers to attendance. Chronic absenteeism is often linked to low academic performance, substance abuse, teen pregnancy, and juvenile delinquency.

High-school completion is one benchmark for school success. A high-school graduate has higher earning potential than a worker without a diploma. An educated workforce has a positive impact on productivity and the local and state economy over time. Education indicators have far-reaching implications for a student's success in the workforce and access to higher education.

Children Succeeding in School Indicators

- Children absent more than 15 days from school
- 3rd-grade students meeting or exceeding state standards on promotional CRCT in Reading
- 5th-grade students meeting or exceeding state standards on promotional CRCTs in:
 - ◆ Reading
 - ◆ Math
- 8th-grade students meeting or exceeding state standards on promotional CRCTs in:
 - ◆ Reading
 - ◆ Math
- Students who graduate from high school on time*
- Teens who are high-school dropouts, ages 16-19
- Teens ages 16-19 not in school and not working*
- High-school graduates eligible for the HOPE Scholarship

**National KIDS COUNT indicators*



Stable, Self-Sufficient Families

Why Stable, Self-Sufficient Families Matter

A stable family structure is critical to the future success of children and the strength of any community.

Low-income and single-parent families face extraordinary challenges in providing the basic necessities of life for their children. Children whose families struggle financially are at higher risk of living in poverty, of experiencing child abuse and neglect, and often lack access to health care and benefits. Under-education, under-employment, unemployment, and the need for public assistance also threaten family independence.

A community's development, along with its sustainable, long-term economic strength, depends on stable families with opportunities to become self-sufficient.

Stable, Self-Sufficient Families Indicators

- First birth to mother age 20 or older with 12 years of education
- Children living in single-parent families*
- Substantiated incidents of child abuse and/or neglect (per 1,000):
 - ◆ Abuse
 - ◆ Neglect
- Children leaving foster care who are reunified with their families or placed with a relative within 12 months of entering foster care
- Households with children receiving Food Stamps
- Children living in families where no parent has full-time, year-round employment*

**National KIDS COUNT indicators*



Strong Communities

Why Strong Communities Matter

A thriving economy, diverse job opportunities and industries, affordable housing, safe neighborhoods, and quality health care and schools are signs of a vibrant, growing community.

When families struggle financially, the economy suffers, and the community declines and confronts unemployment, crime, teenage pregnancy, inadequate education, and limited access to human-services programs.

A strong community, however, establishes an environment that cultivates healthy children, school readiness and success, and stable, self-sufficient families. Economic development, job creation, and sound policies that promote self-sufficiency play a role in creating neighborhoods where our children and families can thrive and learn.

Strong Communities Indicators

- Adult educational attainment
 - ◆ High-school graduate or higher
 - ◆ Bachelor's degree or higher
- GED graduates
- Unemployment
- Poverty status
 - ◆ Children living in poverty*
 - ◆ Students eligible to receive free or reduced-price meals
 - ◆ Families, with children, with annual incomes less than 150% of the federal poverty threshold
 - ◆ Children living in high-poverty areas*
- Homeownership
- Crime rate, age 17 or older (per 1,000)
 - ◆ Violent crime
 - ◆ Other crimes (burglaries, etc.)
- Voter participation

**National KIDS COUNT indicators*

Create a Context – Using and Interpreting Complex Data

Think of data as a jigsaw puzzle. After you interlock all the pieces, the hidden picture emerges to tell the story. Bits of data that you connect in an appropriate way shape the evidence that helps you describe a situation, understand disparities between groups of people or places, uncover a trend over time, illuminate geographic patterns, and make the case for needed services.

Start with a Question

What do you want to know? Your question will help guide you to the type of data you need. Understanding how to make comparisons, interpret changes in data over time, calculate rates, or select the right data set are crucial for putting together the pieces that fit.

Calculations to Help You Understand the Data

As you assemble the data to tell a story, you need a way to gauge the impact of the data to understand the magnitude of differences or changes. Simple calculations help you understand the data.

Rate

A rate is the relationship between two amounts or numbers. An example is miles per gallon. You drove your car 150 miles and used 10 gallons of gas:

$$150 \text{ miles} \div 10 \text{ gallons} = 15 \text{ miles per gallon}$$

Calculating a rate helps you better understand patterns in data. It is useful to

Guiding Questions	Where To Look	Examples
How do I see changes in data over time?	Trend data (multiple years of the same data set)	The teen death rate has declined from its highest rate in 1996.
Do different groups of people or places have different outcomes?	Data groupings (breakdowns by age, race/ethnicity, geography, income status)	Teen birth rate for white and black non-Hispanic girls ages 15 to 19 declined from 1994 to 2006, while rates for Hispanic girls rose dramatically.
How do I describe a specific group of people?	Data sets that tell the story about different characteristics of a set population	For Georgia teenagers, look at: <ul style="list-style-type: none">– Vital statistics (death rates, accident rates, teen births);– Education data (high-school graduation, school absenteeism); or– Census data (teens not working and not in school).

calculate a rate by time periods (month, day, year); by race/ethnicity; by subgroup (disabilities, income level); or other groupings. Rates are often calculated on group sizes of 100, 1,000, or 100,000. Health data, in particular, is often presented as per 1,000 or per 100,000.

To calculate a rate, divide the number of events (numerator) by the population size (denominator), then multiply by the group or “per” number.

Examples

What is the teen birth rate in Georgia?

In 2010, there were 14,285 births to teens ages 15 to 19. There were 347,065 girls ages 15 to 19 in 2010.

$$14,285 \text{ births} \div 347,065 \text{ girls} = 0.04115 \times 1,000 = 41.2 \text{ per 1,000}$$

How many babies per day are born to Georgia teens?

In 2010, there were 14,285 births to teens ages 15 to 19.

$$14,285 \text{ births} \div 365 \text{ days in a year} = 39.1 \text{ births per day.}$$

Percent

A percent is the amount per one hundred. To calculate a percent, divide the number of events (numerator) by the population size (denominator) and multiply by 100.

Examples

How many babies are born low birthweight in Georgia?

In 2010, there were 13,052 births classified as low birthweight (5.5 pounds or less). There were 133,668 total births.

$$13,052 \text{ births} \div 133,668 \text{ total births} = 0.0976 \times 100 = 9.8\%$$

What is the child poverty rate for Fulton County?

In 2010, there were 51,993 children in poverty in Fulton County. There were 217,563 children ages 0 to 17 in Fulton County.

$$51,993 \text{ children in poverty} \div 217,563 \text{ children} = 0.2389 \times 100 = 23.9\%$$

Rate of Change

Knowing how much or how little things have improved or worsened helps you to understand and interpret patterns in data.

To calculate a rate of change:

$$[(\text{value 1} - \text{value 2}) \div \text{value 2}] \times 100$$

Example

Has the teen birth rate increased or decreased over the past five years in Georgia?

The teen birth rate was 41.2 per 1,000 in 2010. In 2006, the rate was 54.1 per 1,000.

$$(41.2 - 54.1) \div 54.1 = -0.238 \\ -0.238 \times 100 = -23.8\%$$

The teen birth rate improved by 23.8% from 2006 to 2010.

Mean, Median, and Range

The mean is the “average,” which is useful for comparisons; median value is the “middle” of a set of numbers; and range helps you understand the magnitude of differences in a set of numbers.

To identify patterns of disparities for an indicator, compare the value for a county or a subgroup of people to the mean. For example, compare the high-school graduation rate for your county to the mean rate for the state; compare the high-school graduation rate for economically disadvantaged students in your county to the high-school graduation rate for all students in your county.

To calculate a mean, add a set of numbers and divide the sum by how many numbers you have. For example:

$$56 + 24 + 188 + 92 + 3 = 363 \div 5 = 72.6$$

A median is often used in reporting income data, such as household income. To determine the median, rank order the set of numbers (3, 24, 56, 92, 188) and find the one in the middle. The median is 56.

When determining the best or worst in a series of data, calculate the range and rank order values. To determine the range, subtract the smallest value from the largest value. The range for the data set in the previous example is 185 (188 - 3).

Margin of Error

In using KIDS COUNT data, the margin of error is significant when looking at survey data such as the U.S. Census or the National Survey of Children’s Health. The margin of error, published in most Census tables, is a statistic that describes the amount of random sampling error in a survey. The larger the sample size, the smaller the margin of error. If the margin of error is large in comparison to the estimated value, then you should use the results with caution.

This table shows Census data for the number of Georgians age 25 or older who have a high-school diploma or GED. The impact of sample size is in the margin of error – the larger the population sampled, the smaller the margin of error.

Location	Population	Percent with HS Diploma or GED	Margin of Error	Possible Range Due to Margin of Error
Georgia	9,815,210	82.9%	0.1	82.8 – 83.0
Baker County	3,451	76.9%	7.5	69.4 – 84.4
Bibb County	155,447	80.6%	1	79.6 – 81.6

Challenges and Limitations

Time Lag

The reporting of data lags considerably behind real time and varies depending on the data collection agency. Census data is generally released a year after collection. The release of vital statistics often lags one to two years behind data collection. Unemployment figures are generally current to real time.

Small Numbers

When the number of events or the sample size is too small, data will be suppressed, or not reported. For Georgia KIDS COUNT, a rate is not calculated if fewer than five events occurred.

Consistency in Data Definition

Georgia KIDS COUNT always publishes data definitions, but be cautious when comparing data from one source to another. For example, poverty data is published by the U.S. Census Bureau in Small Area Income and Poverty Estimates (SAIPE) and in the American Community Survey (ACS). Those estimates are not comparable to each other because different methods were used to derive the poverty estimate.

With education data, pay attention to when standards change. For example, do not compare Criterion-Referenced Competency Tests (CRCT) data from the previous Quality Core Curriculum (QCC) standards to Georgia Performance Standards (GPS) scores or to the current Common Core standards. The definition of high-school graduation changed in 2011, and older data should not be compared to newer data.



Let Data Drive Your Narrative

Visual Presentation

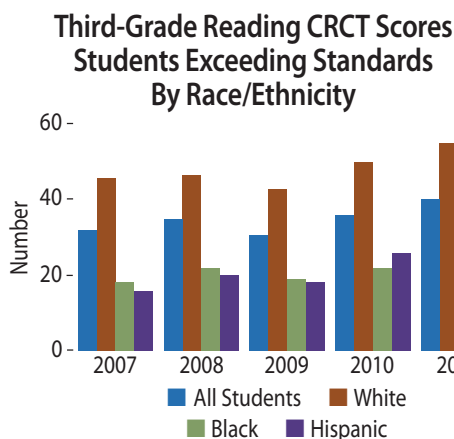
Presenting data visually allows people to see the information you're trying to convey. Charts, colors, pictures, and symbols open up possibilities for looking at data in different ways and for illuminating patterns and relationships. Charting or graphing complex data helps the people you are attempting to reach to quickly grasp relationships among disparate pieces of data. A simple graph can tell a compelling story.

For all visual presentations:

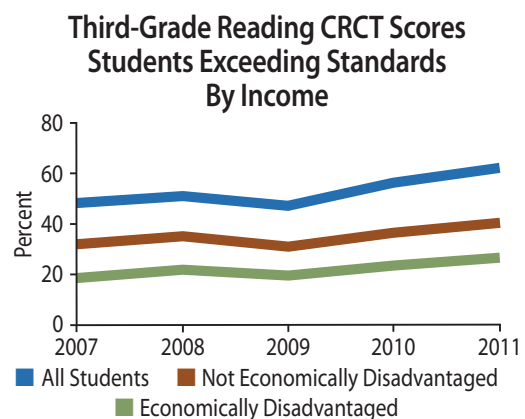
- use clear, crisp fonts;
- keep graphs uncluttered by using only crucial information;
- use shading or patterns to easily distinguish differences in groups;
- use titles; and
- always label the x and y axes.

There are three basic charts that best visually convey information.

Bar graphs are good for comparing groups of data.

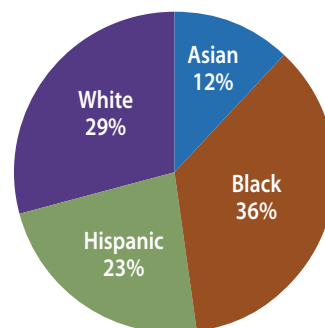


Line graphs are best for displaying trend data, or data over time.



Pie charts are best for displaying proportional data, like population or income levels.

Race/Ethnicity of Magnolia County – 2011



Social Math

Social math simplifies numbers by making them more interesting and understandable. By presenting numbers in a real-life context, readers can better relate to the numbers. Social math gives readers a mental image of the proportion or relative size of an issue.

Example

The 2010 high-school graduation rate for Georgia was 80.8 percent, with 21,803 youth not finishing high school on time.

Better

The 21,803 Georgia youth who did not graduate from high school on time in 2010 could fill 419 school buses.

Example

The child poverty rate for Georgia was 25 percent in 2010, with 613,581 children living in poverty.

Better

One in four Georgia children lives in poverty. The number of children in Georgia living in poverty is larger than the combined population of the cities of Augusta, Columbus, Macon, and Savannah.

Framing Your Story

Simply putting data about child and family issues in front of people is never enough. Our prior knowledge, experience, and expectations shape our viewpoint. Over time we develop habits of thought and expectation – often without having access to all the available information – and we configure incoming information to conform to this frame. Patterns of learned or habitual thinking can persist even in the face of evidence to the contrary. We must always provide a complete picture.

Collaborative work involves getting local leaders and decision-makers to think about child and family issues in a way that motivates them to help resolve the issues through public policies and strategies that support personal actions. We attempt to get an issue on the public agenda through news stories, presentations, and framing the issue in such a way that we can enrich local, state and national discussions.

Here are some good ways to start a conversation around a complex data issue that will encourage local decision-makers to act on behalf of children and families.

Appeal to universal values that appeal to all Georgians – equality, prosperity, opportunity, ingenuity, stewardship, shared fate, responsible management.

Example: The future **prosperity** of Georgia depends on its ability to foster the health, education, and well-being of the next generation. Starting early is wise. When we initiate (**ingenuity**) and replicate high-quality child-care programs, more young children participate (**opportunity**) and benefit from quality care. These children show significant long-term improvement in cognitive, socio-emotional, and language development, and have greater success in school.

Set the context by using a wide angle lens that broadens the story appeal to the general public and frames a positive discussion.

Example: Children's daily experiences and interactions with caregivers in the first few years of life determine whether their developing brains provide a strong or weak foundation for all future learning, behavior, and health.

Establish a positive tone by presenting a reasonable discussion of the problem, its causes, and potential solutions.

Example: Children who receive high-quality child care during the early years have been found to have higher levels of cognitive and language development, fewer reports of problem behavior, and are better prepared to succeed in school.

Use metaphors and models to simplify a complex problem or issue and help people understand new information in a familiar context.

Example: Developing a young child's brain is like constructing a home. The building process begins with laying a firm foundation, framing the rooms, and wiring the electrical system in a predictable sequence. Early experiences shape how the brain gets built. A strong foundation increases the odds of positive outcomes.

When we integrate these elements into a compelling story, we can engage local leaders in discussion and move them to action. By sharing stories grounded in current data from reliable sources with partners and funders, they see the value of the work we're accomplishing across the state. Our stories make a case for continued investment and support from legislators and other funders of health, education, and economic development efforts in the community.

Resources

A variety of materials, data tools, and data definitions are available online at **gafcp.org/kidscount**.

Georgia KIDS COUNT produces and updates Georgia profiles of child, family, and community well-being to inform planning, budget decisions, and policy priorities for children and families in communities across the state. These products are valuable to state and local partners and legislators. The profiles organize the most current data available by result area and indicator for all 159 counties and 12 Family Connection regions in Georgia.

The online calculator helps users calculate a 5-, 10-, 15-, or 20-percent improvement rate for 11 indicators of child well-being. The calculator is especially useful when counties are writing grant proposals, engaged in strategic planning, and implementing practices known to work to improve key indicators and move benchmarks.

Georgia KIDS COUNT produces data snapshots, fact sheets, blogs, news stories, and research briefs throughout the year that are available on the Web.

The *KIDS COUNT on Us – Make Data Count for Kids* guide to using data was made possible, in part, through a grant from the Annie E. Casey Foundation, a private charitable organization dedicated to helping build a better future for disadvantaged children in the United States.

For additional copies, technical assistance, presentations, or further information, contact **communications@gafcp.org**.



GaFCP is a public/private partnership created by the State of Georgia and funders from the private sector to assist communities in addressing the serious challenges facing children and families. We also serve as a resource to state agencies across Georgia that work to improve the conditions of children and families. Georgia KIDS COUNT provides policymakers and citizens with current data they need to make informed decisions regarding priorities, services, and resources that have an impact on Georgia's children, youth, families, and communities.

All photographs used in this guide are for illustrative purposes only. The photographs are not intended to suggest that the individuals represent the indicators of child and family well-being portrayed in this guide.



**We connect, communicate, and count
what matters to communities.**

235 Peachtree Street
Suite 1600
Atlanta, GA 30303-1422
404-527-7394

