

# GEORGIA AT THE TIPPING POINT

Making 20 Years of  
Data COUNT for  
KIDS and Families





## Introduction

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The Annie E. Casey Foundation this year celebrates 20 years of KIDS COUNT, which tracks nationally and across 50 states, how well children are faring in health, education, and economic well-being.

The Foundation is strong in its conviction that data-driven decision-making is a powerful, but underutilized, method to achieve positive results for children. It has invested millions of dollars in collecting reliable data and bringing the evidence to policymakers, advocates, and the public to inform decisions and drive the work on behalf of children and families.

KIDS COUNT was pivotal in moving state leaders to action when they learned in 1991

**“Georgia is at a tipping point. Investing in human capital and sustaining those investments reap tangible, invaluable returns.”**

**Gaye Morris Smith**  
*Executive Director, Georgia Family Connection Partnership*

that Georgia was ranked 50th in the nation in child well-being. They established, and continue to support, the Georgia Family Connection initiative to address the serious issues facing children and families. This public/private partnership supports at-risk children by implementing a strategic approach and community-based decision-making.

By tracking and measuring indicators of child, family, and community well-being, **Georgia Family Connection has enhanced cross-agency collaboration in all 159 counties** in efforts to improve the quality of life in this state.

Trends in health, education, and economic indicators show varying degrees of progress. However, Georgia has consistently remained in the bottom ten states for two decades. The gains we’ve made pale in comparison to existing—and emerging—challenges and disparities. As we examine some of these trends and challenges, we must consider their impact on the viability of our state.

## Georgia’s Changing Landscape

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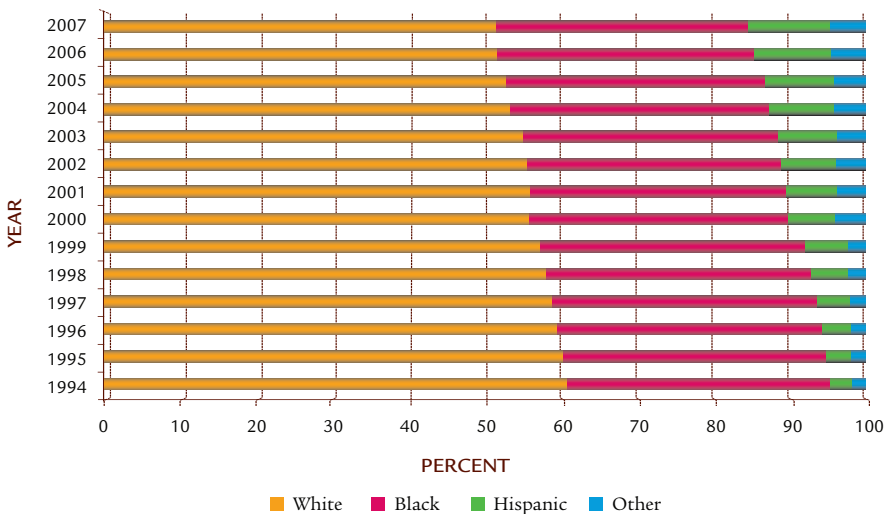
A comprehensive review of available state and national data from 1988 through 2008 paints a diverse landscape for Georgia, the ninth most populous state. Growing at one of the fastest rates in the nation, Georgia’s population went

from 8.2 to 9.5 million (16.6 percent) between 2000 and 2007. An increase in the number of immigrants, residents migrating from northern states, and births contributed to this surge.

As a result of these growth patterns and demographic changes, **Georgia is on the verge of becoming a majority-minority state**.<sup>3</sup> The Hispanic population is rapidly growing in many counties, while the black and white population is decreasing. The percentage of white children decreased from 60.6 percent in 1994 to 51.2 percent in 2007, and the percentage of black children declined from 34.6 percent to 33.3 percent. The percentage of Hispanic children soared from 2.9 percent in 1994 to 10.7 percent in 2007, and the percentage of children identified as “other,” including Asian-Americans, Pacific Islanders, and Native Americans, increased from 1.8 percent to 4.8 percent (see Figure 1).

The populations in Georgia’s urban areas in north and central Georgia, and along the coastal seaports, are on the rise, while rural counties are losing residents. From 2000 to 2007, 34 of Georgia’s counties (21 percent) experienced a decrease in population, while 41 percent either saw a decline in population or had less than 5-percent growth<sup>4</sup>. Rural areas face numerous barriers, including lack of resources and opportunities that inhibit their potential for optimal growth and economic development.

**Figure 1: Distribution of Georgia Child Population by Race and Ethnicity  
1994 – 2007**





## Tracking Two Decades of Child and Family Well-Being in Georgia

Georgia KIDS COUNT tracks 49 indicators of child, family, and community well-being. **Trend data reveal persistent economic challenges facing Georgia's children and families.**

Key indicators that affect a child from birth to employment age include teen birth, child poverty, dropout, and unemployment rates. These indicators show Georgia's children consistently lag behind most of the nation during booming economic periods, and fare even worse during economic downturns.

### Health Outcomes

When our children and families are healthy, children are ready for, and succeed in, school, and families are able to work and contribute to the local economy. Georgia has invested in programs during the past 20 years

to reduce disparities and improve health, including Babies Born Healthy to help low-income women receive quality prenatal care, Children 1st to help at-risk children lead healthy lives from birth, family planning services to improve maternal health and birth outcomes, and teen reproductive health services. Even with these programs and services in place, Georgia continues to fall short in providing its youngest citizens with a healthy start in life. One key indicator, the rate of teen births, ties closely to the economic viability of our state.

**“There are liquor stores and pawn shops in every neighborhood. What we need are resource centers that work to improve conditions in our community.”**

**Tiffany Stacy**  
Columbus, Ga.

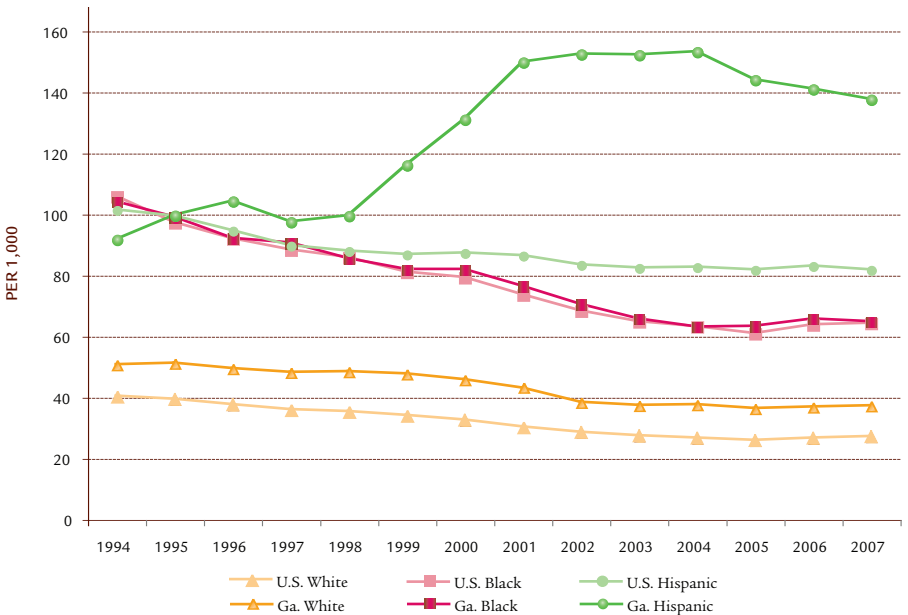
# Teen Births

Births to teens present challenges to the mother and her child. Teen mothers are more likely to drop out of school, be unemployed, or work in low-wage jobs. **While teen pregnancy occurs in families at all income levels, teen childbearing is strongly associated with poverty.** Infants born to teen mothers are at greater risk of lower birthweights, infant mortality, health and behavioral problems, poorer school performance, and child abuse and neglect.

Teen birth rates, after peaking in 1991, declined both nationally and in Georgia until 2007, when the rates began to increase. The rate of decline since 1991 has been less in Georgia (28 percent) than the nation (31 percent).

Trend data reveal racial and ethnic disparities in teen birth rates. From 1997 to 2004, birth rates for white and black teens decreased, while rates for Hispanic teens increased (see Figure 2). The birth rates for white teens in Georgia have been consistently above the national white teen birth rates. The state and national birth rates for black teens mirror each other. Hispanic teens have higher rates of births in Georgia and nationwide. Black teen rates were higher than Hispanic rates until 1995.

**Figure 2: Teen Birth Trends, 1994 – 2007**  
**Teen Births, Ages 15 – 19, by Race, Per 1,000**



## Education Outcomes

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Long-term community economic growth and development depend on students graduating from high school with the knowledge and skills necessary to become contributing citizens. To improve education outcomes, Georgia has:



- implemented a universal quality pre-k program for four-year-olds,
- improved standards and curriculum across grades,
- funded graduation coaches to assist academically at-risk students in middle and high school,
- implemented an early college model to help underrepresented populations of high-school students earn college credit,
- created virtual schools to teach math and science in rural areas, and
- formed community school-based initiatives.

While Georgia has made progress in these and other practices, **the state continues to face challenges in education outcomes.**

### Dropout Rate

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The National Center for Education Statistics measures a state-by-state dropout rate as the number of students entering ninth grade who

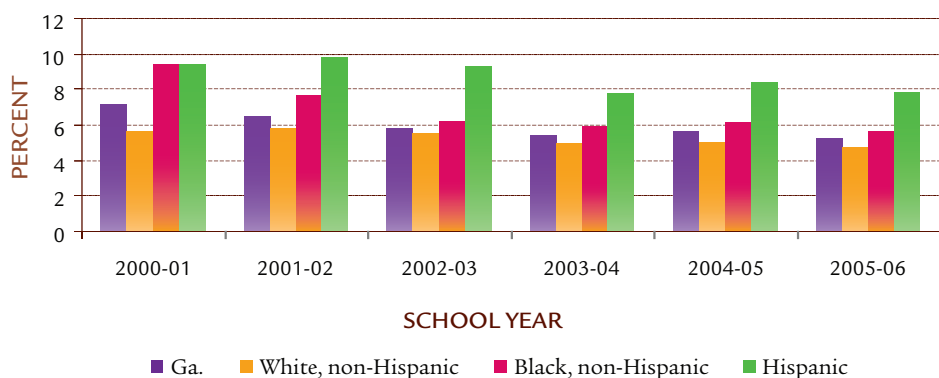
do not withdraw from high school by 12th grade.<sup>5</sup> A national dropout rate is not used because not all states measure dropouts in the same manner.

Georgia's dropout rate decreased from 8.7 to 5.2 percent during school years from 1994 through 2006, a 40-percent improvement. Males drop out at

**“We must be committed and tireless in using every available resource to lessen the impacts of poverty and decrease our drop-out rates.”**

■ *Stephen D. Dolinger, Ed.D.*  
*President, Georgia Partnership for Excellence in Education*

**Figure 3: Georgia Dropout Rate for Grades 9 - 12  
By Race, 2001 - 2006**



higher rates than females. **From 2000 through 2006, the dropout rate for females improved by 32 percent. The rate for males improved by 24 percent.**

The dropout rate for black and Hispanic students exceeded the state rate while white students were below the state rate from 2001 through 2006. The dropout rate for black students improved by 40 percent during that time, while the rate for white students improved by 18 percent, and Hispanic students by 17 percent. Even with that improvement, the dropout rate for Hispanic students was much higher than that for other students (see Figure 3).

## Economic Outcomes

When parents have steady work, children are more likely to have access to health care and their basic needs met, and are less likely to suffer negative effects in social, academic, and emotional development brought on by family stress and conflict over finances. To improve economic outcomes, Georgia has invested in improving the knowledge and core skills of the adult labor force by strengthening the technical college system and adult basic education programs. The state also implemented work-ready and Workforce Investment Act programs that provide on-the-job training and career counseling to job seekers. Despite these efforts, **Georgia is challenged by mounting unemployment rates and too many children living in poverty.**



## Child Poverty

The child poverty rate from 2002 to 2007 increased by 11 percent from 17.8 to 19.8 percent. Nearly half a million children lived in poverty in 2007. That was before the current economic downturn began. More than half the counties in Georgia had 25 percent or more of their children living in poverty in 2007.

**Per-capita income in Georgia doubled from 1989 to 2007, but the gains did not translate into improved economic status for children** (see Figure 4).

Unemployment rates in Georgia have traditionally been low and reflective of the state's economic growth. The state unemployment rate was either lower than, or the same as, the national average from 1988 to 2005. However, the Georgia unemployment rate from 2007 to 2008 grew by 25.8 percent while the national rate grew by 20.6 percent.

Since 1988, the unemployment rate for black workers has consistently been much higher than the state unemployment rate, while the rate for white workers has consistently been below the state rate.

The unemployment rate for black workers

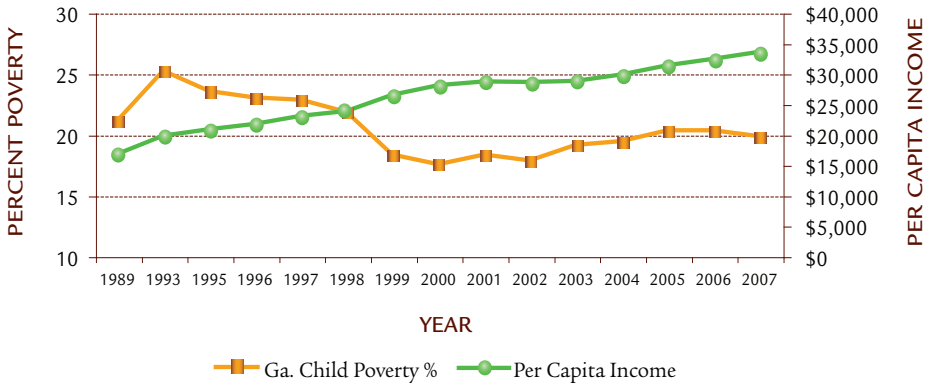
was nearly three times worse than that of white workers over the past decade. The unemployment rate for Hispanic workers had either been at or below the state rate until 2006, when it jumped above the state rate by 1 to 2 percent (see Figure 5).

**“KIDS COUNT guides us toward actions that garner the best results for every child. Georgia must develop the talent and the knowledge-based environment that attract the kind of jobs to grow the economy.”**

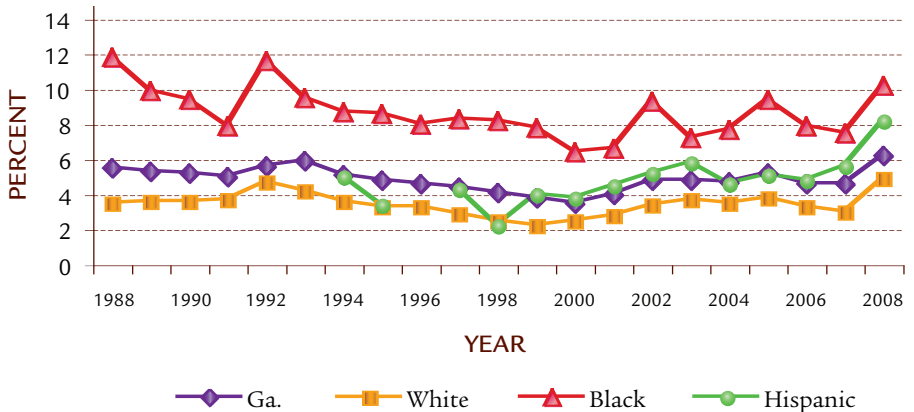
**Ann Wilson Cramer**  
Director, IBM North America, IBM Corporate  
Citizenship & Corporate Affairs



**Figure 4: Georgia Child Poverty Trends with Per-Capita Income  
1989 – 2007**



**Figure 5: Georgia Unemployment Trends by Race and Ethnicity  
1998 – 2008**



## Implications for the Future

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Without data sources like KIDS COUNT, we would be unable to assess Georgia's progress in improving outcomes, and ill-equipped to develop sound strategies to improve conditions for families and communities.

Georgia's children face persistent challenges amid a worsening economy. As the minority population grows, so do disparities. Reducing these challenging trends for Georgia's children and families requires:

- effective leadership, collaboration, and focus;
- long-term sustainable investments at the state and local level;
- policies and practices that are supportive of local decision-making;
- the use of data, best practices, and research as a strategy framework; and
- intervention at the earliest points possible.

Working toward common ground to address local issues will ensure a healthy and prosperous future for Georgia's next generation of citizens. Investing in human capital—children and families—reap tangible, invaluable returns:

- Increasing access to affordable health care results in more children being born with a healthy start.
- Investing in early care and learning systems reap economic returns when more students graduate on time and enter the workforce with marketable skills.
- Providing job training and supports to displaced workers can have an immediate local benefit and a long-term benefit for the state's economic engine.
- Planning for sustainability of these efforts at the outset is critical to closing gaps and protecting the progress we've made.

**Effective leadership provides the passion and vision for positive change. Collaboration drives the motivation and focus to work in partnership to achieve this common purpose.** It takes all of us at many levels working together to drive positive change—that we can sustain—to move Georgia's children into a brighter future.

### References

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5. National Center for Education Statistics, Common Core of Data, Dropouts, Completers, and Graduation Rates, [www.nces.ed.gov/ccd/pub\\_dropouts.asp](http://www.nces.ed.gov/ccd/pub_dropouts.asp).



**“KIDS COUNT data allow us to establish a baseline on certain issues concerning children and families that we can use to measure our progress.”**

 *Honorable Otis S. Johnson  
Mayor, City of Savannah*



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**Online Database Directory**  
**Georgia KIDS COUNT Data**  
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**KIDS COUNT Data Center**  
**[datacenter.kidscount.org](http://datacenter.kidscount.org)**

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