

The Child Indicator

THE CHILD, YOUTH, AND FAMILY INDICATORS NEWSLETTER

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Oregon Benchmarks: Social Indicators and Policy in a Time of Fiscal Distress

In 1989, the Oregon legislature created the Oregon Progress Board to facilitate development of the state's vision for a prosperous Oregon. The Oregon Progress Board (OPB) is an independent state planning and oversight agency that has been instrumental in developing the state's capacity to measure and track its progress at the state and local levels. Oregon Benchmarks, a set of 90 high level indicators of well-being, are the Board's primary tool for monitoring success in achieving the goals set out in *Oregon Shines*, the state's 20-year vision. The overall goals of *Oregon Shines* include quality jobs for all Oregonians; safe, caring and engaged communities; and healthy, sustainable surroundings.

More than 10 years later, the Oregon Progress Board is actively involved in tracking Oregon's progress, as can be seen in its 2003 benchmark performance report. "It is a very different time now" to be working with state-level measures and benchmarks, says Jeffrey Tryens, executive director of the Oregon Progress Board. When the OPB started, it was the first state to articulate its goals in measurable terms. There are now many more

organizations that are tracking indicators at the state level. This has provided the opportunity not only to compare Oregon's progress with other states, but also to build its own ability to develop better measures.

It is also a different time in Oregon, fiscally. A sustained budget crisis has caused massive budget cuts in state funding. At one point the legislature eliminated the Board's staff positions from the budget. The Board has sustained funding, but the continuing budget crisis has meant that the Progress Board has had to get by with fewer staff and with less funding for data collection.

A natural progression in the work of the OPB, which could facilitate state budget decisions, is the recognition of the need to "link up public resources to results in a more meaningful way." Tryens explained that, in order to make indicators more relevant to policy leaders, it would be useful to know, for example, not just whether teen pregnancy is going down, but whether the actions a state agency takes play a role in 'moving' the rate.

continued on page 6

In this Issue...

Oregon Benchmarks	1,6
South Africa: Social Indicators in the Service of Social Change	2
Vital Statistics: New Questions on Birth and Death Certificates	3
Indicators of Positive Development Conference	4,5
New Student Survey from Search Institute and America's Promise	4,6
Baltimore Neighborhoods by the Number	5,7
Recently Released Reports	1,7

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Just Released

Indicators of Welfare Dependence: Annual Report to Congress is a publication produced each year by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. The 2003 report was recently released and includes data about receipt of public assistance (including AFDC/TANF, food stamps, and SSI) as well as various risk factors for welfare dependence, such as economic security, work status of adult family members, and non-marital births. Many of the indicators included in this report relate to children and families.

The 2003 report is available online at <http://aspe.hhs.gov/hsp/indicators03/>

continued on page 7

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Statement of Purpose

The goal of *The Child Indicator* is to communicate major developments and new resources within each sector of the child and youth indicators field to the larger community of interested users, researchers, and data developers on a regular basis. By promoting the efficient sharing of knowledge, ideas, and resources, *The Child Indicator* seeks to advance understanding within the child and youth indicators community and to make all its members more effective in their work.

Child Trends, a nonpartisan, nonprofit research center that has been active in the child and youth indicators field for 20 years, produces and distributes *The Child Indicator* with funding from the Annie E. Casey Foundation. We welcome your comments and suggestions. All communications regarding this newsletter can be directed to childindicator@childtrends.org.

Brett Brown, Ph.D., Editor

South Africa: Social Indicators in the Service of Social Change

The Child and Youth Research and Training Programme (CYRTP) of the University of the Western Cape, South Africa is devoting its considerable energies to improving the capacity of South Africa to measure and monitor the well-being of its children and youth.

By ratifying the United Nations' Convention on the Rights of the Child, South Africa has agreed to work to guarantee a set of basic children's rights, according to Rose September, the head of the program and a member of the faculty of Community and Health Sciences at the University of the Western Cape. Dr. September says that a commitment to children is certainly not lacking in South Africa. However, without adequate measures of child well-being, it is difficult to monitor to what extent that the nation's goals for its children are being met.

The Child and Youth Research Programme is attempting to facilitate the nation's ability to focus on children by improving their capacity to measure, analyze, and disseminate indicators of child and youth well-being. The program has already contributed to some concrete changes. It has succeeded in including a number of questions specifically focused on children in the first post-apartheid census. It also intends to produce a report on South Africa's children featuring these new census data in the coming year. In addition, the program is seeking government partners to create an annual National Child Survey covering issues affecting children in a holistic manner.

The program is providing technical assistance to the National Program of Action, a government organization tasked with monitoring the implementation of the U.N. Convention on the Rights of the Child and the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child. It is also developing a training program at the University of the Western Cape to create a new generation of indigenous researchers who are adept at measuring, presenting, and applying child and youth indicator data.

Recently, the program has been running sessions with children in three different provinces to allow them to take part in defining indicators of child well being. It is finding that children have different opinions of indicators than do adults. Dr. September explained that, although they are still in the early stages of the program, it has already become apparent that children tend to focus on relationships rather than specific content.

For example, they are more interested in talking about whether they like their math teacher than about how much math they are learning. "In time, we hope to have the first child-developed indicators," September said.

These indicators can play a significant role in identifying areas where national resources should be placed. Following the conclusion of these sessions, the children will have the opportunity to present their views and findings directly to policy makers.

International Involvement

The Child and Youth Research and Training Program has actively been seeking international involvement to help them formulate strong measures of child well-being. In conjunction with organizations such as UNICEF and the National Department of Social Development, South Africa, they organized an International Consultative Conference last year to receive input on measuring, monitoring and evaluating child well-being.

At the same time, it is important to actively ensure that indicators of child well-being are adequately suited to South Africa, and not just the countries from which they originated. The HIV/AIDS epidemic, for example, affects South African children differently than it might those in other countries where it is less common. For example, child-headed households are an increasingly widespread phenomenon in South Africa not common to most other countries.

"We need to create a world fit for children," September emphasized. "We are just at the beginning of a very huge task. We are building and developing a supportive government and an active civil society to be advocates for children. We want to keep Nelson Mandela and our current President's vision alive. We cannot maintain South Africa without putting children first. If we do not invest in children, South Africa will not be able to keep up with the international community."

For more information about the Child and Youth Research and Training Programme, please contact Rose September at the University of the Western Cape by phone (021-959-2603) or email at rseptember@uwc.ac.za

Vital Statistics: New Questions on the Birth and Death Certificates

Every 10 to 15 years, the National Vital Statistics System, which is the basis for the nation's official statistics on births, deaths, marriages and divorces, undergoes a review. While individual states are responsible for collecting this information, The National Center for Health Statistics (NCHS) plays an important role in improving the quality of the data collected by developing a standard vital statistics database and standard reporting forms recommended for use throughout all the states.

The recent review, conducted by an expert panel convened by NCHS, uncovered the need for significant changes in the current birth, fetal death, and death certificates, which have been in use since 1989. Important revisions to the standard birth certificate include questions on whether mothers are breast feeding their infant, which is a goal of the Healthy People 2010 initiative; whether infertility treatment was involved in the pregnancy; infections during pregnancy; whether WIC (the Supplemental Food Program for Women, Infants, and Children) services were received during pregnancy; and the principal source of payment for the delivery. An additional question asking about the circumstances of maternal morbidity will make these certificates the only source for correlating pregnancy factors and maternal morbidity on a national basis.

Other items on the birth certificate have been modified suggesting promising new data. Mother's and father's race will now allow for multiple race identification; the frequency of cigarette smoking will be retrospectively reported prior to pregnancy as well as by trimester of pregnancy; and maternal body weight before pregnancy, weight at delivery, and height will be collected, which will make it possible to calculate maternal Body Mass Index (an indicator of obesity) and to assess the appropriateness of maternal weight gain as well as its association with infant birth-weight. One health-related item that will be dropped from the standard certificates is the frequency of alcohol consumption, due to under-reporting.

Examples of new items on standard birth certificates

Breast-feeding
Infertility treatments
Infections during pregnancy
Principal source of payment during delivery
Prenatal smoking by trimester
Multiple race identification of mother and father

Examples of new items on standard death certificates

Hospice facilities as a place of death
Contribution of tobacco use to death
Role of decedent in deaths caused by traffic accidents

The U.S. Standard report of fetal death includes many of the new items from the proposed birth certificates, as appropriate. Notably, the cause of fetal death now captures both the single initiating cause as well as other significant causes.

The proposed U.S. Standard Report of Death will also include new items reflecting changing health information and administration needs. Hospice facilities have now been added as a category under place of death. The contribution of tobacco use to death will now be collected. The role of the decedent in deaths caused by traffic accidents will be tracked, and the actual/presumed date of death will be collected (as opposed to date pronounced dead), which will help epidemiologists research intervals between injuries, onset of conditions and death. As in the birth certificate information, maternal morbidity during pregnancy will also be included on the new standardized death certificates.

Stephanie Ventura, Chief of the Reproductive Statistics Branch of the Division of Vital Statistics at NCHS, anticipates that one of the most important results of the revisions to the birth certificates will be "substantially improved data quality, because the 2003 revision recommendations focus on the collection of data from appropriate sources through the use of standardized worksheets for the mother and the birth facility, using standardized definitions. The new guidelines also call for editing data at the source. Improved data quality will greatly increase the utility and reliability of the data for a wide array of research and monitoring purposes."

Effective January 1, 2003, Pennsylvania and Washington State have revised their birth certificates, and data should be available within about a year after the end of the 2003 data collection period, in the winter of 2004-2005 (personal communication, Ventura, August 2003). Additional states will be revising their certificates effective January 2004 and thereafter.

Beginning in 2003, revised death certificates have been implemented in New York City, Idaho, Montana, New York State, and California, and some state data on new items are expected to become available in 2003; about 19 other jurisdictions hope to implement revised death certificates by the end of 2004 (personal communication, Hoyert, August 2003).

For further information see: Division of Vital Statistics. Report of the Panel to Evaluate the U.S. Standard Certificates. Hyattsville, Maryland: National Center for Health Statistics. 2001. Available on the Internet at: http://www.cdc.gov/vital_certs_rev.htm

Research: Indicators of Positive Development Conference

The Indicators of Positive Development Conference was held on March 12 and 13, 2003, in Washington, D.C. The intent of the conference was to bring together researchers from across the country who have previously been working alone or in small groups on positive development. From a scientific point of view, a broader vision needs to be developed that includes not only what society does not want for children, but also what society does want for children. The conference is part of a long-term effort to conceptualize, develop, and refine positive measures that could eventually appear in future surveys at the national, state, or local level, in research studies, and in program evaluations.

Twenty-three papers were commissioned on the subject areas of Character and Spirituality; Life Satisfaction and Hope; Positive Behaviors; Relationships; Time Use and Healthy Habits; Mastery Motivation, Achievement Task Values, and School Self-Regulation; Connectedness to School and School Engagement; Connection to Community and Civic Engagement; and Social Identity and Economic Behavior. In each of the papers, the authors reviewed existing measures of positive development that had been used in their field, presented measures used in their studies, and presented data on the reliability and validity of their measures. Each author was charged with assessing whether or not the measure is ready to be included in national databases and in the national indicators system to monitor child well-being.

Many of the measures presented at the conference helped to fill gaps that exist in currently available surveys on important constructs of child development. An inventory of character strengths by Drs. Christopher Peterson and Nansook Park, for example, is an aspect of development that is not emphasized in current studies. The study of spirituality, as discussed by Dr. Peter Benson and colleagues, is an area that is currently overlooked in many mainstream surveys. Measures of positive mental health such as life satisfaction, as presented by Dr. Scott Huebner and colleagues, and the presence of hope, as presented by Dr. C.R. Snyder, would be welcome positive additions to a mental health indicator system that is mainly focused on indicators of negative mental health.

A number of measures were presented that deal with relationships. Measures of intrapersonal functioning, including self-esteem, perspective taking, and empathy; interpersonal functioning, including peer relations and social initiative; and communication with mother and father were developed by Dr. Brian Barber. Analyses of a youth-reported scale on positive relationships with parents in the National Longitudinal Survey of Youth-1997 were presented by Dr. Elizabeth Hair and others from Child Trends. The often overlooked world of sibling relationships was captured in a scale by Dr. Brenda Volling and colleagues. The scales presented show that positive relationships with peers, parents, and siblings can be measured and are linked to positive functioning and development.

Attention was also focused on measures relating to adolescent functioning and development within schools. Measures such as motivational goals, as presented by Dr. Rob Roeser and colleagues, adolescents' self-perceptions of their abilities and task values, as presented by Dr. Jacquelynn Eccles and colleagues, and academic self-assessments, as presented by Dr. Christopher Wolters and colleagues, are valuable in assessing how adolescents feel about their abilities to succeed as well as their study and self-regulation skills, and how those abilities and skills relate to school achievement. Interpersonal measures such as students' perceptions of classroom interaction, as presented by Drs. Helen Patrick and Allison Ryan, students' connectedness to school, as presented by Dr. Clea McNeely, and school engagement, as presented by Dr. Jennifer Fredericks and colleagues, help broaden traditional measures of school processes and outcomes to encompass the fact that school is a critical social environment. Satisfaction in all aspects of that environment, academic as well as interpersonal, is an important part of an adolescent's success in school.

continued on page 5

Search Institute and America's Promise Team Up for New Survey

Local school districts and organizations have a new opportunity to measure how well their communities are providing supportive and nurturing environments for youth through the *Survey of Student Resources and Assets*. The survey was created through a partnership between the Search Institute and America's Promise: The Alliance for Youth, and is based on research by both of these organizations about the important components of nurturing environments for youth.

The questions in the survey cover the extent to which local communities provide the five fundamental resources identified by America's Promise (ongoing relationships with caring adults, safe places and structured activities during non-school hours, a healthy start for a healthy future, marketable skills through effective education, and opportunities to learn) and the 40 "building blocks of human development" that the Search Institute has found to be important in encouraging youth to thrive (such as family support and communication, perceptions of safety, positive adult role models, youth programs, school engagement, and peaceful conflict resolution).

continued on page 6

Indicators of Positive Development Conference *(continued)*

Other papers included topics such as positive behaviors by Dr. Silvia Epps and colleagues, prosocial orientation and community service by Drs. Peter Scales and Peter Benson, leisure time activities by Drs. Sandy Hofferth and Sally Curtin, healthy habits among adolescents by Dr. Kathleen Mullan Harris and colleagues, adolescent activity participation by Drs. Bonnie Barber and Margaret Stone, civic engagement by Dr. Scott Keeter and colleagues, frugality, generosity, and materialism by Dr. Tim Kasser, as well as a racelessness scale by Dr. Velma McBride Murry and colleagues, and an ethnic identity scale by Dr. Adriana J. Umana-Taylor.

Reaction to the conference by participants as well as paper authors and discussants was very positive. Katherine Wallman, chief statistician from the Office of Management and Budget, indicated that the federal government is receptive to the idea of including new positive indicators. She asked the research community to include her colleagues in the federal statistical system in the dialogue, and to share knowledge that is being developed on both sides on how to improve surveys and measures of child development. Dr. Kristin Moore, Child Trends President, expressed her hope during the wrap-up for continued collaboration with and among the paper authors in order to complete psychometric work, examine constructs in diverse populations, and assess their prospective validity, with the ultimate goal of emphasizing the positive development of children.

Child Trends is planning to publish the papers presented at this conference within the next year. A special edition of *The Journal of Adolescent and Family Health* will highlight five papers from the conference, and an edited book of conference papers will be published in early 2004 by Kluwer Academic/Plenum Press entitled *Conceptualizing and Measuring Indicators of Positive Development: What Do Children Need to Flourish?* A written conference summary can also be obtained by contacting Child Trends. This summary includes psychometric details about the papers, as well as audience discussion and comments.

The Bureau of Labor Statistics provided conference space. In addition, funding for the conference was provided by the following organizations: Child and Family Research Network of the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development; Edna McConnell Clark Foundation; Federal Interagency Forum on Child and Family Statistics; MacArthur Network on Successful Pathways Through Middle Childhood; John Templeton Foundation; the Office of the Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation; and the Family and Youth Services Bureau, Administration for Children and Families, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

For more information, or to obtain a copy of the written conference summary, please contact Julie Dombrowski at jdombrowski@childtrends.org

Baltimore Neighborhoods by the Number

The Baltimore Neighborhood Indicators Alliance is composed of diverse groups committed to promoting, supporting, and making better decisions using accurate, reliable, and accessible data and information for improving the quality of life in Baltimore City neighborhoods.

This unique Alliance builds on and coordinates the related work of citywide nonprofit organizations, city and state government, neighborhoods, foundations, businesses and universities. The goal is to support and strengthen the principle and practice of well-informed decision making for change toward a shared long-term vision of strong neighborhoods and a thriving city.

The Alliance recently launched a new program that will help Baltimore residents stay updated about the condition of their neighborhoods and city. The Alliance developed Vital Signs for Baltimore Neighborhoods to measure progress over time toward common neighborhood outcomes and goals that characterize strong neighborhoods and a thriving city using specific indicators as the Vital Signs.

These Vital Signs were developed through a comprehensive community-driven process using standard criteria for good indicators, and bring together the work of several indicator and data providers in Baltimore City—such as the Family League/Baltimore City Data Collaborative, city agencies and others in a neighborhood framework.

Like the "vital signs" a doctor uses to determine a patient's health, these indicators are Baltimore's Vital Signs—useful measures of the health and strength of Baltimore neighborhoods over time. The project provides data about many important indicators of neighborhood quality, such as population and resources, as articulated by numerous stakeholders including residents, agencies, businesses, and others. Indicators included in the project are divided into seven topical areas: housing and community development; children and family health, safety and well-being; workforce and economic development; sanitation; urban environment and transit; education and youth; and neighborhood action and sense of community.

continued on page 7

Oregon Benchmarks: Social Indicators and Policy in a time of Fiscal Distress (continued)

While recognizing that indicators cannot establish causality, the OPB has worked towards linking public resources to results in a more meaningful way. State agencies are required to link their results-based performance measures to Oregon Benchmarks, many of which are at the core of the mission of state agencies. An evaluation of whether these performance measures meet specified criteria is conducted during the budget process. The OPB has been instrumental in developing guidelines for the state agencies to create performance measures and targets (these guidelines are available on the website), which were necessary for budget approval.

One weakness in Oregon's approach is that state agencies (and not just in Oregon) tend to develop their budgets and performance measures in isolation, even though their goals may be similar to those of other agencies. To counter this weakness, OPB will propose that a few key administration priorities, like child well-being, receive special treatment in the next budget cycle. Under this approach, relevant agency directors and state partners would develop key "drivers" and priorities for child well-being, overall, in advance of the next budget process. Illuminating the goals and benchmarks of each agency concerned with child well-being will, the Board hopes, shed light on areas of child well-being that overlap or receive too little attention. The goal of this exercise is not one of 'total integration,' but rather a goal of cooperation for improving children's well-being. If this exercise proves fruitful, other areas will be identified for such a review.

Tryens expresses enthusiasm for the potential of this process to develop indicators to inform policy decisions, but also emphasizes that it is important that we "not lose sight of the original vision" in the process, which includes quality jobs for all Oregonians; safe, caring and engaged communities; and healthy, sustainable surroundings.

The most recent assessment of the Oregon Benchmarks, released in March of this year, can be found along with other resources mentioned in this article at <http://www.econ.state.or.us/opb/>

Search Institute and America's Promise Team Up for New Survey (continued)

While many data collection efforts focus on particular risk behaviors or factors, this survey tries to paint a more complete picture of the lives of students by asking the youth themselves to describe how they see their school, family, and neighborhood environments.

According to Peter Benson, President of the Search Institute, "This survey provides an excellent portrait through the eyes of young people about how well their communities provide and support the developmental building blocks that every kid needs to succeed." The results of the survey, Benson said, can also serve as important motivation and mobilization tools for communities. In addition to giving young people "a voice in the process of change," the survey data can also help communities set goals and priorities in their future plans, particularly those relating to youth.

The survey includes 143 questions, and is designed for students in grades six through twelve. Individual schools or communities may purchase survey instrument packets from the Search Institute and then administer the survey in their communities. Once the survey has been conducted, the Search Institute will conduct data analyses and produce a report that covers the survey findings for that particular school or community. Somewhere between 12 and 24 communities have participated in the survey each year since 1998. While there are no current plans to combine community-level findings into an aggregate report, Dr. Benson indicated that such a report is possible in the future.

More detailed information about this survey is available from the Search Institute's website:
<http://www.search-institute.org/surveys/ap.htm>

Baltimore Neighborhoods by the Number *(continued)*

The Alliance introduced the Vital Signs in its baseline report, the *Vital Signs for Baltimore Neighborhoods Report*, launched in November of 2002. Rather than measuring specific programs, the Vital Signs attempt to provide a common framework by which all stakeholders can know the changing conditions of Baltimore neighborhoods over time; understand the potential impact their actions, strategies, and initiatives have on those conditions; and address the needs strategically and cooperatively for long-term neighborhood improvement.

This report includes an overarching vision, generalized goals, and specific indicators for each of the seven topical areas. These visions, goals, and indicators can also be viewed on the Alliance website (www.bnia.org) by clicking on the Vital Signs icon. Under "Education and Youth," for example, users would see the vision of "A city in which people are well educated and prepared to meet the challenges of today and the future." The goal listed in this area is for "Students [to] graduate as productive citizens ready for work, higher education, entrepreneurship and leadership," and the Vital Signs are to measure the extent to which the goals and visions are being achieved, such as dropout rates, absenteeism, and voting among youth.

Over time, The Alliance will track changes in these Vital Signs at the neighborhood level, allowing researchers, citizens and policy-makers to better understand trends within Baltimore's neighborhoods. The mid-cycle update of the *Vital Signs for Baltimore's Neighborhoods* is expected to be released in October of this year, and will provide the first opportunity for users to track trends in the measured indicators over time.

For more information about this project, please visit the Alliance website at www.bnia.org/vitalsigns/index.html

The initial report, *Vital Signs for Baltimore Neighborhoods*, is available for download at http://www.bnia.org/vitalsigns/project_reports.html

Recently Released Reports

New data available from the American Community Survey!

New 2002 population and housing data are now available for more than 800 geographical areas from the American Community Survey. Data are available for the nation, states, as well as counties and places with populations of 250,000 or more. Users can access the data in both tabular and narrative formats.

For more information, or to download data, visit <http://www.census.gov/acs/www/Products/Profiles/Single/2002/ACS/index.htm>

America's Children: Key National Indicators of Well-Being 2003 was released in July, 2003 by the Federal Interagency Forum on Child and Family Statistics. The annual report brings together data from a wide variety of sources, covering topics that include health status, behavior and social environment, economic security, and education. For the first time, the 2003 report also includes previously unpublished 1990 and 2000 census data about changes in the lives of children in each state and the nation as a whole.

This report is available online at <http://www.childstats.gov/americaschildren/>

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