



A State Profile

## Overview & Findings

Every Oklahoma child deserves a good start, a childhood free from the hardships of poverty and a future brimming with hope. Growing up in a supportive, economically stable family gives each child his or her best chance.

This 2002 edition of the Oklahoma KIDS COUNT Factbook focuses on welfare reform. The *Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996*, was an ambitious federal effort to influence the most basic and complex human behaviors — work, childbearing, marriage — and provide each child that supportive, economically stable family. The 1996 welfare reform became a watershed event for children living in poverty. It redirected policy and funding, and changed the terms of their lives. The 2002 Factbook begins the assessment of whether Oklahoma children are benefitting or suffering from welfare reform.

It is time to take measure. During the summer of 2002, welfare reform is again being debated and amended. Soon after, Oklahoma will again restrict or enhance its local welfare-to-work program to accommodate the resulting mix of federal mandates and take advantage of whatever flexibility states are allowed to exert.

Oklahoma families raise and nurture Oklahoma's children. As families suffer or prosper, children will suffer or prosper. The health of the economy and the result of the next round of welfare reform will combine to determine which outcome is more likely. The first round of welfare reform found its successes fueled by a boom economy; Oklahoma may not be so lucky next time. Regardless of public perceptions about welfare, if the resulting welfare system fails its recipients, it will fail their children. If the cycle remains unbroken, Oklahoma's future dims.

The Oklahoma KIDS COUNT Partnership, a project of the Oklahoma Institute for Child Advocacy (OICA), uses key strategies to achieve its goal. First, KIDS COUNT “counts kids,” providing accurate and up-to-date data on the status of Oklahoma's children and youth. Second, KIDS COUNT cultivates leadership on behalf of children and youth, giving voice to their needs at the local level. Third, KIDS COUNT communicates the needs of children and youth, using extensive public awareness activities.

Oklahoma families raise and nurture Oklahoma's children. As families suffer or prosper, children will suffer or prosper.



The Oklahoma KIDS COUNT Factbook uses benchmarks to profile the status of children and youth in our state. Benchmarks are quantifiable measures that, when taken together, help determine child, family and community well-being. The seven benchmarks in the 2002 KIDS COUNT Factbook are **low birthweight infants, infant mortality, births to young teens, child abuse & neglect, child death, high school dropouts and juvenile violent crime arrests.**

From an established baseline, this seventh Oklahoma KIDS COUNT Factbook continues to track progress, or the lack of progress, for each benchmark over time. Progress requires action. Progress requires using all of this information — and more — to make good decisions about state and community budgets and programs that affect children and youth. Effective programs and policies work together with strong communities and families to improve the benchmarks.

Almost nine hundred thousand (892,360) Oklahomans — one in every four (25.9%) — are children. Last year's Oklahoma KIDS COUNT Factbook (2001) shared the good news that only two (low birthweight infants and child abuse & neglect) of the seven benchmarks tracked worsened when compared to data from a dozen years ago. Most young people in Oklahoma were doing well most of the time.

**Good news continues.** The 2002 Oklahoma KIDS COUNT Factbook again reveals that only two of the seven benchmarks tracked worsened when compared to data from the middle of the 1980's:

- **Low birthweight infants**
- **Child abuse & neglect**

Five benchmarks again improved over the comparable older data:

- **Infant mortality**
- **Births to young teens**
- **Child deaths**
- **High school dropouts**
- **Juvenile violent crime arrests**

**Bad news remains.** The improved rates obscure the challenges faced by large numbers of young Oklahomans each year. One in every five (19.1%) Oklahoma children lives in poverty. Each year, almost sixteen thousand (15,733) children are abused or neglected. Each year, almost ten thousand (9,406) youth quit high school. Each year, more than one thousand (1,035) children and youth are arrested for murder, rape, aggravated assault or robbery.

## Oklahoma

Number of Children (2000): 892,360

Children are 25.9% of the state population

Child Poverty Rate (2000): 19.1%

Indicator	Base Data	-	Worsened	Improved	+	Recent Data	Recent Numbers
Low Birthweight	6.4% of live births 1984-86	-14.2%				7.3% of live births 1998-2000	3,598 average annual 1998-2000
Infant Mortality	10.5/1000 live births 1984-86				19.8%	8.4/1000 live births 1998-2000	415 average annual 1998-2000
Births to Young Teens	43.9/1000 girls 15-17 1984-86				24.8%	33.0/1000 girls 15-17 1998-2000	2,570 average annual 1998-2000
Child Abuse & Neglect	9.0 confirmed/1000 children FY 1984-86	-96.8%				17.8 confirmed/1000 children FY 1998-2000	15,733 average annual FY 1998-2000
Child Deaths	41.5/100,000 children 1-14 1984-86				32.2%	28.2/100,000 children 1-14 1998-2000	191 average annual 1998-2000
High School Dropouts	5.5/95-96/97				1.5%	5.4% of grades 9-12 SY 97/98-99/00	9,406 average annual School Year 97/98-99/00
Juvenile Violent Crime Arrests	334.1/100,000 youth 10-17 1990-92				24.8%	251.4/100,000 youth 10-17 1998-2000	1,035 average annual 1998-2000