ECONOMIC CLUSTERS

The 2005 Oklahoma KIDS COUNT Factbook again divides Oklahoma's 77 counties into five clusters with similar conditions based on four economic factors:

Child Poverty Rates (2002 US Census)—the best measure of the presence of very poor children in a community

Per Capita Personal Income (2001–2003 Average Annual)—the most current measure of income levels of people in a community

Percent of Children Receiving Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF) (FY2002–FY2004 Average Annual)—the most current measure of children required to survive on inadequate resources

Unemployment Rates (2001–2003 Average Annual)—the best measure of people's ability to improve economic conditions through work

Taken together, these factors provide a comprehensive picture of a county's economic status in a manner which can be ranked, grouped into clusters, updated and tracked from year to year. Each county is ranked on each of the four factors. The four individual county rankings are combined into an "Economic Index" in which the lower the number, the wealthier the county. Each county is ranked again according to its "Economic Index" and grouped into one of five economic clusters: wealthiest, wealthier, middle, poorer or poorest. Changes in local economic conditions resulted in placing several Oklahoma counties in a different cluster than in prior years. Each cluster is composed of approximately twenty percent (20%) of the state's population.

These five clusters continue to illustrate the diverse economic environments in which Oklahoma children live. Oklahoma's wealthiest counties remain primarily concentrated in the northwestern corner of the state, with a few adjacent to Oklahoma's two largest urban counties (Oklahoma and Tulsa). The poorest counties remain primarily concentrated in the southeastern corner, with substantial numbers found in the southwest and the northeast.

Similar to past years, the profiles of the five clusters reveal clear patterns in Oklahoma's economic landscape. Children in Oklahoma's 32 poorest counties remain twice as likely to be poor and twice as likely be on welfare than children in the state's 18 wealthiest counties. Incomes are the lowest, unemployment rates are the highest, and economic distress is entrenched in these poorest, mostly rural Oklahoma counties.

The cluster of Oklahoma's 18 wealthiest counties has the best indicators for eight of the twelve benchmark areas investigated by Oklahoma Kids Count. The most economically advantaged areas of Oklahoma have the best rates of infants born under 3 pounds & five ounces, births to young teens, births to older teens, births to all teens, high school dropouts, juvenile violent crime arrests, infant mortality and death among teens. Oklahoma's 15 wealthiest counties also have the second best rates of child abuse & neglect confirmations and the second best Health Status Index, measuring health conditions for children.

With a rate twice as high as most other clusters, the second most economically advantaged cluster (wealthier counties) has the worst rate of juvenile violent crime arrests.

The cluster of Oklahoma's 32 poorest counties has the worst indicators for three of the twelve benchmark areas investigated by Oklahoma Kids Count. The most economically disadvantaged areas of Oklahoma have the worst rates of births to older teens, child abuse & neglect confirmations and infant mortality. Oklahoma's cluster of 32 poorest counties also has the second worst rates of births to young teens, births to all teens, death among children and teens (in all three age categories) and the second worst Health Status Index, measuring health conditions for children.

Oklahoma's three most economically disadvantaged clusters (middle, poorer and poorest counties) all tie to display the best rate of infants born under 5 ½ pounds and the second best rate of infants born under 3 pounds & five ounces. The most economically disadvantaged cluster (poorest counties) has the second best rates of high school dropouts and juvenile violent crime arrests.

Economic Clusters

County Economic Index:
Rankings of Various Economic Factors
(Child Poverty, Per Capita Personal Income,
% of Children on Welfare, Unemployment Rate)
Counties, 1994–1996 (FY1995–FY1997) and
2001–2003 (FY2002–FY2004)