



Minnesota Early Childhood Risk & Reach

Summary of Key Indicators of Early Childhood Development in Minnesota, County by County

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Purpose

Methodology

For every risk indicator, each county was assigned to one of four risk categories, based on comparisons to the statewide average. These comparisons were based on z-scores, which represent the number of standard deviations that an individual county-level indicator falls above or below the statewide average. Each county also has a composite risk score, which sums the z-scores for each county across all indicators, calculates the average and standard deviation, and then assigns each county another z-score. This composite score was then used to assign counties to one of the four risk categories.

Indicators of reach measure the proportion of eligible children served by eight publicly-funded programs in Minnesota. Similar to the risk indicators, each county was assigned to one of four reach categories, based on comparisons to the statewide average for every reach indicator.

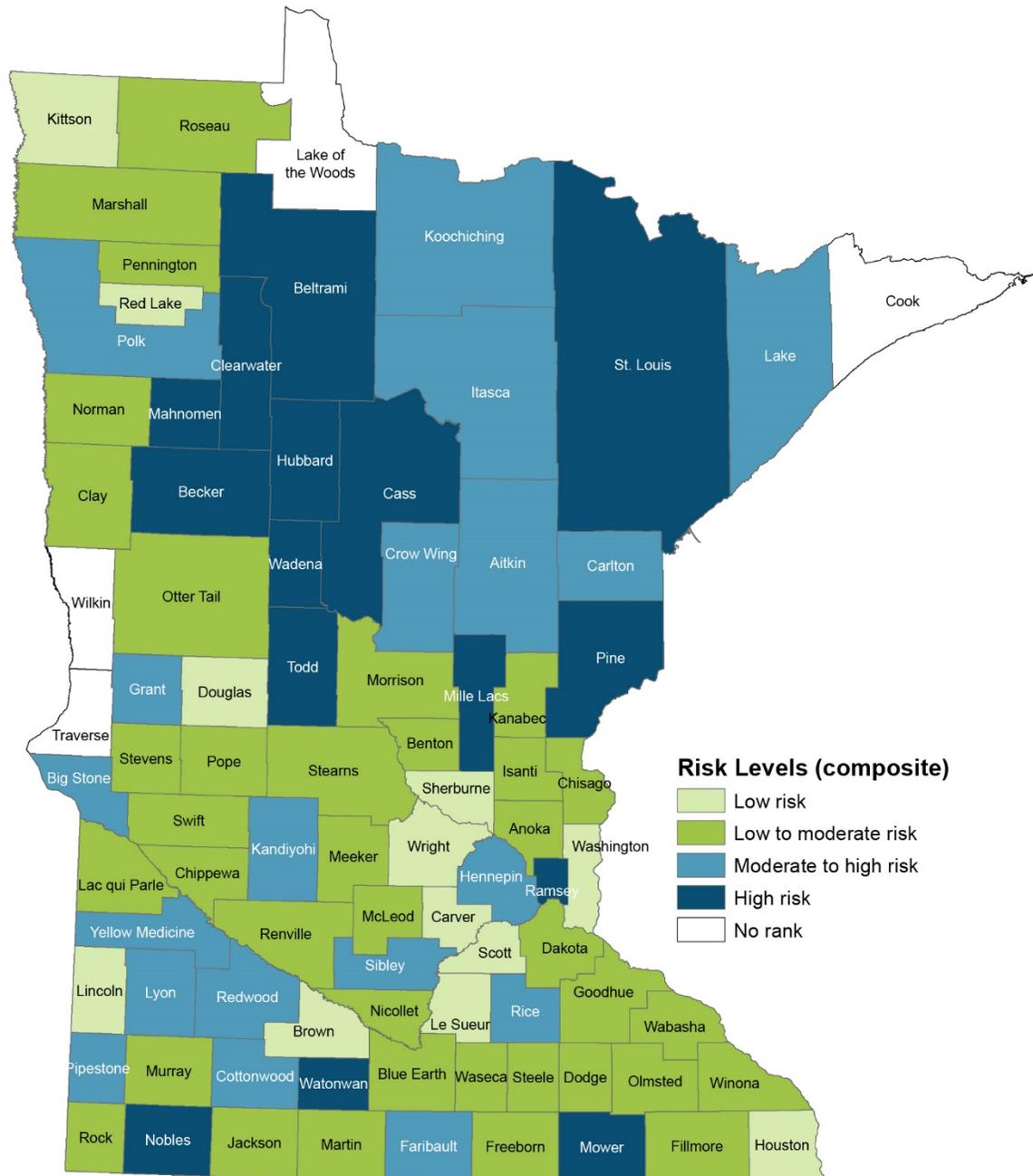
The physical, social, and economic health and well-being of adults and society are strongly influenced by experiences in early childhood. The most cost-efficient time to build foundational skills, to assure the healthy development of all young children, to break the cycle of disadvantage for vulnerable children, and to prevent achievement and health inequities is in the very early stages of development.

This summary provides highlights from a report that describes potential risks to the healthy development of young children and the extent of coverage of publicly-funded services to meet their early learning, health, and basic needs. The report is the first attempt in Minnesota to describe indicators of early childhood development county by county. Differences and disparities by income and race/ethnicity, highlighted in other state level reports, however, are not available for every Minnesota county.

The report was inspired in large part by efforts in Louisiana and other states to take stock of indicators of early childhood well-being and the availability and accessibility of key services from a county-level perspective. It is intended to be a resource for all early childhood stakeholders in order to guide and inform resource allocation and policy. One benefit of compiling data in such a format is that these indicators can be periodically assessed for continuity, change, and integration over time.

The full report describes the methods in more detail, including limitations, and recommends possible improvements for future reports. It also includes all references.

Overall risk status for children under age 6



Note: Counties with no rank lacked data on 4 or more risk indicators that contribute to this composite.

Findings: Risk indicators

Economic risks

- Eight percent of births in 2012 were to mothers with less than a high school degree. Nine of Minnesota's counties fall in the high risk category on this indicator, all of which are located in greater Minnesota. Mahnommen County has the highest share (24%).
- Statewide, about 3 percent of children have no working parent, ranging from 25 percent in Wadena County to 2 percent in Sherburne County.
- Almost 17 percent of children are living in poverty in Minnesota (poverty level is about \$19,000 per year for a family of three and about \$23,000 for a family of four). Fourteen counties spread throughout the state fall in the highest risk category on this indicator.

Health risks

- The teen birth rate in Minnesota is 20 births per 1,000 girls age 15 to 19. Seven counties are high risk. Mahnommen, Nobles, and Beltrami counties have the highest rates at 96, 55, and 50 births per 1,000 teen girls, respectively.
- In 2012, an estimated 22 percent of births in Minnesota lacked adequate prenatal care. Most counties are low to moderate risk on this indicator. The 13 high-risk counties are scattered throughout the state, including multiple counties in the southwest and northwest regions.
- In 2013, almost 5 percent of births were low-weight births (under 5.5 pounds). The thirteen counties in the high risk category are spread throughout the state.
- The Minnesota infant mortality rate is 5 deaths per 1,000 births. The rate in Mahnommen County is the highest, 13.5 per 1,000, reflecting the county's high concentration of American Indian children and mortality rates among American Indian babies that are double the rates of white babies in Minnesota.
- About 6 percent of children in Minnesota under age 6 lacked health care coverage (2008-2012), with the range stretching from 2 percent in Lyon and Pennington counties to a high of 16 percent in Mahnommen and Todd.
- About 37 percent of 2-year-old children (age 24 through 35 months) lacked the recommended childhood immunizations in 2013. Immunization levels range from 32 percent in Chisago County to 88 percent in Lyon County. The 16 high-risk counties include all seven Twin Cities metro region counties, except Carver, which falls in the moderate to high risk category.

Family stability risks

- Nineteen percent of children under age 5 changed residences at least once in the past year (2008-2012). Eleven counties fall in the high risk category, including the state's two most populous counties, Hennepin and Ramsey. Yellow Medicine County features the highest share of children who moved in the last year (27%), and Sherburne County has the lowest share (9%).
- In 2013, 25 in 1,000 children under age 5 statewide had a maltreatment report filed. Mille Lacs County has the state's highest rate, at 75 per 1,000 children. Anoka, Dakota, and Washington counties are among the lowest-risk counties.
- In 2013, about 8 in 1,000 children under age 6 statewide were in foster care. The state's highest rates of foster care placements are all in six northern counties. Beltrami has the state's highest rate, at 45 per 1,000 children.

Overall risk status

Each county was assigned to one of the four risk categories, based on its average score across all indicators relative to other counties. This single score is meant to focus attention and begin conversations about where counties fall along the continuum of risk, which counties are in greatest need, and what we might learn from counties with the lowest-risk environments for young children.

Minnesota has an estimated 436,000 children age 5 and younger living in 87 counties.¹

- About 80,000 children live in 12 counties categorized as low-risk counties. The counties with the most indicators at low risk levels are Carver, Scott, Washington, Sherburne, Red Lake, and Wright.
- About 155,000 children live in 37 low-to-moderate risk counties.
- About 132,000 children live in 19 moderate-to-high risk counties, including Hennepin County.
- About 68,000 children live in 15 high-risk counties, including Ramsey County. The counties with the most indicators at high risk levels are Mahnomon, Becker, Beltrami, and Cass.

¹ 4 counties with about 1,000 children under age 6 lack sufficient data to assess overall risk.

Findings: Reach indicators

Reach of health programs

- Seventy percent of eligible children under age 6 are served by the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC). In general, greater Minnesota counties have higher levels of reach than counties in the metro area.
- The Family Home Visiting Program reaches 8 percent of the targeted low-income families (at or below 185% of poverty level) with children under age 5. In general, high-reach counties tend to be in greater Minnesota.

Reach of human services

- A third of children under age 6 in low-income families (at or below 125% of poverty level) are covered by Minnesota Family Investment Program. The coverage ranges from 11 percent in Red Lake County to 91 percent in Beltrami County. In the Twin Cities metro area, Anoka, Hennepin, and Ramsey counties have high reach levels (65%).
- Thirteen percent of children under age 6 in low-income families (at or below 200% of poverty level) are served by the Child Care Assistance Program. The participation ranges from 3 percent in Todd County to 23 percent in Dodge County. Counties in southeast Minnesota near Rochester have high levels of CCAP reach, and counties in the northwest have lower levels.
- Statewide, 40 children per 1,000 children under age 6 enrolled in Minnesota Health Care Programs were assessed and treated for mental health issues in 2013. Ramsey County is among the 12 low-reach counties scattered across Minnesota.



Reach of education programs

- About a third of children age 3 received developmental screenings by the Early Childhood Screening Program in 2013. The reach ranges from 8 percent in Mahnomon County to about 75 percent in Douglas, Lac qui Parle, Pipestone, and Red Lake counties. In the metro area, Hennepin (25%) and Ramsey (22%) counties have low reach levels.
- About a quarter of children under age 6 living in poverty are served by Head Start and Early Head Start. In general, greater Minnesota counties have higher levels of reach than counties in the metro area. The coverage ranges from 10 percent or below in Carver and Dakota counties in the metro area and Benton, Dodge, Le Sueur, Mower, Murray, Rock, Sherburne, and Sibley counties in greater Minnesota to 80 percent or higher in Clearwater, Douglas, Freeborn, Lincoln, Roseau, and Swift counties.
- In 2014, about 4 percent of children under age 5 were served by early intervention or early childhood special education services statewide, reaching from 1 to 11 percent of children per county.

The full report presents each reach indicator county by county in a table as well as on the composite risk score map to provide a sense of each program's coverage in relation to the overall level of risk or need.



Conclusions and implications

Nearly 200,000 children in Minnesota live in moderate-to-high or high-risk counties, representing 46 percent of all children under age 6 in Minnesota with potential risks to healthy development.

County-by-county comparisons of risks show that Ramsey County, which is the most racially diverse county in the metro area, is more similar to many greater Minnesota counties than to the rest of the metro counties. Eight of the 15 high-risk counties (including Ramsey County) are high risk for children living in poverty, and six of them have high proportions of American Indian children.

The reach of publicly-funded early childhood programs in Minnesota varies by county and ranges from about 4 percent to about 70 percent of eligible children. In some counties the greater availability of services may contribute to a lower risk level; in other counties, a greater level of services may have resulted from efforts to target the higher risk levels that are present in the county.

State population projections along with racial disparities in developmental risks suggest that over the next 10 to 20 years the whole metro region will look a lot like Ramsey County does today. Throughout Minnesota, but especially in the metro region, developmental risk levels are likely to rise unless there are concerted efforts to rectify income inequality and racial inequities and to improve the reach of early childhood education, health, and family support programs.

No single risk factor determines a child's developmental trajectory. Nevertheless, cumulative risk has been found to be the most predictive of adverse outcomes in childhood and across the lifespan. Opportunities for intervention are as numerous as the consequences of cumulative risk. There is no threshold at which intervention is futile. Supporting and restoring stable and nurturing early relationships and systems for human development are top priorities to promote competence and resilience in young children and their families.

Finally, this is a good first step in developing a tool useful to describe and compare indicators of early childhood development at the county level. A comprehensive, cross-agency, integrated early childhood data system would make these and other related data more accessible and more useful for assessing cumulative early childhood risk and the relationship between risk and reach over time.

For more information

This summary presents highlights of the Minnesota Early Childhood *Risk and Reach Report*, available on the Wilder Foundation website.



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