DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 440 745 PS 028 484

AUTHOR	Benjamin, Diane; Thompson, Kerri
TITLE	Information Is Power! A Child Advocate's Guide to Fear-Free Fact Finding. Revised.
INSTITUTION	Kids Count Minnesota, Minneapolis.
SPONS AGENCY	Children's Defense Fund-Minnesota, St. Paul.; Polk Bros. Foundation, Chicago, IL.
PUB DATE	1998-00-00
NOTE	65p.; Minnesota Kids Count is a joint project of the Children's Defense Fund-Minnesota and the Congregations Concerned for Children--Child Advocacy Network.
AVAILABLE FROM	Congregations Concerned for Children--Child Advocacy Network, 122 West Franklin Ave., Minnespolis, MN 55404. Tel: 888-870-1402 (Toll Free).
PUB TYPE	Guides - Non-Classroom (055)
EDRS PRICE	MF01/PC03 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	*Child Advocacy; *Children; *Data Collection; Elementary Secondary Education; Information Needs; *Information Seeking; Information Sources; Information Utilization; Preschool Education; *Statistical Analysis; *Well Being
IDENTIFIERS	Minnesota

ABSTRACT

Noting that obtaining facts and figures on important policy issues related to children is the critical first step toward identifying what is working and what needs improvement, this Kids Count guide is designed to help local community members find and use data on the condition of children and families in Minnesota. The guide describes how to select the right information, locate the source of the information, and perform basic mathematical calculations. Following the introductory chapter, Chapter 2 details a step-by-step process for requesting data. Chapter 3 describes key data sources, including the U.S. Census, and national and Minnesota sources for information on education and child care, maternal and child health, family economics, and child welfare; and discusses the use of race and ethnicity data. Chapter 4 provides information on calculating basic statistics on obtained data, including calculating percentages, rates, and ratios, calculating change over time, accounting for inflation, and presenting data effectively. Chapter 5 presents suggestions for using data responsibly. The guide concludes with a list of Internet data sources, relevant acronyms and abbreviations, and a worksheet for creating a fact sheet for a particular community. (KB)

INFORMATION IS POWER!

A Child Advocate's Guide to Fear-Free Fact Finding

kids count minnesota

About Minnesota Kids Count

Minnesota KIDS COUNT is a joint project of the Children's Defense Fund-Minnesota and the Congregations Concerned for Children Child Advocacy Network. Minnesota KIDS COUNT releases periodic reports and an annual data book to provide a statistical profile of Minnesota's children and suggestions for action on their behalf.

The Children's Defense Fund-Minnesota is dedicated to advocating policies that raise children out of poverty. Through research, publications, public education and advocacy, the Minnesota office focuses on the well-being of the state's children.

Congregations Concerned for Children Child Advocacy Network is a passionate, faith-based voice for children. Through a network of congregational advocates, they seek to change legislation and policy on behalf of children and families.

Credits:
Information is Power! A Child Advocate's Guide to Fear-Free Fact Finding was originally produced by Voices for Illinois Children through a grant from the Polk Bros. Foundation. This edition is revised by Children's Defense Fund-Minnesota.

Report layout and design by Pinzke Design, Chicago, Illinois.

To order additional copies of this report, please call Congregations Concerned for Children Child Advocacy Network at (612) 870-3670 or toll-free, 1-(888) 870-1402.

Table of Contents

1. Introduction 1

2. Getting Started 2
   - Framing Questions 2
   - Requesting Data 2

3. Sources of Data —Key Areas for Children and Families 4
   - The U.S. Census 4
   - Education and Child Care 5
   - Maternal and Child Health 8
   - Family Economics 12
   - Child Welfare 15

4. What to Do with Data Once You Have It 18
   - Count Your Data 18
   - Compute Your Data 18
   - Compare Your Data 21
   - Present Your Data 21

5. Using Data Responsibly 25

Data Sources on the Internet 26

Acronyms and Abbreviations 27

Worksheet 28

Introduction

1

For the past 15 years, Children's Defense Fund – Minnesota has provided information on the condition of children and families in our state. If there is one thing we have learned during this time, it is that *information is power.*

Obtaining facts and figures on issues — such as how well children are doing in school, the health status of pregnant women, or the economic conditions of a neighborhood — is a critical first step toward identifying what is working and what needs to be improved. Data help describe problems, inform possible solutions and make advocacy more persuasive.

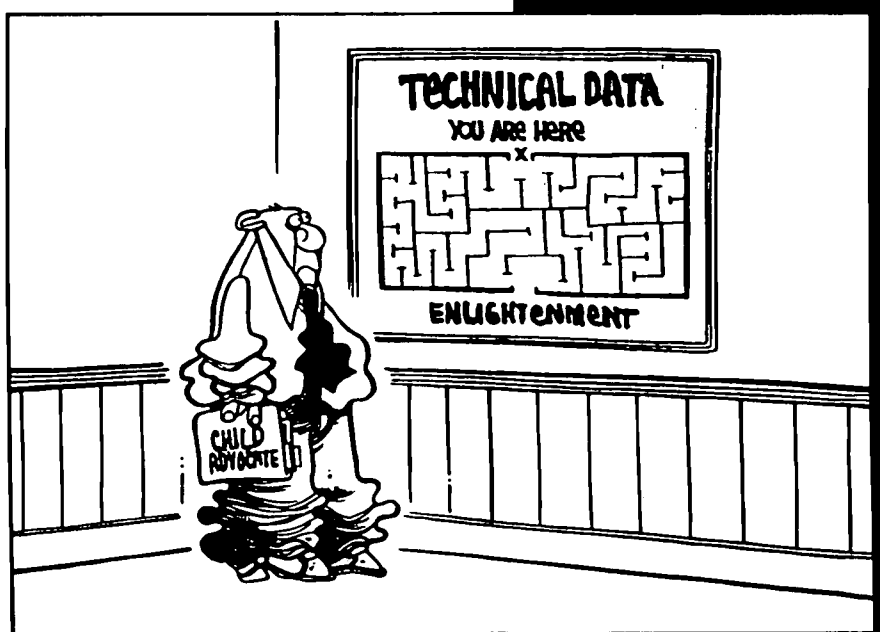
Unfortunately, too many people are intimidated by data and may assume that to identify and use data requires special training. While technical expertise in data usage is not necessary, one must learn a few basic skills before getting started. This technical assistance guide is designed to help those who do not have a background in research or statistics to find and use demographic or basic program data on children and families.

Minnesota KIDS COUNT has compiled this guide to help local community members find and use data on the condition of children and families. State-specific information in the areas of education and child care, maternal and child health, family economics, and child welfare are highlighted. This guide also describes how to select the right information, locate the source of that information, and perform basic mathematical calculations.

The guide is designed for a wide variety of individuals and groups, including:

- service providers who need to find community-specific data for a grant application,
- local community organizations who want to engage in a planning process to improve the condition of children and youth,
- local government officials who want to understand the impact of federal or state policies on families in their community, and
- educators who want to develop community programs in schools to better prepare children for academic success.

Information is power! With information on education and child care, maternal and child health, family economics, and child welfare we can begin to make our communities better for our children and youth.



2

Getting Started

Collecting data that can help you complete an important project is not difficult — you just need to know where to start. In this section we describe how to ask for the right data and highlight key issue areas and sources of information on children and families.

Framing Questions

How you ask for the right data — how you frame your question — is a crucial step in your data gathering process. You will need to think about your project, do a little careful research, and seek input from collaborators. In general, narrowing your research to specific questions will help ensure the data you obtain is the data you need. Answers to the following questions will help you frame your own search.

- How do you define the data you are looking for?
- What ages or age groups are you interested in?
- Do you want the data broken down in specific demographic categories (e.g., gender, race, ethnicity)?
- What geographic location(s) are you interested in (e.g., community area, county, city)?
- What time period is needed?
- How do you want the data delivered (e.g., paper, computer disk)?
- When do you need the data?

Knowing this kind of information in advance will make it easier to be as specific as possible when requesting data. Also, when you contact your data sources, be sure to ask for details on how they define the data they are providing and if there are any peculiarities that you should know about the data.

Requesting Data

The key to finding useful data is asking the right questions. Many times people looking for data get turned away or are given incorrect information because they do not accurately request the data they want.

For example, a community organizer wants to know how much money is spent per-pupil in his school district. He requests the data from the school district but is surprised when the dollar amount is double what he expected. He calls the school district back to ask if there has been some mistake. The school finance officer reviews the figures and declares that they are

Data Tip 1

Be patient and polite

Your data request may seem reasonable to you, but it may not be at your data contact's fingertips.

correct. The community organizer then realizes that he did not need total expenditures, but really meant to ask for operating costs per-pupil, which excludes building costs. However, the school district gave him data on the total expenditures per-pupil, which includes building expenses. The minor mistake meant that he gathered information that was not useful for his project.

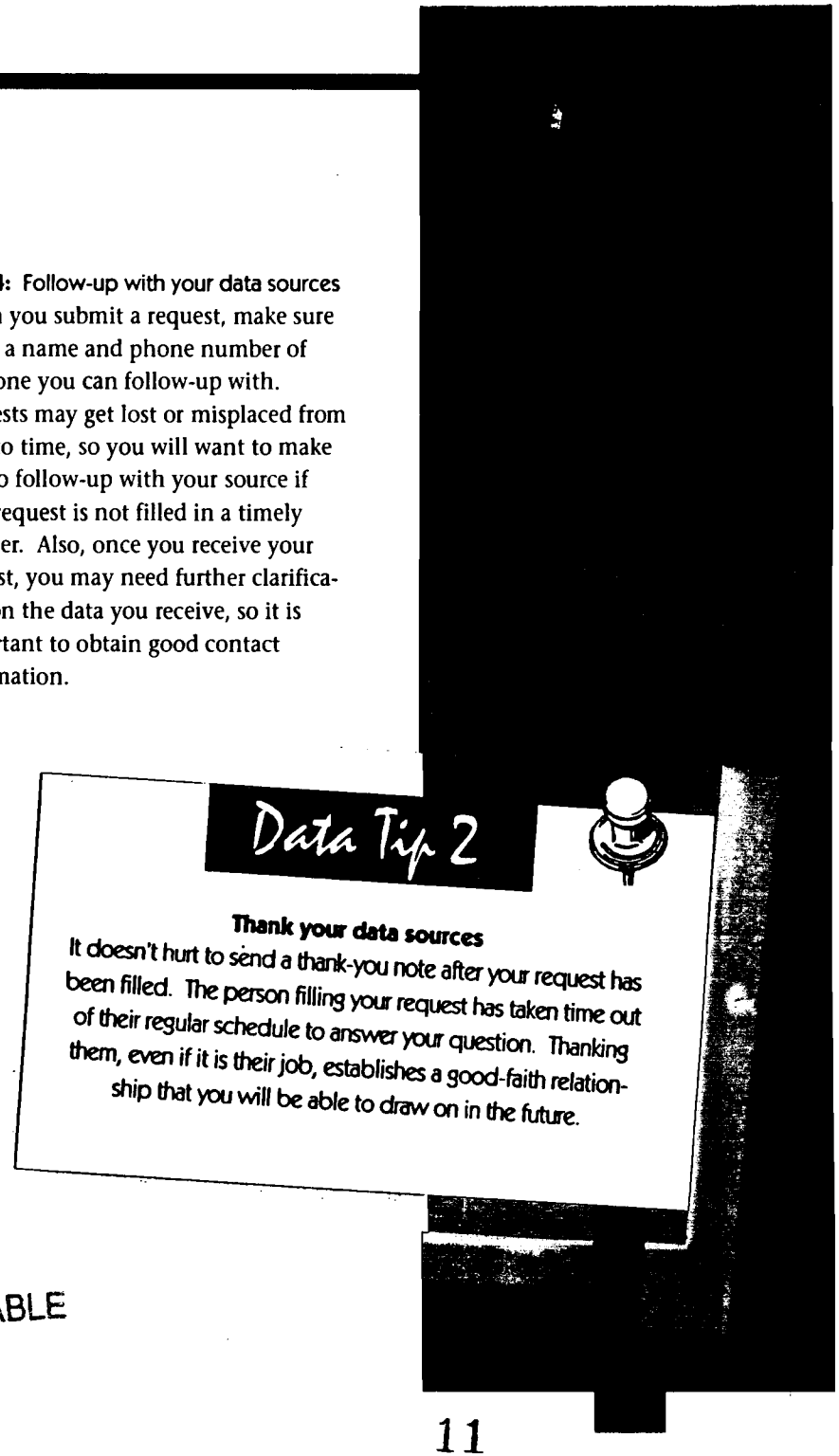
Here is a step-by-step guide to requesting data:

Step 1: Identify and contact your data source The most efficient way of initiating a request is over the phone. Your first attempt may not be the correct source or they may transfer you to another agency or division within the agency. Be patient! You may be transferred a number of times. Each time, it helps to describe what your project is and what kind of data you are looking for.

Step 2: Describe your specific data needs This will help your data source determine the kind of information needed to answer your question. Often data are already available through standard reports, while other data details may have to be obtained by special request. Being specific can help avoid getting "the run around" or can help get you transferred to the right person faster.

Step 3: Submit requests in writing Don't be intimidated by this! It is standard procedure in many public agencies. Some agencies ask everyone — from community organizers to state legislators — to submit a request in writing. In a written request, make sure to briefly describe why you need the data, what data you are requesting, how you would like it sent to you (e.g., printed report, computer disk or e-mail), when you need it by and where you can be reached if questions arise about your request. Submitting requests by fax, if possible, may quicken the request process.

Step 4: Follow-up with your data sources When you submit a request, make sure to get a name and phone number of someone you can follow-up with. Requests may get lost or misplaced from time to time, so you will want to make sure to follow-up with your source if your request is not filled in a timely manner. Also, once you receive your request, you may need further clarification on the data you receive, so it is important to obtain good contact information.



Data Tip 2

Thank your data sources

It doesn't hurt to send a thank-you note after your request has been filled. The person filling your request has taken time out of their regular schedule to answer your question. Thanking them, even if it is their job, establishes a good-faith relationship that you will be able to draw on in the future.

3

Sources of Data — Key Areas for Children and Families

Now that you know how to make a request, you need to know who to make the request to. In this section we provide a brief overview of the most pressing issues facing children and families in the areas of education, maternal and child health, family economics, and child welfare. Within each topic area, we compiled a list of many official data sources, the types of data available, how to contact the source, and other pertinent information. We start with perhaps the broadest and most widely accessible data source — the U.S. Census.

Data Tip 3

Start Early!

Give yourself plenty of time to collect the needed data. Some data requests can be filled immediately. Other more complicated requests may take several weeks. Make sure to give yourself and your data sources enough time to get the job done.

What kinds of data does the Census collect?

The U.S. Census collects information about households and individuals within households. The kinds of data collected include:

- **Income** — family income, poverty rate, receipt of public benefits
- **Housing** — type of housing, ownership, number of rooms, building condition, amounts spent on housing
- **Education** — highest grade completed, public or private school
- **Work** — employment status, type of occupation, salary
- **Demographics** — age, sex and race/ethnicity

Note: You need to be a little careful using older Census data. Census information is collected every 10 years. Some of the data from a Census may not be useful by the time the next Census is recorded. For example, there are 1,200 children age 5 in a community according to the 1990 Census. By the year 2000, the number of 5 year olds may have changed significantly.

How do you access Census data?

- **Library** — Many libraries carry U.S. Census information in bound volumes and on CD-ROM.
- **U.S. Census** — The U.S. Census Public Information Office can be called directly for basic questions at 301-457-4100. Regional Census offices offer information and advice on how to use the Census. The Chicago Regional Office can be reached at 708-562-1740.
- **Web Page** — A description of Census activities and data can be reached on their homepage www.census.gov
- **State Data** — Minnesota Planning Demography Division: 612-296-3539. Current household and population estimates as well as projections.

Education and Child Care

The earliest years of a child's life are critical for laying the foundation for later learning and development. The vast majority of Minnesota children — whether they have a nurturing and developmentally appropriate early childhood experience or not — will enter our public schools. Children who do have a quality early childhood experience are much more likely to be successful in school.

A good education is a child's surest path to personal growth, responsible citizenship, and economic well-being. This is particularly true for children from disadvantaged backgrounds. Global competition and the growing demand of the workplace make the benefits of education a necessity for each child and the key to our future.

Key Questions:

- How many children are in licensed and unlicensed child care?
- How many children drop out of school?
- How do children score on tests and what does that tell us about learning?
- What percent of children are enrolled in special education?
- How much is spent per-pupil on primary and secondary education and what is it spent on?
- How many children participate in the free- and reduced-priced school lunch program?

Education and Child Care — Data Sources

Organization	Phone	Available Data Include	Comments
U.S. Bureau of the Census www.census.gov	Public Information: 301-457-4100	educational attainment, school enrollment, preschool enrollment, child care and employment status	These items are categorized by race, ethnicity, and employment status for various geographic levels.
National Center for Education Statistics (NCES)	General Information: 202-219-1828	education conditions in the U.S. and internationally, high priority educational needs and indicators	Public datasets are available which include information from a number of national education surveys and studies conducted by NCES.
U.S. Department of Education (DOE)	Information Resource Center: 800-USA-LEARN	U.S. education initiatives, standards, conditions and progress	DOE collects data at the state level.
U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) Region V	Administration for Children and Families: 312-353-8322	Head Start enrollment, child characteristics and program spending	They collect Head Start information for Minnesota and other Midwestern states.
Education Commission of the States (ECS)	Publications Office: 303-299-3600	resource library and database concerning assessment, curriculum, finance, governance, and restructuring	ECS conducts policy research, surveys and special studies. They have information on all 50 states.
National Clearinghouse for Bilingual Education (NCBE)	General Information: 202-467-0867 800-321-NCBE	resource library and database on issues dealing with the education of linguistically and culturally diverse learners in the U.S.	NCBE collects, analyzes and distributes information in areas of concern including education of urban and minority students, racial, ethnic and gender equity issues and multi-cultural education.

Question: How many Minnesota children drop out of school?

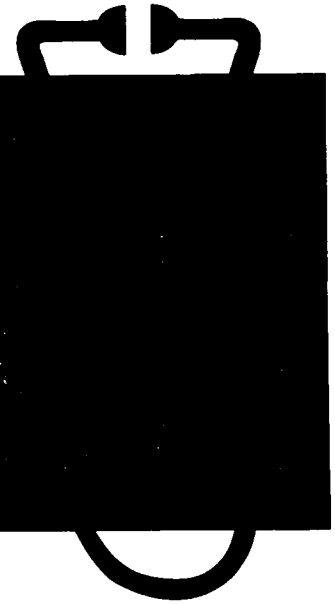
Source: Department of Children, Families & Learning - phone: 612-296-2400

Answer: In the 1995-1965 school year, 15,701 children dropped out of public school.

Organization	Phone	Available Data Include	Comments
Department of Children, Families and Learning	General Information: 612-296-6104 Early Childhood Education: 612-296-8414 Food and Nutrition Services: 612-296-6986 Data Management: 612-296-2400	student demographics, school enrollment, chronic truancy rate, school dropout rate, participation in the school lunch program, teacher and administrator salary, operating costs per-pupil, children enrolled in pre-kindergarten, children enrolled in special education programs numbers of licensed child care facilities—i.e. centers and family child care homes—and slots demographics of children using child care subsidies—age, gender, type of care used	You will need to think about which department or program you want information from before you make contact. DCFL has data at the school building, school district, regional, and state level. Availability varies depending on which data you are using.
Minnesota Child Care Resource & Referral	507-287-2020	number of licensed and legal unlicensed child care slots in centers and homes, ages of children in care, costs of care, availability of specialized care, demographic information on individuals seeking care (e.g., income, age of children, special needs)	MNCCRRA and its member agencies maintain a database and compile statistics of legally operating child care providers. Data are available for the state, regions, counties and communities. As the listing is voluntary, it does not include all providers operating in Minnesota.
DCFL: Minnesota Student Survey	For county information, call the Minnesota Prevention Resource Center: 1-800-247-1303. For local school district information, call your local superintendent's office.	Survey of 6th, 9th and 12th grade students in the areas of risk behaviors, tobacco, alcohol and other drug use, sexual activity, abuse and other issues.	Conducted every three years, beginning in 1989.

Maternal and Child Health

Most Minnesota children are born healthy and thrive. Yet, all children, regardless of family income, race/ethnicity or areas of residence, require periodic medical attention to ensure healthy development. In addition, we know that healthy mothers are more likely to give birth to healthy babies so we need to make certain that pregnant women receive the services they need. Good health care that begins before a child is born saves lives and money, and reduces health problems down the road.



Key Questions:

- How many pregnant women receive prenatal care in the first trimester?
- Has the percentage of all births to teen moms increased?
- What percentage of children have lead poisoning?
- How many children do not have health insurance?
- What is the immunization rate for children under age two?
- How many children die as a result of gun shot injuries?
- How many children are enrolled in the Medicaid program?

Maternal and Child Health — Data Sources

Organization	Phone	Available Data Include	Comments
U.S. Bureau of the Census	Public Information: 301-457-4100	demographic data (e.g., age, gender, race, ethnicity), income, Medicaid receipt, and insurance coverage	While specific data on population health status are not included on the Census, certain Census indicators are considered risk factors for poor health outcomes including poverty, lack of health insurance and inadequate housing.
U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) Region V	General: 312-353-1385 Maternal & Child Health: 312-353-1700 Medicaid: 312-886-5354	public health program participation, immunization rates, enrollment in Medicaid	The DHHS Region 5 Office is located in Chicago. This is a good source of state comparison data. They have information on Minnesota, but may refer you to local offices for additional information.
Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)	Office of Public Inquiries: 404-639-3534 National Center for Health Statistics (NCHS): 301-436-8500	various diseases, health behavior, health status, health care utilization, birth and death data	CDC is the federal agency responsible for monitoring the nation's health. Within CDC, NCHS is the principal vital and health statistics agency.

Question: Has the percent of low birth weight babies been increasing?

Source: Minnesota Department of Public Health – phone: 612-297-1232

Answer: In 1991, 5.0 percent of all births were at low birth weight;
In 1995, 6.0 percent of all births were at low birth weight.

Maternal and Child Health — Data Sources

Organization	Phone	Available Data Include	Comments
Minnesota Prevention Resource Center:	612-427-5310 Outside metro area: 800-247-1303	information and materials on substance abuse prevention	
Minnesota Department of Health Minnesota Care	Minnesota Care General Information: 297-3862 Outside the Metro Area: 800-657-3672	information on the MinnesotaCare Program, Minnesota's insurance program for low-income people	
Minnesota Department of Health	Health Policy and Systems Compliance Division: 612-282-6387	information on development of Minnesota state policies concerning health care cost containment and access to care	It includes information on Minnesota programs and projects, other states' programs, Medicare and Medicaid, health service markets, health plan markets, market regulation issues, and access and quality issues.
Minnesota Department of Health	Family Planning Special Projects Data: 612-623-5713 Maternal and Child Health Special Projects: 612-623-5265	approved grantees, services provided, populations served, and expenditures of the state funded Family Planning and Maternal Health special project grant programs	

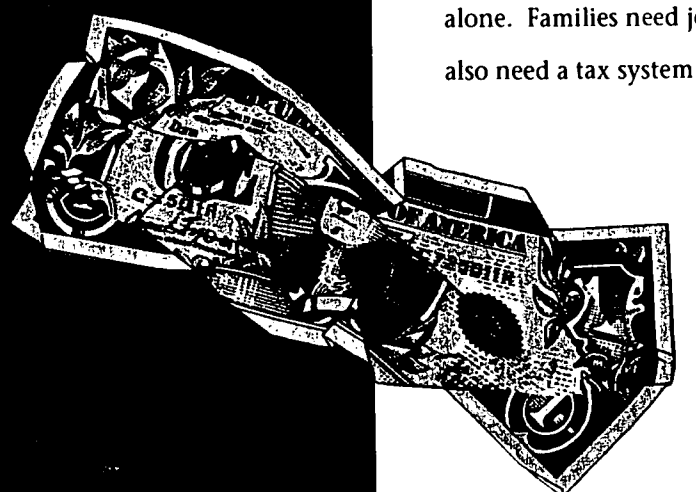
Organization	Phone	Available Data Include	Comments
Minnesota Department of Health	Center for Health Statistics General Number: 612-297-1232 Lead poisoning Data: 612-215-0877 Immunization Data: 612-623-5237 Vaccine Preventable Disease Data: 612-623-5707 STD Data: 612-623-5642 HIV/AIDS Data: 612-623-5645	information about health conditions and vital statistics for Minnesotans	Available by age, county, race and other demographic variables.
Minnesota Department of Health	WIC Program: 612-623-5266 outside metro area 800-657-3942	number of participants, characteristics and other program information	
Department of Children, Families and Learning	Migrant Student Health Data: 218-281-5832	physical health data about Minnesota Migrant Education and Migrant Head Start students	Information includes immunizations.
Department of Children, Families and Learning	Early Childhood Health and Developmental Screening Data: 612-296-1398	number of children screened and the number of new potential problems identified through Early Childhood Screening, including growth, immunizations, cognitive and motor development, hearing, vision, and identification of risk factors that may influence learning	
Minnesota Organization on Adolescent Pregnancy, Prevention, and Parenting (MOAPPP)	MOAPPP office: 612-644-1447 Toll free: 800-657-3697	information about teen pregnancy, births, prevention and parenting programs	Excellent clearinghouse of materials and information.

STATE SOURCES

Family Economics

Every child needs and deserves to grow-up in a household that can provide the basic necessities of life: adequate food, clothing, shelter, and health care. These are the fundamental underpinnings of security, and they help a child to grow-up healthy and strong.

Although parents are ultimately responsible for the well-being of their children they cannot do it alone. Families need jobs that pay a living wage, provide affordable health care and child care. They also need a tax system that does not overburden low-income people.



Key Questions:

- How many children live in poverty?
- How many people are unemployed and for how long?
- How many entry level jobs are being created?
- How many children receive Temporary Assistance for Needy Families?
- How much do low-income families pay in taxes each year?
- How many families live in inadequate housing?

Defining Poverty:

We often hear that families are living below or above the poverty level. What does that mean? Each year the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services sets the poverty guidelines for different family sizes. For example, in 1997 for a family of 3 (an adult and 2 children or 2 adults and a child) to be considered "living in poverty" or "below the poverty line," annual family income could not exceed $13,300. This threshold, originally developed by the Social Security Administration, was based on the amount of money needed for a family to get by on a thrifty food budget. The official "poverty line" is used in determining eligibility for social programs and tax benefits.

Family Economics — Data Sources

Organization	Phone	Available Data Include	Comments
U.S. Bureau of the Census	Public Information: 301-457-4100 State Data Center: 217-782-1381 Chicago Regional Office: 708-562-1740 Center for Governmental Studies—NIU: 815-753-0934	income, public benefits, child support, occupation, housing, and employee benefits	These items are categorized by race, ethnicity, and employment status for various geographic levels.
U.S. Department of Labor (DOL)	General Information: 312-353-1880 Women's employment status: 312-353-6985	jobs, salaries, benefits, and other labor issues	DOL has some state data. This data may be useful for comparisons with other states.

Organization	Phone	Available Data Include	Comments
Minnesota Department of Economic Security	General Information Line: 612-296-3644 Labor Market Information Help Line: 612-282-2714 Toll Free: 888-234-1114	statistics related to employment and unemployment	
Minnesota Department of Economic Security	Research Analyst: 296-1826 Dept. of Research and Statistics 296-5750	TANF participants' work activities, demographic and job training information.	Available when participant is referred by county to work activities.

continued

Question: How many Minnesota children live in poverty?

Source: U.S. Bureau of the Census, Current Population Statistics – phone: 708-562-1740

Answer: In 1994, there were 199,000 children living in poverty – or, 16 percent of all children.

Family Economics — Data Sources

Organization	Phone	Available Data Include	Comments
Minnesota Department of Human Services	General Information: 612-296-6117 Research Analyst: 612-296-7474	characteristics of people receiving TANF such as: age, race, marital status, and level of education	
Minnesota Department of Human Services	Research Analyst: 612-296-6155	information on TANF recipients seeking employment, job services, participation in education and training, the amount and type of public assistance participants are receiving, and the length of time participants spend on public assistance	
Minnesota Department of Human Services	Child Support Office Help Desk: 612-296-4085		The help desk receptionist will locate a person to provide the specific information requested.
Commission on the Economic Status of Women	612-296-8590	data base system includes general population characteristics, educational attainment, enrollment, marital status, living arrangements, labor force participation, employment, income, earnings, and poverty. Information is categorized for the entire state, the Twin Cities metropolitan area, and the rest of the state	U.S data are also available.
Minnesota Department of Revenue	General Information: 296-3781 Statistical information: 296-3425	tax collections data	Can also answer basic questions about taxes.

Child Welfare

Families in increasing numbers are vulnerable to social and economic factors that are eroding even basic family supports. Drugs, violence and financial hardship are taking a toll on children and their parents throughout the state.

Traditionally, parents have relied on extended families, the community, and social institutions to help make ends meet. Increasingly, families are finding themselves isolated from kin and neighbors.

Stress on the family heightens the risk of child abuse and neglect, family disintegration, and children living with unmet special needs.

Key Questions:

- How many children are victims of abuse or neglect?
- How many families receive family support services?
- How many children are placed in foster care and how long do they stay there?
- What is the average age of children entering the foster care system?
- How many children are arrested for non-violent and violent crimes?
- How many children are adopted each year?
- How many children are victims of violent crimes?
- What is the incidence of reported domestic violence?

Child Welfare — Data Sources

Organization	Phone	Available Data Include	Comments
U.S. Bureau of the Census	Public Information: 301-457-4100 State Data Center: 217-782-1381 Chicago Regional Office: 708-562-1740	family composition, living arrangements	These items are categorized by race, ethnicity, and employment status for various geographic levels.
Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) Region V	Administration for Children and Families: 312-353-4237 or 312-353-1385	child abuse and neglect, foster care, characteristics of children involved with child welfare services	They have national and state level data on child welfare issues. DHHS also is a source of state-by-state comparisons.

Organization	Phone	Available Data Include	Comments
Minnesota Department of Human Services	Communications: 217-785-1700 312-814-6847 General Information: 296-3781 Child Abuse and Neglect Data: 612-296-5416 Foster Care Data: 612-296-2441 Adoption Data: 612-296-3250 Children in Out-of-Home Placement Data: 612-296-2441 or 612-772-3765	child abuse and neglect, foster care, adoption, characteristics of children	Data is available by county.
Minnesota Department of Corrections	Office of Planning and Research: 612-642-0405	juvenile and adult incarceration population information by race, offense, number of new crimes committed, paroles, release, education level, religion, and marital status	
Minnesota Planning	Criminal Justice Center: 612-296-4852	juvenile and adult crime data	Data is available by county.

Using Race and Ethnicity Data

When people are trying to paint a picture of child well-being in Minnesota, they often want to include information about children of color. The number of children of color in Minnesota has been increasing rapidly in many parts of the state, including areas of greater Minnesota that have in the past been predominantly white. While the white population of Minnesota is estimated to have increased by 2.6% between 1990 and 1995, populations of color had much higher increases, ranging from 20.5% to 57%.

There are many barriers to finding accurate data about race and ethnicity in Minnesota. First of all, accurate and current demographic data about children of color in Minnesota is often unavailable, especially at the local level. The decenntennial census, which was conducted in 1990 and will be done again in the year 2000, is a source of local level data about children by race. However, that information is quickly out of date, especially because Minnesota has experienced significant growth during the 1990's in populations of color. Also, certain harder-to-count populations, such as migrant farm workers or illegal immigrants, are probably undercounted by the census.

The U.S. Census Bureau and the State Demographer do provide estimates of population by race and ethnicity (see right). However, these estimates are not broken out by age at the county level. School districts collect data on race and ethnicity, but this information only covers children who are in school and misses very young children as well as those who drop out.

Data about race and ethnicity is collected using many different methods. Parents might be asked to identify their race or the race of their children on a form. Often, these forms require that only one race or ethnicity be selected, even if a child culturally identifies with more than one race or ethnicity. Worse yet, race and ethnicity for some data is determined by others based on a visual determination, greatly reducing the accuracy of that data. Futhermore, different categories are used to classify people, depending on the data source. For example, one form may ask people to identify as "African-American" and one may identify people as "Black." One may classify "Hispanic" as a separate ethnic designation, and another may classify it as a racial designation. This lack of standardization reflects the real lack of consensus about definitions of race, ethnicity and culture in our society.

It also results in data that is often not consistent over time or across categories. It's important to always inquire how race is determined for a particular kind of data.

Estimated Population by Race and Hispanic Origin, 1990-95

	1990	1995	Percent Change
White, non-Hispanic	4,112,249	4,221,200	2.6%
African-American, non-Hispanic	93,660	136,900	46.2%
American Indian	48,458	58,400	20.5%
Asian	77,381	107,900	39.4%
Hispanic, all races	54,358	85,100	56.5%

Source: U.S. Census Bureau and Office of the State Demographer

Finally, children of color are often undercounted and unmeasured. Families may be mistrustful of providing information to the government. Children of migrant farmworkers may not be adequately represented because they are only in Minnesota part of the year. Data collectors may not be fluent in the parent's language or may determine race for a child incorrectly. This means that data about children of color in Minnesota should always be interpreted with caution.

4

What to Do with Data Once You Have It

You have successfully obtained some data on children and families. Now you need to decide how these data will be presented. Often when you receive data from a government agency, you may have to do a few basic calculations to get to the exact figure you want. This section will describe how to calculate some of the basic statistics typically used to count and compare data. Examples will be used throughout this section to demonstrate how these basic statistics are calculated.

Data Tip 4

Use the most recent data you can

The more recent data you use, the easier it will be to convince your audience that the existing condition is pressing. If only older data are available, be sure to make a note that you are using "the most recent data available."

Step 1: Count Your Data

If the data has been collected for you by a government agency, "counting" has usually already been done for you. However, there are times you may need to add or subtract a few numbers to obtain the exact figure you are interested in.

Example: You want to determine the number of children in poverty in the St. Paul suburbs. You have been able to collect the number of children in poverty in Minnesota, Ramsey County, and the City of St. Paul from the U.S. Bureau of the Census. In order to obtain the number you are looking for, you would need to subtract the City of St. Paul number from the Ramsey County figure to obtain the number of Ramsey County suburban children living in poverty.

Number of children in poverty in Ramsey County	20,329
Number of children in poverty in St. Paul	- 17,596
Number of children in poverty in Ramsey Co. suburbs	2,733

Step 2: Compute Your Data

While there are times that data you receive are ready to be used, there are other times when you may need to do a few computations. In this section, we will describe some of the more popular mathematical "tricks of the trade." The following are calculations — percentages, rates, ratios, change over time and adjusting for inflation — that will help to make your data meaningful.

Percentages, Rates and Ratios

Many of these calculations are similar. Which one you choose just depends on what you want to say about your data. Each of these calculations involves dividing one piece of data by another.

A "percent" means per 100. For example, 10 percent means 10 out of 100. To calculate a percent you divide the number in a sub-group or smaller number (for example, the number of children with no health insurance) by the number in the total group (for example, all children in a county) and multiply by 100.

Percent: (Number in sub-group ÷ Number in whole group) x 100

Example: (Number of children in poverty in Pine Co. + Number of all children in Pine Co.) *100

(910 ÷ 5,972) = x 100 = 15.2%

Thus, 15.2 % of children in Pine Co. live in poverty.

Converting Percentages: Once your data are calculated, you are able to express these numbers in a variety of ways.

Percentages	Other ways to express the same number
5%	5 in 100 or 1 in 20
10%	1 in 10 or One-tenth
50%	1 in 2 or One-half
75%	3 in 4 or Three-fourths

A "**rate**" simply means the number of things *per* some other number, usually 100, 1,000 or some other multiple of 10. A percentage is a rate — per 100. Depending on the size of your sub-group you may want to use a rate that is greater than per 100. This is often the case in health statistics such as infant mortality, child death, incidence of disease, etc.

To calculate a rate you need three pieces of information: the total group number, the number in your sub-group and the "per" number — per 1,000, or 10,000, or 100,000. That "per" can be called the multiplier.

Rate = (Number in sub-group ÷ Number in whole group) x Multiplier

Example: (Number of infant deaths in Minnesota + Number of all births in Minnesota) x Multiplier

(451 ÷ 64,277) = .007 x 1,000 = 7.00

Thus, the 1994 infant mortality rate for Minnesota was 7.00. This means that for every 1,000 births that occurred in Minnesota that year there were 7 infant deaths.

"**Per**" figures can also be other kinds of measures. For example, you might be interested in the number of infant deaths per month. In this instance we simply divide by the "per" figure.

Example: 451 infant deaths in Minnesota in 1994
451 infant deaths ÷ 12 months = 37.5 infant deaths per month
451 infant deaths ÷ 365 days per year = 1.23 infant deaths per day

A "**ratio**" is simply one number divided by another. It tells us how much bigger or smaller one number is compared to another. You can use this kind of comparison if you have the same measure for two groups for the same year (as in the example below) or one group with data for two different years.

For example, in 1996 the unemployment rate for Sibley County was 5.5 and in Rock County it was 2.8. If you divide the Sibley County figure by the Rock County figure you get the ratio.

Example: Unemployment rate in Sibley County ÷ Unemployment rate in Rock County

5.5 ÷ 2.8 = 2.0

This illustrates that the Sibley County unemployment rate is twice that of the Rock County rate.

Data Tip 5

Check and double check your numbers

After you have checked your numbers, have someone else check them. Also, check your numbers against the original data sources. Double check your arithmetic. Errors in reports or tables can ruin credibility and damage the effectiveness of your hard work.

Calculating Change Over Time

When you need to compare data from different points in time, it is a good idea to calculate the amount of change from one time period to the next. This is called the "rate of change." For example, if you want to see how the number of children in foster care changed between 1985 and 1996, you would use the following formula:

Rate of Change:
(Newer year number - Older year number) ÷ Older year number x 100

Example: 1996 number of children in foster care = 17,561 (newer number)
1991 number of children in foster care = 16,777 (older number)

(17,561 - 16,777) = 784

784 ÷ 16,777 = .0467 x 100 = 4.67%

This figure indicates that between 1991 and 1996 the number of children in foster care in Minnesota increased 4.67%.

Accounting for Inflation

While the concept of inflation may seem complicated, it is really quite simple to calculate. In order to understand what inflation is, consider the following example.

You go to the grocery store and purchase a bag of groceries that costs $10. If you went back one year later and purchased the same exact items, it would cost you more than $10. Some of the change in the cost of items is due to inflation. Inflation is a general rise in the level of prices over time which often varies from year to year or even month to month. Therefore, if you want to compare the change in the cost of groceries from one year to the next you should make sure to first account for inflation.

In order to do this calculation, you need to know the inflation index for each particular point in time. This can be obtained from the Bureau of Labor Statistics (at, 312-353-1880) and is known as the Consumer Price Index (CPI). For example, the CPI figure for January 1995 was 150.3 and in January 1996 it was 154.4. When you divide one figure into the other you get the inflation factor.

Inflation Factor = Newer Index Figure ÷ Older Index Figure

154.4 ÷ 150.3 = 1.028

We can use this inflation factor in two key ways:

1) **To put an older dollar amount into current year dollars.** For example, you could take a 1995 cost of education per-pupil and inflate it to 1996 dollars. To do this, you would use the following formula:
Inflation Factor x Older Per-Pupil Figure

1.028 x $4,000 = $4,112

This figure indicates that if you spent $4,000 per-pupil in 1995, you would need to spend $4,112 per-pupil in 1996. This calculation makes the statistics more meaningful for comparisons.

2) To account for impact of inflation on spending. For example, if you want to look at child health care spending in different years, you would want to account for inflation. For example, a city health clinic spent $50,100 on child health care in 1995 and $53,366 in 1996. In order to compare changes in spending we must first account for inflation by "adjusting" the older number by the inflation factor. This adjustment will put the older number into the same time frame as the newer year figure. We know from the above calculations that the inflation factor for 1995-1996 is 1.028.

Formula: (Older year spending amount x Inflation factor = Inflation adjusted spending amount)

Example: $50,100 x 1.028 = $51,503

Now you can compare 1995 inflation adjusted spending to 1996 spending by using the formula for change over time described above.

($53,366 - $51,503) ÷ $51,503 = .036 x 100 = 3.6%

Thus between 1995 and 1996, spending for child health care in this clinic increased by 3.6% after adjusting for inflation. If you had not adjusted the figures for inflation, it would have appeared as though spending had increased by 6.5%.

Data Tip 6

Make presentation understandable and meaningful

Too much data can overload your audience. Even If you have mounds of data, be sure to choose the most relevant figures for your argument and audience. Focus on the highlights. If you need to present more data, consider putting it in an appendix where it will be accessible to those who really need it.

Step 3: Compare Your Data

In order to make the data you have collected meaningful it is often a good idea to compare it to something else. Sometimes just stating the number — the number of children in foster care, the number of children born low birth-weight — is enough. However, it is often more powerful to compare those figures to the population as a whole, another point in time, or another geographic location.

POSSIBLE COMPARISONS

Topic	Points of Comparison	Examples
Population Characteristics	Gender, Race, Ethnicity, Age, Income	Male vs. Female Black vs. White
Geographic Location	Nation, State, County, Community Area	U.S. vs. Illinois Illinois vs. Indiana Adams Co. vs. Fayette Co.
Point in Time	10-year interval, last five years	1980 vs. 1990

Step 4: Present Your Data

Now that you have collected your data and calculated some statistics, you are ready to present this information. There are a few things to consider in preparing your presentation:

Know your audience

Before you begin planning your presentation, you should know who is your target audience. Different audiences sometimes require different levels of information. For example, data presented to the general public may be interested in simple charts and graphs describing the issue, while experts on a particular issue may be interested in more detailed information.

Data Tip 7

Do a test run

Have someone review your graphs, charts, and tables before you "go public" with the information. This will give you an opportunity to check that the presentation supports the point you are trying to make.

Know your data

In addition to determining who you will be sharing your information with, it is important that you understand the data that you will be presenting. Make sure to provide information on the source of the data, and the caveats or limitations of your data. Often, data are presented that may be misleading if certain considerations are not mentioned. For example, you are presenting data on the number of children enrolled in the Early Intervention program in 1996. You'd want to be sure to note if the data were from the 1995-1996 school year, from the 1996 calendar year, or a point in time during 1996. Knowing this information will help your audience to better understand the data.

Know how to display your data

There are a number of different ways that data can be presented to your audience. It is a good idea to incorporate visuals, such as tables and graphs, into your discussion. Ask yourself a few key questions:

- Is it readable? Avoid putting too much information on one page and make sure that pictures, maps or charts are not too small to read.
- Can it stand alone? Most graphs and tables should be self-explanatory. But always include pertinent identifying information on every table, chart and graph produced.

Producing tables, graphs, and charts

There are a number of computer software packages that enable you to create impressive tables, graphs, and charts. Here are a few illustrations of the types of visuals you can use to get your point across to the audience.

Example of a Table:

Selected Indicators of Childhood Well-Being: U.S. vs Minnesota

	U.S.	Minnesota
Median Family Income (1994)	$37,000	$41,900
Percent of Kids with No Health Insurance (1994)	13%	6%
Percent of Kids in Poverty (1994)	21%	16%
Percent of Children Ages 16-19 Who Are High School Dropouts (1994)	9%	8%

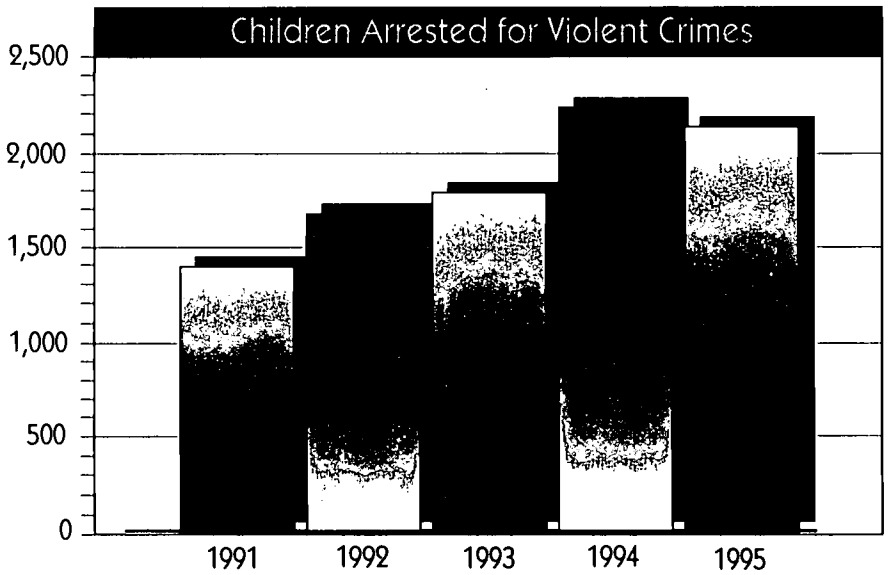
Source: Annie E. Casey Foundation. 1997 National Kids Count

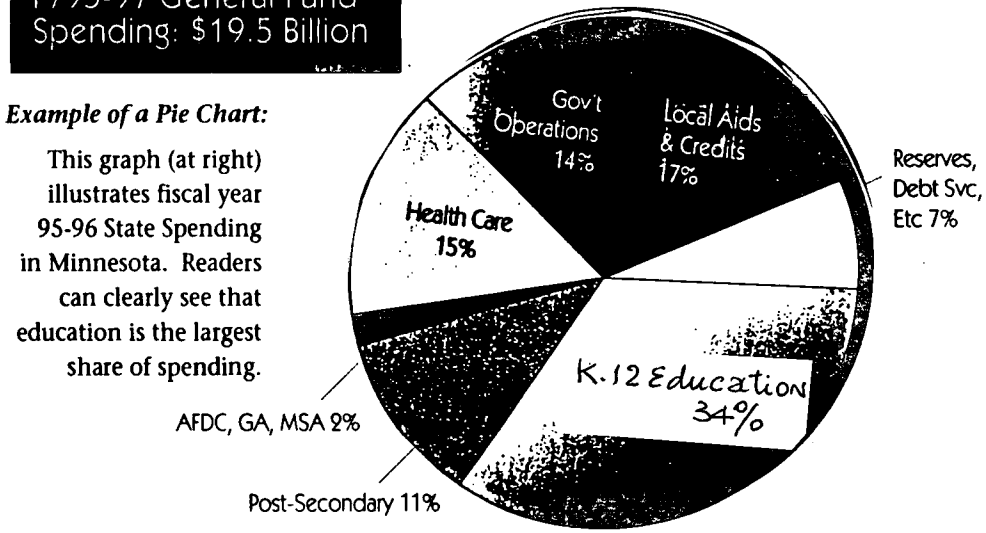
Tables enable you to present a large amount of information at one time. They also can provide your audience with numerical data at a greater level of precision than charts and graphs.

There are a variety of different types of charts and graphs which enable you to summarize a great deal of data in one place. Trends over time and comparisons between data elements can be illustrated at a glance. Charts and graphs can often have a more dramatic impact than data presented in tables or text.

Example of a Chart:

This "bar chart" (below) illustrates that the number of Minnesota children committing violent crimes grew from 1991 to 1994 and decreased in 1995.





Example of a Pie Chart:

This graph (at right) illustrates fiscal year 95-96 State Spending in Minnesota. Readers can clearly see that education is the largest share of spending.

Combining Data with Personal Stories

Personal experiences and stories are often persuasive ways to communicate with your audience. Inviting people to your presentation to share their experiences or presenting their stories as "case studies" allows the audience to better understand how certain conditions or policies affect the lives of real people. If you are quoting or publicizing a case study in your materials, be sure to ask permission first.

Statistics are powerful in illustrating the seriousness and urgency of a problem. However, it is important to remember that there are faces behind the figures you present. Also, while certain people respond to numbers, others may respond to pictures or stories. It is a good idea to use a combination of these techniques to inform your audience.

Community Report Card: A Profile of Children and Families in Dakota County

Community Report Card: A Profile of Children and Families in Dakota County" was an ambitious effort by the Dakota Partnership for Healthy Communities to gather and disseminate data about the status of children in Dakota Country. The diverse members of the partnership hoped that the report card would stimulate discussion and action about how children were faring in their country.

Dakota Country is a blend of fast-growing suburbs, older cities, small towns and rural communities. Population growth is expected to continue at a rapid pace well beyond the year 2000, and the country has a high proportion of children in its population.

In March, 1996 the group published its third version of the report card which looked at fourteen indicators in five areas: Health, Basic Needs, Nurturance, Education and Risk. In the report summary, they clearly identified areas where the county was doing well and areas where the county needed improvement.

The Partnership distributed the 23 page book to over 1,000 public officials, schools, police chiefs, religious congregations and non-profit agencies. A two page summary was distributed through libraries, schools and at community events.

The partnership developed a report card committee with assistance from an ongoing Communications Committee. The design and printing of the report card was provided by the Graphic Arts staff of a local school district. The report contains quotes from community leaders for each topic area along with a cover letter from the chair of the County Board of Commissioners. An extensive list of additional resources for qualitative data about children in Dakota Country was also included in the report.

"It was a tremendous amount of work," said Howard Schneider, a senior planner with Dakota Country Community Services Planning. "It's a cumbersome process because you have to call so many different places for statistics, and we couldn't find good indicators for some of the areas we wanted."

Still, Howard and others involved in the process felt that it was critical to provide a local context for data about their country. The narrative of a local, county report can contain more information than a state-level report could ever do. In fact, people in Dakota County often request data about their specific school district or city within the country, which the Partnership is usually able to provide.

Will the Partnership issue another report card in the future? "We need to keep up with gathering the information," said Schneider. "We might use a different format, but we still need to track how well kids are doing over time."

Using Data Responsibly

5

As a user of data, it is critical that you use it responsibly. Data that are used irresponsibly will deter from your ability to be a credible source. Here are a few pointers to ensure that you are using data responsibly:

Always Use Official Data Sources

If you are uncertain where the data you have come from, your best bet is not to use it. Data that come from a questionable source should be avoided.

Cite Your Source

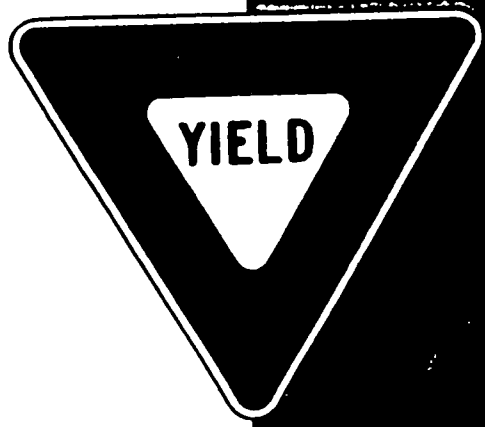
You should always provide your audience with information on the source of your data. Be sure to give credit to the group or agency that supplied the data.

Use Caution When Dealing with Small Numbers

Calculating rates and percentages when you only have small numbers of events or individuals is problematic. These figures may be unstable and can be very misleading. There are rules of thumb developed primarily for health statistics that assist data users in dealing with small numbers. If the condition you are observing is less than 10, *or* the whole population in less than 100, you should not calculate a rate. For example, if you are reporting on infant mortality in your community and the number of infant deaths is 7 and the number of births is 107, you should *not* calculate the infant mortality rate for that community. You can report the numbers, but put an "*" or other notation where the rate figure appears. This is used because rates based on small numbers are considered unreliable.

When Analyzing Data Over Time, Keep in Mind That Definitions and Formulas of Certain Data Sometimes Change

These changes need to be recognized when you are looking at trends in conditions over time. For example, the definition of child abuse continues to evolve as time progresses. Thus, if this change is not mentioned, the numbers presented at different points in time may be misleading. Changes in the way data are defined should always be noted.



Children and Families—Data Sources on the Internet

Government — National

Bureau of Labor Statistics
http://stats.bls.gov/blshome.html

U.S. Bureau of the Census
http://www.census.us

U.S. Department of Education
http://www.ed.gov

Fed Stats
http://www.fedstats.gov/index20.html
Information from over 70 federal agencies that collect statistics.

National Center for Health Statistics
http://www.cdc.gov/nchswww/nchshome.htm

U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD)
http://www.hud.gov

Government — State

MN Dep. of Economic Security, Research & Statistics Office
http://www.des.state.mn.us/lmi/

Minnesota KIDS COUNT 1998 Databook
http://www.cyfc.umn.edu

Minnesota Planning
http://www.mnplan.state.mn.us
This site contains all Minnesota Planning reports, including the Children's Report Card.

List of all Minnesota Government web sites: http://www.state.mn.us/govtoffice/index.html

Other Sites of Interest

Annie E. Casey Foundation
KIDS COUNT
http://www.aecf.org/aeckids.htm

Center on Budget and Policy Priorities
http://www.cbpp.org

Children's Defense Fund
http://www.childrensdefense.org

Child Welfare League of America
http://www.handsnet.org/handsnet2/cwla/

Electronic Policy Network (EPN)
http://www.epn.org

Families USA
http://epn.org/families.html

National Association of Child Advocates
http://www.childadvocacy.org

Urban Institute
http://newfederalism.urban.org/

List your own favorite sites:

Acronyms and Abbreviations

Sometimes accessing data can get difficult because of all the jargon. Here are a few of the acronyms you are likely to encounter:

Federal Agencies

ACF Administration for Children and Families — part of the Department of Health and Human Services

CDC Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

DHHS Department of Health and Human Services

DOE Department of Education

Minnesota Agencies

DCFL Department of Children, Families and Learning. Includes the former Department of Education, along with other children's services such as child care and Head Start.

DHS Department of Human Services. Administers many programs for children and families including income assistance, drug and alcohol treatment, services for people with disabilities and child welfare services.

MDH Minnesota Department of Health. Administers health-related programs and statistics, including immunizations, birth and death records, maternal and child health, WIC, health education, and disease prevention and control.

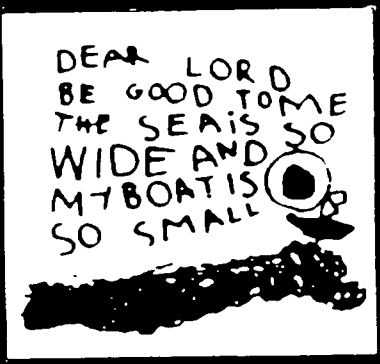
MFIP Minnesota Family Investment Program. Minnesota's version of TANF, the federal welfare program.

TANF Temporary Assitance for Needy Families. Replaced AFDC as a part of federal welfare reform.

CCRR Child Care Resource and Referral agencies. Provide assistance to providers and parents in each region of Minnesota.

MA Medical Assistance. Minnesota's name for the federal Medicare program which provides health care to low income adults and children.

MinnesotaCare
Minnesota's health care plan for low income people who do not qualify for Medicare.



WORKSHEET

Now it's your turn. Create a Fact Sheet on the state of children in your community.

Be sure to think about the tips provided in this guide as you prepare this worksheet.

Population

Number of children under age 18 _____

Children as a percent of total population _____

Education and Child Care

Number of children in licensed and unlicensed child care _____

Percent of child care providers that are nationally accredited _____

High school dropout rate _____

Amount spent annually per-pupil on primary and secondary education _____

(see sources on pages 5-7)

Maternal and Child Health

Infant mortality rate _____

Teen birth rate _____

Percent of children with lead poisoning _____

Number of children enrolled in Medicaid _____

(see sources on pages 8-11)

Family Economics

Percent of children in poverty _____

Median family income _____

Number of jobs created _____

Percent of TANF recipients that are children _____

(see sources on pages 12-14)

Child Welfare

Number of children that are victims of abuse and neglect _____

Percent of children that are in foster care _____

Number of children arrested for violent crimes _____

(see sources on pages 15-16)

Minnesota KIDS COUNT Advisory Committee

Carolyn Carlson
Blue Cross/Blue Shield
Minnesota

Jim Casebolt
Joint Religious
Legislative Coalition

Trudy Dunham
Center for 4-H
Youth Development
Univervity of Minnesota

Richard Fong
Minnesota Planning

Sherry Boyce
St. Louis County
Extension Service

Judith Kahn
Children, Youth and
Family Consortium
University of Minnesota

Judith Jordan
Minnesota State Child
Care Resource and
Referral Center

Ann Hill
Ombudsman for
African American Families
State of Minnesota

Ann Jaede
Minnesota
Department of Corrections

Nancy Nelson
Minnesota Organization
for Adolescent Pregnancy,
Prevention and Parenting

Fritz Ohnsorg
Center for Health Statistics
Minnesota Department
of Health

Patricia Ray
Ombudsperson for
Spanish Speaking Families
State of Minnesota

Pete Rode
Urban Coalition

Acknowledgements

Information is Power! A Child Advocate's Guide to Fear-Free Fact Finding was originally funded by a grant from the Polk Bors. Foundation. The original text was written by Ami Nagle of Voices for Illinois Children, with the assistance of Andrea Havill, Marjorie Newman, Mike Burke, Mike Roach, Michael Kagan and Mary Kate Webber.

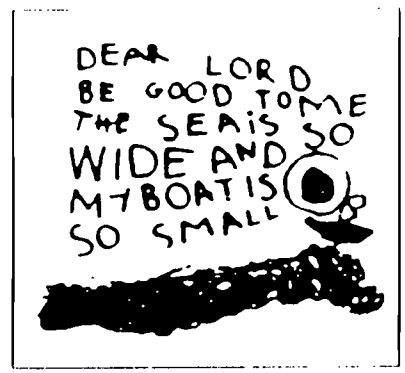
Revisions to the Minnesota version were written by Diane Benjamin and Kerri Thompson at Children's Defense Fund-Minnesota.

Children's Defense Fund-Minnesota would like to thank Ami Nagle and Voices for Illinois Children for their kind permission to revise their original publication.

Children's Defense Fund
Minnesota Office

550 Rice Street, Suite 205
St. Paul, Minnesota 55103
Telephone (612)227-6121
Fax (612)227-2553

Information is Power!
A Child Advocate's Guide to Fear-Free Fact Finding



U.S. Department of Education
Office of Educational Research and Improvement (OERI)
National Library of Education (NLE)
Educational Resources Information Center (ERIC)

NOTICE

Reproduction Basis

☒ This document is covered by a signed "Reproduction Release (Blanket)" form (on file within the ERIC system), encompassing all or classes of documents from its source organization and, therefore, does not require a "Specific Document" Release form.

☐ This document is Federally-funded, or carries its own permission to reproduce, or is otherwise in the public domain and, therefore, may be reproduced by ERIC without a signed Reproduction Release form (either "Specific Document" or "Blanket").

EFF-089 (3/2000)