

Every Child Every Promise

TURNING FAILURE INTO ACTION

ISSUE BRIEF

I N C O M E



This research brief made possible by

Every Child, Every Promise examined how much children and youth experience the Five Promises, or positive features of development, that research shows are connected both to avoiding risky behavior such as alcohol or other drug use and to positive outcomes such as volunteering or doing well at school.

The Five Promises are Caring Adults, Safe Places and Constructive Use of Time, A Healthy Start, Effective Education, and Opportunities to Help Others.

AMERICA'S PROMISE ALLIANCE



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THE PROMISE RICH vs. THE PROMISE POOR A Big Gap Experienced with Promise Two: Safe Places and Constructive Use of Time

In an increasingly competitive global economy, the inequitable distribution of the Five Promises should be cause for concern.

This research brief documents the Promise gap that exists between children in low-income families and those in higher income families.

Although parents in low-income families are typically providing a safe, nurturing, and caring home for their children, these families need supports outside their homes to ensure that their children have the stimulating and educational experiences that lead to better academic and social outcomes.

The Every Child, Every Promise (ECEP) report, released by the Alliance in November 2006, clearly demonstrates that this country is not doing enough to ensure that young people have the necessary supports to meet and/or exceed their potential.¹ In fact, two-thirds of the 49 million young people in the U.S ages 6- to 17-years are not experiencing a critical mass of these developmental supports, the Five Promises—caring adults; safe places; healthy start; effective education; opportunities to help others—they need to succeed. While this “Promise deficit” is seen across all demographic groups, *ECEP* shows that it is more prominent for certain population segments. Some groups of children are much more likely than others to experience a critical mass of the Five Promises. But none of the Promise gaps are as large as the differences between children in low-income families and those in high-income families.

A RECENT ANALYSIS OF ECEP DATA CONCLUDES:

- 1 Children in low-income families are less likely than those in high-income families to be “Promise-Rich” (experiencing four or more Promises) and more likely to be “Promise-Poor” (experiencing zero or one Promise).
- 2 A big gap between income groups exists in Promise Two: *Safe Places and Constructive use of Time*.
- 3 While parents in low-income families are providing nearly the same level of the *Safe Places* Promise as those in high-income families, children from low-income families are less likely to attend safe schools, live in safe neighborhoods and participate in high-quality after-school activities.

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THE PROMISE RICH vs. THE PROMISE POOR

PROMISE-RICH VS. PROMISE-POOR

There are significant differences between low- and high-income children in the Promise-Rich and Promise-Poor categories (see Table 1). Children in high-income families are more than twice as likely as those in low-income families to be Promise-Rich. Forty-four percent (4 million young people) in America's high-income families have four or five Promises. This group of children can expect to succeed. On the other hand, only 19 percent (approximately 2.5 million out of 13.5 million young people) from low-income families are receiving enough of these essential developmental resources they need to succeed.

At the other end of the Promises spectrum, children in low-income families are more than twice as likely as those in high-income families to be Promise-Poor. Nearly 30% of low-income children experience zero or one Promise compared to only 13 percent of children in high-income families. This means that 4 million 6-to-17 year-olds living in low-income families experience zero or one Promise in their lives and are therefore at greater risk for failure.

GAPS WITHIN PROMISE TWO:

SAFE PLACES AND CONSTRUCTIVE USE OF TIME

Looking at the individual Promises, children in higher-income families are more likely than children in lower-income families to experience each Promise, but that experience varies dramatically between high-income and low-income kids when looking at individual Promises (see Table 2).

Financial status does not appear to be a great factor in experiencing Promise One - *Caring Adults*. More than 80 percent of children in all income groups report experiencing the *Caring Adults* Promise. The difference between the high-income group and the low-income group on this measure is relatively small - eight percentage points. This indicates that most parents, including those in low-income families, are providing one of the most critical ingredients for positive youth development.

The biggest difference *ECEP* discovered between high-income and low-income children is with Promise Two - *Safe Places* and *Constructive Use of Time*. There is a

TABLE 1 Distribution of 6-17 year-olds by family income and number of total promises experienced

TOTAL NUMBER OF PROMISES EXPERIENCED	LESS THAN \$30,000		\$30,000 - \$49,999		\$50,000 - \$99,999		\$100,000 - OR MORE	
	Percent	Number (IN THOUSANDS)	Percent	Number (IN THOUSANDS)	Percent	Number (IN THOUSANDS)	Percent	Number (IN THOUSANDS)
0-1	29c	4,002	22b	2,124	18b	2,947	13a	1,275
2-3	51	7,039	52	4,802	46	7,531	43	4,217
4-5	19d	2,622	25c	2,308	36b	5,894	44a	4,315
		13,663		9,234		16,372		9,807

SOURCE: Figures calculated by Search Institute and Child Trends based on 2005 National Promises Survey dataset and American Community Survey microdata). National Promises Study samples were weighted to reflect March 2004 Current Population Survey distributions by age, gender, race/ethnicity, and income. Missing data in the American Community Survey (approximately 209,000 among 6-11 year olds and 261,000 among 12-17 year olds) were excluded, because although it is likely lower-income children were over-represented among the missing, the exact distribution of missing data is not known

a,b,c = Percentages with differing letters are significantly different from each other

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THE PROMISE RICH vs. THE PROMISE POOR

TABLE 2 Percentage of U.S. 6-17 Year Olds by Income Groups with Each Promise

INDIVIDUAL PROMISES	LESS THAN \$30,000		\$30,000 - \$49,999		\$50,000 - \$99,999		\$100,000 - OR MORE	
	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number
Caring Adults	80b	11,041	85	7,849	84	13,752	87a	8,533
Safe Places and Constructive Use of Time	23d	3,174	32c	2,955	41b	6,712	51a	5,002
Healthy Start	38b	5,244	33b	3,047	45a	7,367	48a	4,708
Effective Education	55c	7,591	57c	5,263	62b	10,150	68a	6,669
Opportunities to Help Others	41c	5,659	51b	4,709	60a	9,823	65a	6,375

SOURCE: Figures calculated by Search Institute and Child Trends based on 2005 National Promises Survey dataset and American Community Survey microdata). National Promises Study samples were weighted to reflect March 2004 Current Population Survey distributions by age, gender, race/ethnicity, and income. Missing data in the American Community Survey (approximately 209,000 among 6-11 year olds and 261,000 among 12-17 year olds) were excluded, because although it is likely lower-income children were over-represented among the missing, the exact distribution of missing data is not known

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28 percentage point difference between high- and low-income kids; 51 percent of children in high-income families experience Promise Two, compared to only 23 percent of children in low-income families. This means nearly 10.5 million young children from low-income families are not experiencing Promise Two.

The *Safe Places* Promise is the product of six components that span the family, school and community.

High- and low-income 12-to-17 year-olds have comparably high rates of safe family and effective parental monitoring (see Table 3). But the differences between income groups in terms of safe schools, safe neighborhoods and high quality and affordable after-school activities are dramatic. While 80 percent of 12- to-17-year-old children in high-income families report being in safe schools, only 55 percent of their peers in low-income families report attending a safe school.

Moreover, the relationship between family income and safety in schools is clearly linear. The more money a family has, the more children are reported to attend safe schools. There is a similar pattern for safe neighborhoods. Eighty-six percent of children in high-income families report living in safe neighborhoods, compared to 52 percent of those in low-income families.

In addition, while nearly half of children from high-income families participate in high-quality after-school activities, only about one-third of children from low-income families do so. The reason for the after-school disparity could be the opportunity for participation; 80 percent of high-income children and youth have affordable, high-quality after-school activity options in their neighborhoods, compared to only two-thirds of those living in low-income families.

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THE PROMISE RICH vs. THE PROMISE POOR

The difference between high- and low-income kids with reference to *Safe Places* and *Constructive Use of Time* is driven by differences in safety and constructive activities outside the home. The majority of parents in low-income families are doing their part, as evidenced by the vast majority of children across income brackets reported living in a “safe” home.

The problem fulfilling Promise Two occurs once young people leave their home. Children from low-income families have insufficient access to safe streets, safe schools and opportunities to participate in substantive activities that build the social skills which will help them thrive during their youth and succeed in a competitive workforce – especially in relation to their higher-income counterparts.

TABLE 3 Percentage of U.S. 12-17 Year Olds with Safety Promises Experienced by Income

	Less Than 30,000	\$30- \$49,000	\$50- \$99,999	\$100,000 or more
	Percent	Percent	Percent	Percent
Experiencing a Safe Family	84	89	90	89
Experiencing Parent Monitoring	60b	64	67a	69
Experiencing Safe Schools	55c	62b	65b	80a
Experiencing Safe Neighborhoods	52c	70b	78b	86a

SOURCE: Figures calculated by Search Institute and Child Trends based on 2005 National Promises Survey dataset and American Community Survey microdata). National Promises Study samples were weighted to reflect March 2004 Current Population Survey distributions by age, gender, race/ ethnicity, and income. Missing data in the American Community Survey (approximately 209,000 among 6-11 year olds and 261,000 among 12-17 year olds) were excluded, because although it is likely lower-income children were over-represented among the missing, the exact distribution of missing data is not known

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WHERE DOES THIS LEAVE US?

The lack of Promises for children in low-income families, coupled with the rise in child poverty suggests there are growing numbers of children who are unlikely to experience even a minimal number of the Five Promises. According to the Current Population Survey conducted by the U.S. Census, the number of children in low-income families (about 28 million under 200 percent of the Federal poverty level) has remained stagnant since 2000, with the rate of children in poverty rising from 16 percent in 2000 to 18 percent in 2005; resulting in an increase in nearly 1.3 million poor children since the turn of the century.²

Having a large and growing number of children who do not get the developmental supports they need to succeed (high school completion being the benchmark of success for America’s youth) does not bode well for the future of the United States. Despite broad measures of economic prosperity (low unemployment, climbing stock market, etc), the Census Bureau reports that income inequality increased by 4.2 percent over the past 10 years.³ If this Promise disparity is not fixed, the gap between the haves and the have-nots will grow bigger. ■

1 America’s Promise Alliance (2006). *Every Child, Every Promise: Turning Failure into Action*. Alexandria, VA: Author. <http://www.americaspromise.org/APAPage.aspx?id=6584>

2 DeNavas-Walt, Carmen, Bernadette D. Proctor, and Cheryl Hill Lee, 2006, *Income, Poverty and Health Insurance Coverage in the United States: 2005*, *Current Population Reports*, P60-231, U.S. Bureau of the Census, U.S. Government Printing Office, Washington, DC. Page 8

3 Ibid