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## **New Report Profiles Child-Well-Being in Each of Louisiana's Parishes**

New Orleans, LA, December 2, 2009—A new report released today finds that race and place are two of the most important predictors of child well-being in Louisiana. The 2009 KIDS COUNT Data Book on Louisiana's Children, produced by Agenda for Children, presents and analyzes information on over fifty different measures of child well-being in each of Louisiana's 64 parishes. The report documents critical statistics related to children's health, demographics, education, child care, child welfare, and juvenile justice.

The Data Book focuses on the roles that both race and place play in child well-being in Louisiana. The quality and availability of housing, schools, job opportunities, and health care all combine to define a child's environment, for better or worse. As the report reveals, children of color are more likely to grow up in distressed neighborhoods that can limit opportunities available to young people and their families. The data show that African American children in Louisiana are more likely than their white peers to experience a host of negative outcomes ranging from being born preterm to dropping out of high school. "Despite the victories of Civil Rights legislation more than four decades ago, we continue to see shocking racial disparities in some of our most basic measures of child well-being, including infant mortality rates and child poverty," said Judy Watts, President/CEO of Agenda for Children. "As a society that values equity, it is imperative that Louisiana actively pursue policies and practices that lift up all our children. When decisions are made and policies are created, ask first, 'Is it good for the children?'"

Key findings in the Data Book include:

### **Family Economics**

- One out of every four Louisiana children lives in poverty.
- Child poverty rates vary widely across the state. The child poverty rate in East Carroll Parish (56%) is 3.7 times as large as the child poverty rate in St. Tammany Parish (15%).

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## **Education**

- Louisiana has made significant progress toward ensuring that more children enter kindergarten ready for school. Enrollment in prekindergarten in public schools increased by 57% between the 2000-2001 school year and the 2008-2009 school year, rising from 21,290 students to 33,438 students. In 2008, the National Institute for Early Education Research's *State of Preschool* report ranked Louisiana 12<sup>th</sup> in the nation in terms of providing four year-olds with access to publicly-funded preschool programs.
- A majority of public school students come from low-income families in all but six of Louisiana's parishes. In the 2008-2009 school year, the percentage of students who were eligible for free or reduced lunch ranged from a low of 43% in Bossier and St. Tammany parishes to a high of 94% in Tensas Parish.

## **Health**

- Louisiana has improved since 2001 in access to adequate prenatal care. In 2001, 79% of all births were to women who received adequate prenatal care, while the same was true of 85% of births in 2006. Despite the overall improvement, rates vary widely by both geography and race. In Acadia, the worst-ranked parish, only 67% of births in 2006 were to women who received adequate prenatal care. By contrast, 97% of La Salle Parish births in 2006 were to women who received adequate prenatal care. Statewide, white women were more likely than black women to have received adequate prenatal care. In 2006, 89% of births to white women were to mothers who had received adequate prenatal care, while the same was true of just 79% of births to black women.
- After many years of continuous improvements, Louisiana's teen birth rate rose between 2005 and 2006, increasing from 50 to 55 births per 1,000 females ages 15-19. With 99 births per 1,000 females ages 15-19, the teen birth rate in Red River Parish (the worst-ranked parish) was three times as large as the rate in Lincoln Parish (the best-ranked parish).

## **Child Welfare**

- The number of valid child abuse and neglect allegations in Louisiana increased by 22% between fiscal year 2005 and fiscal year 2007, rising from 13,999 to 17,098 allegations. Nearly all of the rise was caused by a large increase in the number of valid neglect allegations during this time. In FY 2007, three out of every four valid child abuse and neglect allegations involved neglect. Physical abuse accounted for 17% of allegations, while sexual abuse allegations comprised 5% of all valid child abuse & neglect allegations.

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## **Juvenile Justice**

- Since the beginning of the century, Louisiana has experienced a dramatic decrease in the number of youth who are in the custody or under the supervision of the Office of Juvenile Justice. The number of youth in secure custody declined from 1,485 youth in 2000 to 486 youth in 2007.

“In these difficult financial times, it is more important than ever that Louisiana invest in a brighter future for our children,” said Watts. “The data show that we were already failing too many Louisiana children even before the recession pushed more families into poverty. We urge decision-makers in state and local governments to protect children’s needs during difficult budget decisions.”

Hard copies of the Data Book can be obtained by contacting Agenda for Children. The full report can also be downloaded in its entirety at the Agenda for Children web site, [www.agendaforchildren.org](http://www.agendaforchildren.org). Data on Louisiana’s children is also available through the KIDS COUNT Data Center, [www.kidscount.org/datacenter](http://www.kidscount.org/datacenter), which allows users to map data, chart trends over time, and rank parishes. The Data Center also allows users to add “widgets” that show live charts, rankings or maps on their own web sites.

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*Agenda for Children, Louisiana’s statewide child advocacy organization, works to make Louisiana a state in which all children can thrive. For more information, please visit the Agenda for Children website at [www.agendaforchildren.org](http://www.agendaforchildren.org).*