

# New online database tracks wellbeing of US children

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The Institute for Child, Youth and Family Policy (ICYFP) at Brandeis University's Heller School for Social Policy and Management has launched the first nationally comprehensive, interactive online database for tracking and analyzing the wellbeing and equity of U.S. children across racial and ethnic groups.

The site, [diversitydatakids.org](http://diversitydatakids.org), allows users to create customized profiles, rankings and maps that make data visual, accessible and understandable. It is supported by the W.K. Kellogg Foundation and the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation (RWJF), in partnership with the Kirwan Institute for the Study of Race and Ethnicity at Ohio State University.

BNow spoke with Dolores Acevedo-Garcia, director of ICYFP and principal investigator of [diversitydatakids.org](http://diversitydatakids.org) about the project and what it can provide.

## **Your database looks specifically at children's wellbeing across racial and ethnic groups. Why look at the data across those lines?**

There are three main reasons why it is critical to look at child wellbeing by race and ethnicity. First, our child population today is much more diverse than it was a few decades ago. In the mid-1970s, non-Hispanic white [children](#) represented about 85 percent of the U.S. child population,

but today they are only slightly more than half. Second, unfortunately, not all children have the same opportunities for healthy development. On average, black, Hispanic and American Indian children have fewer opportunities than other children. These inequities in opportunity feed large disparities in child outcomes down the road in development, health and education. Finally, we need better information about programs and policies that improve wellbeing for all children while reducing inequities. Often we have information about whether a program or policy works overall, but not whether it reduces inequities and improves outcomes for vulnerable children. Diversitydatakids.org policy equity assessments address these issues. We have a moral, economic and civic obligation to tackle these inequities through a deepened understanding of which strategies, policies and programs are effective.

**The database can zoom out and look at trends nationally and zoom in and look at smaller geographic levels. Can you give an example of what information at a specific geographic level can tell us about child wellbeing?**

The racial and ethnic composition of the [child population](#) differs across the country, and opportunities and inequities also differ. This means we need more tailored policy solutions rather than a "one-size-fits-all" approach. Diversitydatakids.org presents data for up to seven different geographic levels (depending on data availability): neighborhood, county, city, school district, metropolitan area, state and nation. Different geographic levels allow us to answer different questions. For example, we examine the extent of Family and Medical Leave Act (FMLA) coverage across states for working parents, recognizing that parents' time to attend to their children's needs may not be available to parents of all racial/ethnic, immigrant and socioeconomic backgrounds. We are interested in the state level because states are able to enact

expansions (via state-level legislation) to cover more parents. Our data support the work of groups that advocate for expansions of family and medical leave at the state level.

## **What other kinds of questions can this database answer?**

Diversitydatakids.org is a very rich data resource. It has broad and deep geographic and thematic coverage, always with a focus on race/ethnicity and equity; often the data are available for multiple years. Also, the reports users can get from the site are highly customizable. These two features—the depth and breadth of our indicators, and customizability—mean that our data can be used to answer a wide range of questions. For example, one user may be interested in low birthweight for Hispanic babies by county, while another user may want to know about school segregation between white and black children in the 100 largest metropolitan areas or school districts, while another user may want to know the proportion of low-income children in a specific state that are served by Head Start.

## **What can this database help accomplish?**

Diversitydatakids.org offers the first comprehensive, equity-focused information system to monitor progress towards improved wellbeing for children of all racial/[ethnic groups](#) through unique data and policy indicators and analysis. Until now, despite increasing diversity and inequities, the public, policymakers and practitioners must piece together information from disparate, fragmented sources.

Diversitydatakids.org helps fill this gap. One possible use of our data is to help state and local groups understand equity issues in their communities and how their communities compare with other areas, which they can use in reports and policy advocacy. Another possible use

of our data is our equity-focused analyses, which help put an important equity issue in the spotlight. In September 2010, our original website released a study of school segregation in the 100 largest metro areas, which received extensive publicity, especially in the Boston Globe, where it was covered in the lead story and editorial.

Provided by Brandeis University

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