

**More than two-thirds of children in out-of-home placements have greater stability after one year.** Stability and permanency are important to children's development and safety. Children who are shifted among multiple foster care or other out-of-home placements are at greater risk of serious developmental and health problems.<sup>14</sup>

**Incidents of school violence have increased but reporting remains inconsistent.** Children spend the majority of their day in school, where the expectation is that teaching and learning are the focus. School violence—including bullying, assaults, and threats—disrupts the learning process, creates an environment of anxiety and distraction and can reinforce violent behavior and victimization.<sup>15</sup> While reporting is increasing, it is difficult to gauge if the standards for reporting have improved.

**The delinquency rate has declined and is at an eight-year low.** North Carolina's juvenile delinquency rate has declined to 34.08 per 1,000 children ages 6-15. Due to changes in the structure of the Department of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention during the past nine years, there has also been a 67.9 percent decline in Youth Development Center commitments.<sup>16</sup>

**North Carolina does not treat 16-and 17-year-olds as the minors they are.** In fact, more North Carolina youth are processed as adults than as juveniles. In 2004 alone, 32,926 16 and 17 year olds were processed in the adult system compared to 19,955 youth who generated delinquent complaints in the juvenile system.<sup>17</sup> Research has shown that the juvenile system is developmentally appropriate for children under the age of 18, providing both the rehabilitation and reorientation necessary to move young people in the direction of future success.



North Carolina has undertaken significant reforms to the systems that serve to ensure the safety of children and their freedom from violence in their homes, schools and communities. In 2000, the child welfare system adopted new federal outcome measures to better monitor and track the quality of care provided to children. Significant additional efforts locally provide support to children in the foster care system, keep families involved and support youth transitioning out of foster care. Professional development opportunities and other efforts that build the capacity of the child welfare system have been expanded through collaboration across systems and facilitated through the work of the North Carolina State Collaborative for Children, Youth and Families.

The establishment of the Center for the Prevention of School Violence in 1993 marked an investment in monitoring the safety of school environments and youth violence prevention. The Center has additionally supported positive youth development efforts in communities to ensure that young people have opportunities for after-school activities and connections to their neighborhoods.

The N.C. Department of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention has undergone significant reforms as well, focusing on the formation of local Juvenile Crime Prevention Councils (JCPCs) and reducing the size



and focus of Youth Development Centers to provide geographically based, therapeutically focused treatment and services for youth. The JCPCs are an effective infrastructure to provide a developmentally appropriate, research-based continuum of services for *all* youth, which includes education, parental participation, punishment and rehabilitation.

The most significant reform required to ensure that all North Carolina minors are afforded opportunities to become successful adults is to provide them access to these services. Automatically consigning all 16- and 17-year-old youth to the adult criminal justice system, with no exceptions, results in less monitoring and higher recidivism rates for young offenders.<sup>18</sup> Research demonstrates that youth are best served in the juvenile justice system, where a continuum of research-based programming, developmentally appropriate community programs, secure settings and the inclusion of families can provide them with the tools to move their lives forward in a more positive direction.<sup>19</sup>

North Carolina must continue to explore ways to enhance the capacity of the child welfare system, prevent delinquency through strong positive youth development programs and support juveniles in contact with the justice system through the provision of developmentally appropriate services. The safety of our children and youth is fundamental to their ability to achieve in school, participate positively in their communities and succeed as adults.

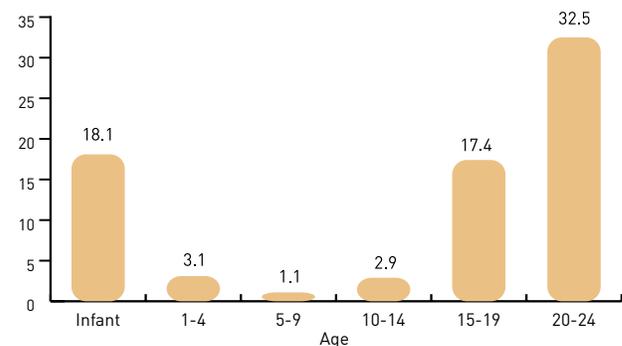
## How are North Carolina's systems serving children?

There have been a number of recent reforms to the systems that address the safety of children, including implementation of the Multiple Response System in child welfare. There are still opportunities to enhance the focus on prevention by further investing in family support programs, Juvenile Crime Prevention Councils and after-school programs, which can provide young people with supportive environments. Nearly 23,000 youth annually receive locally provided JCPC-funded juvenile services, despite limited funding that has not kept pace with the juvenile population growth, inflation or the demand for expanded services.<sup>20</sup>

	2007
Children adopted	1,662
After-school programs	502
Juvenile Crime Prevention Council admission rate (per 1,000; ages 10-17)	16.04
Detention admission rate (per 1,000; ages 6-17)	3.44

Please see "Indicator notes, definitions and sources" for more information on each of these indicators.

## Rate of child deaths due to violence by age group (per 100,000 residents)



Source: N.C. Violent Death Reporting System Annual Report 2005. N.C. DHHS Division of Public Health, Injury and Violence Prevention Branch, August 2008

In 2005, infants were found to have the highest rate of violent death among children under 18 years of age. Homicides accounted for most of the violent child deaths, with firearms being the dominant method. Among all violent deaths, young adults in the 20-24 year age group had the highest rate of violent death, with suicide and homicide being the top two manners of death.

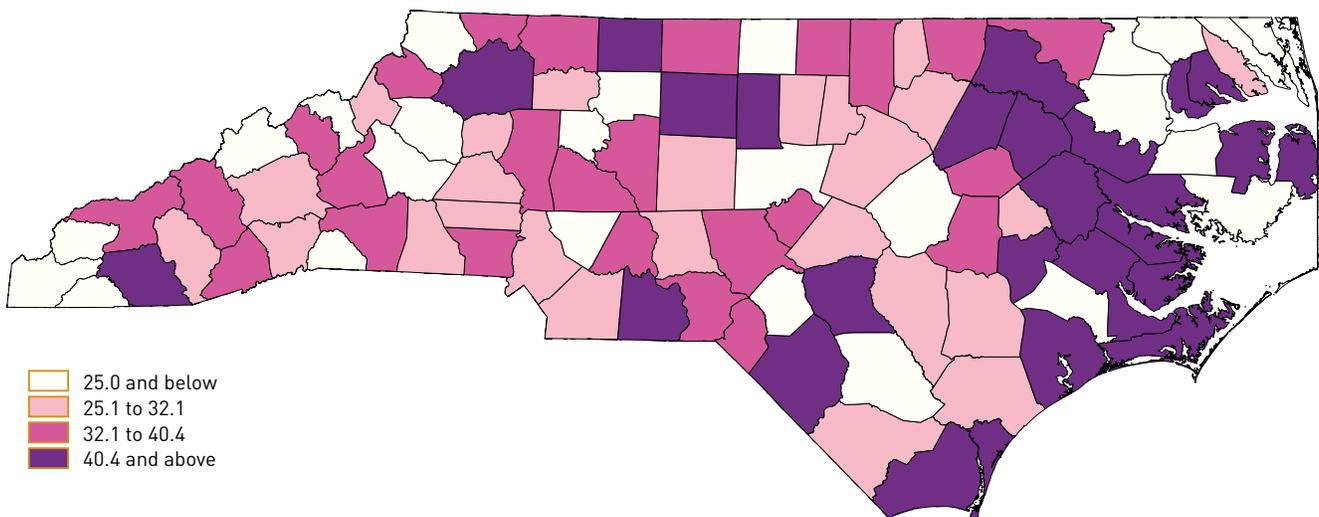
## Race Matters

There is increasing concern that youth of color are disproportionately in contact with the juvenile justice system nationwide. The Annie E. Casey Foundation recently reported on the ratio of rates of youth of color to white youth in custody and found that North Carolina has a higher ratio of youth of color in custody relative to white youth than that of the country as a whole. North Carolina's youth of color are four times more likely to be in the juvenile justice system than white youth.

2006	North Carolina	United States
Ratio of rates of youth of color to white youth in custody	4:1	3:1

**Source:** Annie E. Casey Foundation, *Kids Count Data Book, 2008*. Based on data from the 2006 Census of Juveniles in Residential Placement.

## Juvenile Delinquency Rate (per 1,000) by County



**Source:** North Carolina Department of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention. 2007 Annual Report.

## Goal 3: All Children have Economic Security

The interdependence of the economic health of families, communities and the state is never more apparent than in the case of children. Children rely on the support of government and their parents' incomes to ensure that their basic needs are met. They depend on the institutions in their communities to pave the way to greater opportunities. Children's economic security may be a measure of the economic conditions of their household and the vitality of their communities today, but it also points to the sustainability and growth of the economy in the future.

Economic security—in its many forms—impacts children's outcomes. Children growing up in poverty are more likely to live in poverty as adults, possibly driven in part by a higher likelihood of missing meals, living in poor neighborhoods and attending poorer schools. Long-term prospects can be further restricted, even for children in middle-income families, who often find their debt for higher education too significant to bear. In 2005, North Carolina college graduates of all income levels held an average of \$20,000 in debt.<sup>21</sup> Children without the security of a safe home—free from health hazards and in communities of opportunity—or a warm meal, or a school that challenges them to achieve, face even more obstacles to economic success.

In recent decades, as North Carolina's economy has transitioned from manufacturing to services, there has been significant turmoil in the national and international markets, and the state has failed to significantly modernize its approach to economic recovery and poverty reduction. The resulting outcomes for children are overwhelmingly negative and demonstrate a significant area for improvement.

### Goal 3: All Children have Economic Security

	2007	2003	Change (%)
Median household income (in 2007 inflation-adjusted dollars)	\$44,670	\$43,084	3.7%
Children in poverty (100% of the Federal Poverty Line)	421,702	382,164	10.3%
Poor children in working households	102,620	60,766	68.9%
Children in low-income households (200% of the Federal Poverty Line)	925,648	915,753	1.1%
Children in asset poor households	28.9% (2004)	n/a	n/a
Children in households with a housing cost burden	714,397	605,734	17.9%
Children in concentrated poverty neighborhoods	13,728 (2000)	n/a	n/a

Please see "Indicator notes, definitions and sources" for more information on each of these indicators.



**North Carolina's median household income increased only slightly to \$44,670 over the period from 2003 to 2007, adjusted for inflation.** Median household income provides one measure of a household's ability to meet the costs for food, clothing, housing, health care, childcare and transportation. The cost of living varies across communities in the state, and the North Carolina Justice Center's Living Income Standard provides county-level estimates of what it takes to make ends meet.<sup>22</sup>

**The number of poor children in working households has increased by half.** A combination of stagnating wages and low-wage job growth has created an environment in which earned income often does not move a family out of poverty. Economic conditions that leave families struggling to find affordable childcare, pay for health care or meet monthly housing expenses create environments of prolonged exposure to high stress that impact children's brain development and limit their ability to learn.<sup>23</sup>

**Nearly half of North Carolina's children live in low-income households.** In 2007, "low-income" or nearly two times the federal poverty level for a family of four was \$42,000, only slightly lower than the state's median household income. A depressed labor market, parents' lack of education, poor housing and bad health can all contribute to a family's economic struggles.<sup>24</sup>

**Nearly a third of North Carolina's children live in households that are asset poor.** These households do not have the savings to go three months without employment income. They can't weather economic storms or natural disasters and are therefore more vulnerable to poverty and less able to take advantage of opportunities.

**The number of children living in households where housing costs represent more than 30 percent of the monthly income is growing.** The larger the portion of monthly income that is spent on housing, the fewer resources are available for other necessities. These children are more at risk of hunger and, in the long run, living in substandard housing or being homeless.

**As of 2000, 13,728 children lived in concentrated poverty.** The concentration of poor people in economically depressed communities creates an environment conducive to a host of social problems: increased risk of violence, substance abuse, high drop-out rates and teenage pregnancy.<sup>25</sup>



In recent years, North Carolina has been a national leader in providing income supports to families through childcare subsidies, expanding the minimum wage and offering a state Earned Income Tax Credit. While these efforts have benefited from the commitment of nonprofit organizations and policymakers, the current economic downturn demands sustained investment by the state in systems that can support families in times of crisis and afford them opportunities to improve their economic security.

## How are North Carolina's systems serving children?

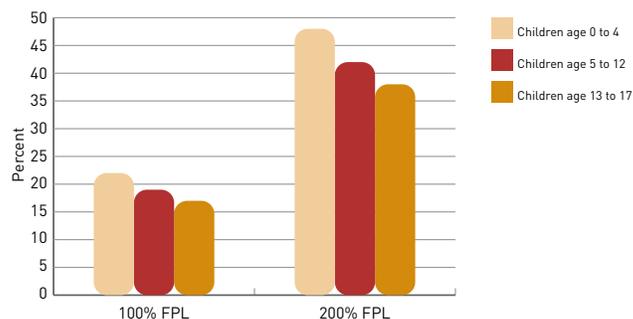
North Carolina has a system of income supports that has engaged and enrolled a significant number of families, most notably through Food Stamps (now called SNAP) where children benefit from the financial assistance of the federal government. Unfortunately, however, North Carolina continues to waste needed resources testing the assets of applicants to many public benefit programs, despite the fact that very few households are found to be ineligible because of having too much money saved. An important source of local stimulus is provided by the federal and state Earned Income Tax Credits. The federal Child Tax Credit provides an additional lump-sum at tax time for low- and middle-income families with children.

	2007
Children receiving food stamps	610,218
Food stamp applications denied due to asset test	0.21%
Households receiving the federal Earned Income Tax Credit	(2005) 770,657
Households receiving the federal Child Tax Credit	(2005) 778,095

Please see "Indicator notes, definitions and sources" for more information on each of these indicators.

Building savings for future opportunities and creating communities where public schools, financial institutions and businesses support and promote economic opportunity for children are two ways in which North Carolina can build upon the success of its efforts to address income poverty. Addressing the concentration of poverty in certain regions, as well as in particular neighborhoods, can additionally stimulate local economies and support economic growth in the future. The economic challenges today suggest taking a long-term view on the return on investment in children's economic security. Further investments in this area could go a long way to raising the competitiveness of North Carolina now and in the future.

## Children by Federal Poverty Level by Age Group



Source: Population Reference Bureau calculation. American Community Survey, 2007.

The Federal Poverty Level (FPL) in 2007 for a family of four was \$20,650. North Carolina's children are much more likely to live in low-income households—where earnings are below 200 percent of the FPL—than poor households—where earnings are below 100 percent of the FPL—a sign that many parents are working, but earning very low wages. Of particular concern, however, is that young children under the age of 5—when they are at their most vulnerable—are more likely to be poor or low-income than older children.