

For immediate release
Thurs., Jan. 21, 2010

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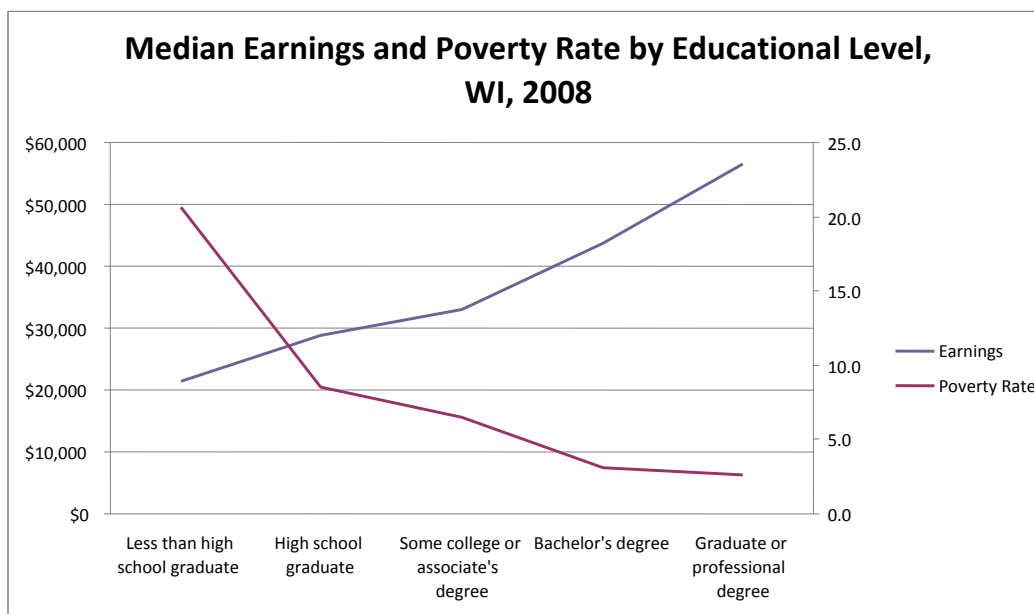
WCCF Releases 2009-10 WisKids Count Data Book, *Jobs Count: Helping Wisconsin Families Thrive Through New Opportunities*

The Wisconsin Council on Children and Families (WCCF) WCCF has released its 2009-10 WisKids Count Data Book, *Jobs Count: Helping Wisconsin Families Thrive Through New Opportunities*. The book was unveiled Thursday morning at a panel discussion in Milwaukee focusing on employment issues facing the Milwaukee area.

Jobs Count contains an array of county-by-county data on key indicators of child well-being. In addition to the numbers, this year's edition of WisKids Count features an essay outlining a number of key employment challenges the state faces. They include access to job training services and post-secondary education; access to high-quality jobs that offer a family-supporting income; and the availability of supports to fill gaps between jobs, such as unemployment insurance. The essay offers several policy recommendations aimed at helping families navigate the path to economic security, both now and into the post-recession future.

“Economic stability is at the heart of child well-being,” said WCCF Executive Director Ken Taylor. “Kids whose parents have good jobs are more likely to grow up healthy, succeed in school, and stay out of trouble. One of the best ways to tackle child poverty is by connecting adults to high-quality employment.”

One of the most powerful influences on income and poverty status, as noted in the book, is participation in postsecondary education. The graph below illustrates that median income rises dramatically and poverty rate plummets in relation to educational attainment.



“The evidence on the importance of postsecondary education is very powerful,” Taylor said. “Tailoring school programs and financial aid policies to meet the need of low-income working parents can be a powerful weapon in the battle against poverty.”

Other data highlighted in *Jobs Count* includes:

- Wisconsin has seen considerable growth in the rate of 4-year-olds in kindergarten program as school districts expand opportunities around the state.
- Children testing positive for lead has seen a steady decline from 4.5 % of children under age 6 in 2003 to 1.7% in 2008.
- Juvenile arrest rates have dropped since 2003 from 89 per thousand to 76 per thousand in 2008.
- Wisconsin’s overall high school graduation rate masks disparate outcomes for students of color in the state.
- Between 2007 and 2008 the number of children using emergency shelter increased by 23%, or 884 more kids.
- Wisconsin has seen a dramatic increase in FoodShares participation between 2003 and 2008 (56/1000 to 79/1000).
- Children eligible for free and reduced lunch have increased from 29% in 2003 to 34% in 2008.
- African American children are almost 5 times as likely as White children to live in poverty in Wisconsin. Latino children are more than twice as likely as White children to be poor.

The essay also contains a number of recommendations aimed at addressing the state’s employment challenges, including:

- updating the state’s UI system so that those seeking part-time work will qualify;
- putting more emphasis on education and training in the welfare reform legislation (TANF) coming up for reauthorization soon;
- indexing the minimum wage to inflation; and
- extending the increased funding for Pell Grants that was provided in the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA).

The panel discussion, “Employment Challenges in the Milwaukee Area: The Recession and Beyond” (scheduled from 8:30 to 10:00am at the Italian Community Center) features local experts taking on such topics as:

- How should local and state leaders respond to our current employment challenges, both ongoing ones and those directly related to the recession?
- Has the recession merely exacerbated existing employment barriers, or has it fundamentally changed what job-seekers and workers will face in the months ahead?
- Of the various challenges facing workers, such as transportation, skill development, and job access, what are key leaders focusing resources on at this stage?

Advance registration for the event is closed as of noon on Tuesday, Jan. 19; however, space may be available on a walk-in basis. The registration fee of \$30 includes breakfast. For more information about the panel discussion, see http://www.wccf.org/event_workforce_forum.php.

The WisKids Count data book *Jobs Count: Helping Wisconsin Families Thrive Through New Opportunities*, is available at http://wccf.org/pdf/wiskidscount_2009-10_fullbook.pdf. You may also access the data directly via the Kids Count Data Center on the Annie E. Casey Foundation website at <http://datacenter.kidscount.org/data/bystate/StateLanding.aspx?state=WI>.