



# Connected to Practice

*Best practices—A Focus on What Works*

## **Strong Communities**

March 2008

Family Connection Partnership is committed to improving the well-being of Georgia’s children, families, and communities. Family Connection Partnership works jointly with partners across the state to address the serious challenges facing Georgia's children and families.

Family Connection Partnership visions that all Georgia children can be healthy, ready to start and succeed in school, and have stable, economically self-sufficient families that live in strong communities.

Since 1995 Family Connection Partnership has measured the well-being of Georgia’s children using Georgia Kids Count indicators. In 2005 the indicators were revised and expanded. The fifth set of the revised Georgia Kids Count Indicators focuses on Strong Communities.

The level of connectedness, involvement, and trustworthiness among people living in the same neighborhood—social capital—is critical for the prosperity of communities. These social networks facilitate communication about education and job opportunities, access to credit, and potential child care options. Families living in communities with inadequate or unsafe housing face extraordinary challenges in providing the basic necessities of life. These disconnected families are vulnerable to an array of social and economic challenges, including unemployment, crime, teenage pregnancy, inadequate education, and access to public assistance.

In strong communities public spaces are cleaner, people are friendlier, voter participation is higher, and the streets are safer. Communities with strong connections provide a solid foundation necessary for the success of the children and families living in them.

### **Georgia Kids Count Indicators Strong Communities**

Adult educational attainment
1. High school graduate
2. Bachelor’s degree or higher
Unemployment
Poverty status
1. Children living in poverty
2. Students eligible to receive free or reduced price meals
3. Families with children with annual incomes less than 150% of the federal poverty threshold
Homeownership
Crime rate (age 17 or older) (per 1,000)
1. Violent crime
2. Other crimes (burglaries, etc.)
Voter participation

---

## INDICATORS RELATED TO EDUCATIONAL ACHIEVEMENT OF ADULTS:

---

- |                                |
|--------------------------------|
| Adult educational attainment   |
| 1. High school graduate        |
| 2. Bachelor's degree or higher |

### Why is this indicator important?

- The educational status of parents is a key factor in shaping healthy outcomes for children. When children grow up in communities with high drop-out rates, they are more likely to experience poverty and live in economically distressed environments (Kids Count Georgia Fact Sheet, 2003).
- Educational attainment of mothers has been linked to young children's school readiness skills, educational attainment, and enrollment in early learning programs (<http://www.vakids.org/pubs/sri2004.pdf>).
- Mothers with less than 12 years of education are less likely to receive adequate prenatal care, and their children are at higher risk of infant mortality. (<http://www.unitedhealthfoundation.com/shr2005/components/infantmortality.html>)
- Adults with high school diplomas earn higher wages than non-graduates.
- Non-graduates have reduced buying power which means decreased revenue to local businesses, increased taxpayer costs for public services, and decreased economic development opportunities among employers seeking an educated workforce (<http://www.all4ed.org/files/HighCost.pdf>).
- Non-graduates have poorer health outcomes and mortality rates—2.5 times higher than the rate of those with 13 or more years of education (<http://www.all4ed.org/files/HealthFactoids.pdf>).
- Unemployment rates among non-graduates are more than 50 percent higher than for high school graduates and nearly three times higher than for college graduates (Dolinger, 2005).
- Non-graduates and graduates with low levels of academic achievement are more likely to participate in criminal activity. Non-graduates are 3.5 times more likely to be arrested in their lifetimes (<http://www.all4ed.org/publications/Crime%20Factoids%20for%20Website.doc>).

### What Works?

- **Offer community-based programs to teach adults about resources available to help them complete their education, earn a GED, and/or learn technical skills necessary to succeed in the workforce.**
- **Offer family literacy programs through local school systems, community colleges, private nonprofit community-based organizations, correctional institutions, and other state institutions.** Because parents are their children's first and most important teachers, it is critical that they have the basic skills to support their children's development in the early years of school (<http://www.aelweb.vcu.edu/pdfs/Report6.7.pdf>).
- **Increase funding for TANF recipients to pursue college degrees.** Currently less than one percent of TANF funds are allocated to education and training investments ([http://www.cssp.org/uploadFiles/improving\\_economic.pdf](http://www.cssp.org/uploadFiles/improving_economic.pdf)).

### Resources

Best Practices. Georgia Partnership for Excellence in Education. <http://www.gpee.org/Best-Practices.11.0.html>

Healthier and Wealthier: Decreasing Health Care Costs by Increasing Educational Achievement. 2006. Alliance for Excellent Education. <http://www.all4ed.org/files/HandW.pdf>

Improving the Economic Success of Families. Policy Matters. Center for the Study of Social Policy [http://www.cssp.org/uploadFiles/improving\\_economic.pdf](http://www.cssp.org/uploadFiles/improving_economic.pdf)

No Time to Waste: Indicators of School Readiness-Maternal Education. Voices for Virginia's Children  
<http://www.vakids.org/pubs/sri2004.pdf>

Report of the Task Force on Adult Education and Literacy to the Virginia Board of Education and Recommendations for Improving Literacy Services in Virginia. June 2001.  
<http://www.aelweb.vcu.edu/pdfs/Report6.7.pdf>

Show Me the Money: Alliance Analysis Finds that States Could Generate Millions More in Wages by Raising High School Graduation Rates. (2005). Alliance for Excellent Education. Available at  
<http://www.all4ed.org/files/archive/publications/StraightAs/Volume5No7.pdf>

The Impact of Education on Crime: Fact Sheet. Alliance for Excellent Education. November 2003.  
<http://www.all4ed.org/publications/Crime%20Factoids%20for%20Website.doc>

The Impact of Education on Health & Well-Being: Fact Sheet. Alliance for Excellent Education. November 2003.  
<http://www.all4ed.org/files/HealthFactoids.pdf>

The High Cost of High School Dropouts: What the Nation Pays for Inadequate Schools. 2007.  
<http://www.all4ed.org/files/HighCost.pdf>

---

## INDICATORS RELATED TO ECONOMIC SECURITY:

---

Unemployment
Poverty Status
1. Children living in poverty
2. Students eligible to receive free or reduced price meals
3. Families with children with annual incomes less than 150% of the federal poverty threshold
Homeownership

### Why are these indicators important?

- Family stress and conflict associated with economic insecurity increases the likelihood of divorce or separation. Low-income parents separate twice as frequently compared to parents who are not struggling economically (Sherman, 1997).
- Economic pressures have a negative effect on adults as parents. Many studies have shown that exposure to parental conflict is hard on children, with negative effects in social, academic, and emotional development (<http://www.agls.uidaho.edu/ccc/CCC%20Families/pdf/Conger%20and%20Elder.pdf>).
- Parents under economic pressure are likely to be distracted and minimally involved in the parenting role until their children get involved in serious misbehavior. Stress results in inconsistent parenting and vacillation between noninvolvement and hostile, overreaction (Ibid).
- Research findings indicate that teens in families receiving Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) are more likely than other youth or younger children in TANF families to engage in risky behaviors, have academic problems, and experience long-term dependency (Kaplan, 2004).

- How children observe their parents' work experiences can shape their views of their future economic opportunities and may affect their academic performance and attitudes. Children who witness a parent's job loss may be motivated to stay in school and thus, eventually secure a better or more stable job. Children's pessimistic perceptions of their parents' labor market experiences diminish their motivation and may lead to unhealthy behaviors such as disengagement from school ([http://www.iveybusinessjournal.com/view\\_article.asp?intArticle\\_ID=570](http://www.iveybusinessjournal.com/view_article.asp?intArticle_ID=570)).
- Children living in poverty are at greater risk of low academic achievement, health problems, and are more likely to repeat the cycle of poverty as adults (<http://www.childtrends.org/Files/PovertyRB.pdf>).
- The mental and physical changes accompanying hunger and malnourishment can have harmful effects on learning, development, productivity, physical and psychological health, and family life.
- Research shows positive benefits from homeownership for children, including educational attainment, lower teen pregnancy rates, and increased social and political involvement at all levels of government (<http://www.cfed.org/publications/Building%20Assets%20-%20first%20edition.pdf>).
- Families that own homes are less likely to move than those that rent. Residential stability has been closely linked to improved educational outcomes in children (<http://www.newyorkfed.org/research/epr/03v09n2/0306hark.pdf>).

## What Works?

### 1. Connect Families to Resources

- **Offer community-based programs to teach parents about resources available to help them complete their education, earn a GED, and/or learn technical skills necessary to succeed in the workforce.**
- **Offer family literacy programs through local school systems, community colleges, private nonprofit community-based organizations, correctional institutions, and other state institutions.** Because parents are their children's first and most important teachers, it is critical that they have the basic skills to support their children's development in the early years of school. <http://www.aelweb.vcu.edu/pdfs/Report6.7.pdf>
- **Support education and job skills training.** Currently only 10 percent of TANF recipients are in job training and less than one percent of TANF funds are allocated to education and training investments ([http://www.cssp.org/uploadFiles/improving\\_economic.pdf](http://www.cssp.org/uploadFiles/improving_economic.pdf)).
- **Increase access to childcare providers.** Newly employed welfare recipients have difficulty finding reliable providers. The lack of availability of subsidized childcare slots for children of different ages is likely to prevent some women from keeping their jobs.
- **Make transitional benefits more available and accessible.** Shortages of transitional childcare funds and lack of awareness of their availability (and availability of transitional Medicaid) prevents some clients from accessing these benefits. Paperwork, bureaucratic snags, and ignorance of procedures discouraged some clients from accessing and using transitional benefits.
- **Increase access to traditional banking services in low-income neighborhoods.** Help lower the risk of families going to predatory lending organizations, which drain much-needed resources from low-income communities.
- **Advocate for an end to housing discrimination.** Steering families toward specific neighborhoods and providing little assistance with finance packages hinders their purchase of a home.
- **Offer financial literacy education.** Partner with community organizations, including schools, financial institutions, and faith-based organizations, to educate families about financial matters.
- **Use strategies to maximize identification of students eligible for free or reduced price meals.** Train cafeteria managers and cashiers to process applications so students may drop off the applications at the cafeteria and at the front office. To assure integrity of the applications, have central office clerks review and validate the applications taken by the cafeteria managers and cashiers ([http://www.lbb.state.tx.us/Perf\\_Rvw\\_PubEd/Other/FoodForThought/foodforthought.pdf](http://www.lbb.state.tx.us/Perf_Rvw_PubEd/Other/FoodForThought/foodforthought.pdf)).

## 2. Policy and Services

- **Increase cash benefit levels.** State cash benefit levels should be set at a level that, when combined with other key benefits like food stamps and the earned income tax credit, raises family income at least to the federal poverty level ([http://www.cssp.org/uploadFiles/improving\\_economic.pdf](http://www.cssp.org/uploadFiles/improving_economic.pdf)).
- **Provide outreach and support to immigrant families.** Currently, legal immigrants who entered the United States after August 1996 are not eligible for TANF benefits for five years (Ibid) therefore their families may struggle or face increased challenges to becoming self-sufficient.
- **Promote sustained employment and assist in finding rapid re-employment for those who lose jobs.** Low-income working families constantly struggle to make ends meet. A job loss can result in a major financial crisis including eviction or loss of a home, and in many cases, turning to public assistance programs (<http://www.milhs.org/Media/Edocs/MLHS101booklet.pdf>).
- **Provide assistance to low-income working families.** These families need assistance to help them overcome barriers to long-term employment, including childcare, transportation, financial management, and time management.
- **Expand and promote asset building programs such as the Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC).** EITC is a refundable federal tax credit that is available to working families with incomes up to two times the federal poverty level. Asset building programs can assist individuals with a downpayment for a home purchase.

## Resources

Addressing the Challenges Faced by Teens in TANF Households. Kaplan, J. 2004. Welfare Information Network. <http://www.financeproject.org/Publications/TANFTeensIN.htm>

Building Assets for Stronger Families, Better Neighborhoods, and Realizing the American Dream. Corporation for Enterprise Development. 1998. <http://www.cfed.org/publications/Building%20Assets%20-%20first%20edition.pdf>

Children in Poverty: Trends, Consequences, and Policy Options. 2002. Research Brief. Child Trends <http://www.childtrends.org/Files/PovertyRB.pdf>

Effects of Homeownership on Children: The Role of Neighborhood Characteristics and Family Income. Federal Reserve Bank of New York Economic Policy Review. 2003. <http://www.newyorkfed.org/research/epr/03v09n2/0306hark.pdf>

Hard Times on the Farm: Economic Stress and Family Life. <http://www.agls.uidaho.edu/ccf/CCC%20Families/pdf/Conger%20and%20Elder.pdf>

*Improving the Economic Success of Families.* (2003). Policy Matters: Setting and Measuring Benchmarks for State Policies. Center for the Study of Social Policy, [http://www.cssp.org/uploadFiles/improving\\_economic.pdf](http://www.cssp.org/uploadFiles/improving_economic.pdf)

Mather, M., Rivers, K. (2006). *The Concentration of Negative Child Outcomes in Low-Income Neighborhoods.* Population Reference Bureau. [http://www.prb.org/pdf06/NegChildOutcomes\\_Neighborhoods.pdf](http://www.prb.org/pdf06/NegChildOutcomes_Neighborhoods.pdf)

National Effective Parenting Initiative (NEPI). Center for the Improvement of Child Caring [http://www.ciccparenting.org/cicc\\_effective.asp](http://www.ciccparenting.org/cicc_effective.asp)

Report of the Task Force on Adult Education and Literacy to the Virginia Board of Education and Recommendations for Improving Literacy Services in Virginia. June 2001. <http://www.aelweb.vcu.edu/pdfs/Report6.7.pdf>

Taking the First Steps: Helping Welfare Recipients Who Get Jobs Keep Them. Rangarajan, A., 1996. Off Welfare and Into Work. <http://www.mathematica-mpr.com/publications/PDFs/PESD.PDF>

Unemployment and Job Displacement: The Impact on Families and Children. Kalil, A., 2005. Ivey Business Journal. [http://www.iveybusinessjournal.com/view\\_article.asp?intArticle\\_ID=570](http://www.iveybusinessjournal.com/view_article.asp?intArticle_ID=570)

Working Hard but Still Poor: An Agenda for Meeting the Needs of Michigan's Low-Income Families. 2004. <http://www.milhs.org/Media/Edocs/MLHS101booklet.pdf>

---

## INDICATORS RELATED TO COMMUNITY SAFETY:

---

Crime rate (age 17 or older) (per 1,000)

1. Violent crime
2. Other crimes (burglaries, etc.)

### Why are these indicators important?

- Crime-related activities consume valuable social and economic resources. Social costs include pain and suffering of crime victims and their families and weakening of community cohesion. Economic costs include loss of productivity due to death or disability resulting from crime, medical costs, and loss of property values in neighborhoods with high crime rates ([http://www.scag.ca.gov/publications/pdf/2007/SOTR07/SOTR07\\_Quality.pdf](http://www.scag.ca.gov/publications/pdf/2007/SOTR07/SOTR07_Quality.pdf)).
- Children who grow up in communities with high crime rates are at increased risk of becoming involved in criminal behavior, dropping out of school, becoming young parents, and/or struggling economically as adults ([http://www.futureofchildren.org/usr\\_doc/vol9no2Art4done.pdf](http://www.futureofchildren.org/usr_doc/vol9no2Art4done.pdf)).
- Crime is an indicator of other deep social and economic problems. It can reflect lack of opportunities, inadequate education, and feelings of hopelessness. It is a strong indicator of economic stagnation, a shortage of well-trained workers, and inadequate police presence (<http://www.state.nj.us/dep/dsr/sustainable-state/11.htm>).

### What Works?

- **Enhance communication and collaboration between law enforcement officers, residents, and business owners in communities.** Encourage residents to take part in decision-making processes and management of problem areas that community members feel are most threatening to their safety and well-being. These areas of concern should become priorities for joint police-community interventions.
- **Empower communities to organize themselves in focused crime prevention.** Neighbors can look out for each other and be the 'eyes and ears' of local police. Watch groups foster a sense of community and pride by forming a unified group of citizens dedicated to improving their neighborhood. These informal programs give residents a greater sense of control and can also be a springboard for many other efforts to address the causes of crime, reduce crime, and improve neighborhood conditions including youth recreation, childcare, economic development, senior citizen activities, affordable housing and community beautification ([http://www.oag.state.ny.us/crime/neighborhood\\_watch/importance\\_of\\_neigh\\_watch.html](http://www.oag.state.ny.us/crime/neighborhood_watch/importance_of_neigh_watch.html)).
- **Establish community policing programs.** Assign one community officer to each neighborhood to walk the beat, interact with residents, identify problems, and attend community meetings where a structured, collaborative approach is used to solve problems.
- **Make effective use of the talents and resources available within communities to help extend severely strained police resources.** As police interaction with the community becomes more positive, productive partnerships may form, leading to greater satisfaction with police services and increased job satisfaction among officers.
- **Increase after-school opportunities to prevent future criminal activity.** After-school hours are the peak time for engaging in juvenile crime and risky behaviors such as alcohol and drug use. After-school programs offer healthy and positive alternatives that help keep kids safe, improve academic achievement, and help relieve the stresses on today's working families. They can serve as important youth violence prevention and intervention strategies (<http://www.safeyouth.org/scripts/facts/afterschool.asp>).

## Resources

After School Programs Fact Sheet. National Youth Violence Prevention Resource Center.  
<http://www.safeyouth.org/scripts/facts/afterschool.asp>

Importance of Neighborhood Watch. Office of the New York State Attorney. 2005.  
[http://www.oag.state.ny.us/crime/neighborhood\\_watch/importance\\_of\\_neigh\\_watch.html](http://www.oag.state.ny.us/crime/neighborhood_watch/importance_of_neigh_watch.html)

Mapping Out Crime: Providing 21<sup>st</sup> Century Tools for Safe Communities. 1999. United States Department of Justice. <http://govinfo.library.unt.edu/npr/library/papers/bkgrd/crimemap/071299.pdf>

Reconnecting Youth. Virginia Best Practices in School-Based Violence Prevention.  
[http://www.pubinfo.vcu.edu/vabp/program\\_details.asp?id=103](http://www.pubinfo.vcu.edu/vabp/program_details.asp?id=103)

Saving Futures, Saving Dollars: The Impact of Learning on Crime Reduction and Earnings. 2006. Alliance for Excellent Education. <http://www.all4ed.org/files/SavingFutures.pdf>

Strong Community, Culture, and Recreation Indicators. Living with the Future in Mind: Goals and Indicators for New Jersey's Quality of Life. 2004. <http://www.state.nj.us/dep/dsr/sustainable-state/11.htm>

The Quality of Life: The State of the Region. 2007. Southern California Association of Governments.  
[http://www.scag.ca.gov/publications/pdf/2007/SOTR07/SOTR07\\_Quality.pdf](http://www.scag.ca.gov/publications/pdf/2007/SOTR07/SOTR07_Quality.pdf)

---

## INDICATORS RELATED TO CIVIC PARTICIPATION:

---

Voter participation

### Why is this indicator important?

- Voter participation is the basic measure of how many of people are exercising the fundamental right to self-government in a community.
- Increased voter participation facilitates a democracy that is more responsive to public needs for less poverty, more jobs, a cleaner environment, less crime, and better education (<http://www.state.nj.us/dep/dsr/sustainable-state/part-3.pdf>).

### What Works?

- **Civic education programs.** Partner with local civic-based organizations, schools, and other community groups to promote education and voter participation, focusing special attention on those least likely to participate, including immigrants, youth, and ex-felons who are eligible to vote. The voting process should be explained through face-to-face contact and written material made available for communities to spread the word.
- **Public awareness campaigns.** Promote voter participation through the media that gives a voice to the issues affecting the people in communities.
- **Neutral and accessible polling sites.** The location of a polling site can affect the integrity of the vote, especially if it is not located in a neutral, easily accessible, or safe location. Sites that are hard to access may discourage voters from voting.
- **Offer staggered or extended hours at polling sites.** Extend the voting hours to allow or encourage people to vote before and after work.

- **Work toward changing election period and days.** Extend the election period from one day to two or more days so people have more flexibility in scheduling time to vote. Hold elections on Saturdays or Sundays rather than Tuesdays because traditionally more people are off work on those days.
- **Provide assessment and follow-up after elections.** Following elections, implement programs in communities to evaluate voter turnout and use evaluation to address special needs in areas of the community with low voter participation.
- **Facilitate other methods of voter registration.** Allow Internet registration or Election Day Registration (EDR). Also known as same-day voter registration, this program permits eligible citizens to register and vote on election day and has been shown to increase voter turnout in six states (<http://www.demos-usa.org/page52.cfm#why>) .

## Resources

About Election Day Registration. Demos: A Network for Ideas and Action.  
<http://www.demos-usa.org/page52.cfm#why>

Benefits of the Vote Center Model. Larimer County Colorado.  
[http://www.co.larimer.co.us/elections/votecenters\\_benefits.htm](http://www.co.larimer.co.us/elections/votecenters_benefits.htm)

Electronic Voting Best Practices. Kennedy School of Government: Harvard University.  
<http://www.ljean.com/files/ABPractices.pdf>

Living with the Future in Mind: Goals and Indicators for New Jersey's Quality of Life. 2000.  
<http://www.state.nj.us/dep/dsr/sustainable-state/part-3.pdf>

New Experiments in Minority Voter Mobilization. 2007. The James Irvine Foundation.  
[http://www.irvine.org/assets/pdf/pubs/evaluation/CA\\_Vote\\_FINAL\\_Sep19.pdf](http://www.irvine.org/assets/pdf/pubs/evaluation/CA_Vote_FINAL_Sep19.pdf)

Voter Participation in New Brunswick and the Political Disengagement of the Young. Howe, P. 2004.  
<http://www.gnb.ca/0100/PDF-AC-Agenda/voter-e.pdf>