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Wayne County

Poverty rate up 6% for kids younger than 5

Darren A. Nichols / The Detroit News

DEARBORN -- Young children in Wayne County continue to face some of the toughest challenges in Michigan, according to report card issued Monday by the Great Start collaborative.

The number of annual births has declined 33 percent to 27,422 in 2005 from 1990, but poverty rates increased, according to the study by the United Way of Southeast Michigan for the group that formed in 2006 to assess the lives of Wayne County youngsters and improve them.

Nearly 30 percent of all Wayne County children younger than 5 live in poverty, up 6 percent since 2000. The percentage of children younger than 18 living in single-parent homes remained stable, but at 42.1 percent remains higher than the state average of 31 percent.

"We can talk about not leaving a child behind, but we need to do more than talk," said group chairman John Colina during a forum at Henry Ford Centennial Library in Dearborn. "Today is the first day forward. Michigan's success is tied to our children. We have to make sure our children are ready to learn (by kindergarten)."

The data is the first step toward improving the factors that contribute to undereducated children before they reach kindergarten, said Colina. Between 85-90 percent of the brain capacity is developed before a child reaches the age of 5.

The Great Start collaborative is a part of the Michigan Early Childhood Investment Corporation, established last year by Gov. Jennifer Granholm, who has said early childhood development is an important piece to the state's economic vitality.

Similar groups exist in about 20 other counties. All areas of the state will be part of the effort by 2010.

Other findings in the report: 29 of every 100 babies are born to mothers who have not received adequate prenatal care; 45 percent of children receive publicly funded insurance; and deaths of infants before their first birthday increased to 11.5 percent in 2004 from 10.9 percent in 2000, compared to 8.1 percent for the rest of the state.

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[Return to regular web page](#)