

THE BROOKINGS INSTITUTION

A Brookings Public Forum

MEASURING CHILD WELL-BEING:

A NEW INDEX

Wednesday, March 24, 2004

Falk Auditorium
The Brookings Institution
1775 Massachusetts Avenue, N.W.
Washington, D.C.

[TRANSCRIPT PREPARED FROM A TAPE RECORDING.]

PANEL TWO: The Index and Its Policy Implications

Panelists:

Rachel Jones, Science Desk Reporter, National Public Radio

Kristin Moore, President and Senior Scholar, Child Trends

Bill O'Hare, KIDS COUNT Coordinator, Annie E. Casey Foundation

Don Winstead, Deputy Assistant Secretary, Human Services Policy, Office of Planning and Evaluation, Department of Health and Human Services

Ruth Zambrana, Adjunct Professor of Family Medicine, University of Maryland

THIS IS AN UNCORRECTED TRANSCRIPT.

DR. CHASE-LANSDALE: I'd like to bring--get your attention, please. We'd like to start the second session. If you all would return to your seats, we'd like to start the second session.

DR. CHASE-LANSDALE: Okay. It's on? If we could begin the second session, please? Now, I have to get back on here. Terrific. That was a terrific first session, and now we'll turn to the second session and the policy implications. We're going to have a terrific panel of commentators here, and each will speak for eight minutes, and they're very well prepared; and they have a tough chair. I'm delighted to chair this panel and also would like to thank the Brookings Institution because we at the Foundation for Child Development are just delighted this is happening today.

So, our first speaker is Bill O'Hare. He's the KIDS COUNT Coordinator from the Annie E. Casey Foundation.

MR. O'HARE: Thank you. It's a--can people hear me all right? If you can't, you wouldn't say anything, I guess.

Well, it's certainly a pleasure to be here on this distinguished panel and to be here to be part of this presentation and see this work finally come to light after several years of work.

And I want to applaud Ken and his staff and the Foundation for Child Development to put this out. And I applaud it for several reasons. One is that it is--I think it elevates children's issues and the well-being of children in a way that lots of other things can't do. And I think that's an important contribution to put children higher on the public agenda.

And if I could just add a note to this about the connection between this Child Well-Being Index and public policy, I think it is important for a way that may not be immediately obvious. I think when we think of public policy choices, we often think of individual choices, like, do you have family caps in TANF or--and things like that.

I think there's another way of thinking about public policy, and that's about what issues are higher on the public agenda and what are lower. Certainly, that's changed over the last 10 years, the last couple years, and I think this kind of work moves children's issues higher on the agenda so they get the attention of policy makers and things are more likely to get done.

The second reason I really like this work is that it builds on a long tradition, at least 15 or 20 years, of child well-being indicator work. And, for those of us who have been involved in that, a relatively small number over time, it's gratifying to see that work kind of build on past work and reach this stage that Ken has put it into now.

And I think many ways building on past work is the hallmark of developing a scientific field. And so, I think to some extent, this is kind of a watershed in some ways of the fact that measuring child well-being is now much more of a scientific field than it was 10 or 15 years ago, and that's important.

The third reason I really applaud this work is that I think it's a starting point, as Ken mentioned, and I applaud your courage in putting this out. As he acknowledged and other of those in this work, this is not perfect. And it's a work in progress. And it takes a certain amount of courage to put something out there, but I think it's important to do so because it is a starting point, and it's a place we can advance from. And, so, I think it's important in that respect as well.

Let me shift to what I really want to talk about. Let me--if I could get a show of hands. A little audience participation. How many of you are familiar with the KIDS COUNT Program at the Casey Foundation? Oh, that's gratifying. All right. There's some material out in back if you're not.

But basically, we use indicators of child well-being, state-by-state, to track the well-being of children. And our first report was issued in January of 1990. We have been doing it every year since then. Our 15th annual report is due out June 3rd this year. And the reason I mentioned that is that in 1990, this child indicator business was a very lonely place to be. There was a few people around. Chris I know, and Nick Zill and some that are in here. And there was an interest, a beginning of a field there. But certainly compared to where we are now, it was a very less developed field. And so, it's gratifying to see the Federal Government get involved in this, and just as a quick point--I think Ken mentioned this--but the America's Children Report that the Federal Government now has been doing for six or seven years was a very important starting point for Ken's work. So, it's a way of building on our past work that really I think is a hallmark of science and a very useful way to move forward.

I think, as you can tell from my work or the Casey Foundation work, the KIDS COUNT work, we focus on state indicators of well-being, and one of the questions that came up here from the Congressman is why you haven't done this for states.

And those of you who know this field, know that there's a lot--the data sets are much richer at the national level than they are at the state level; and, of course, much richer at the state level than they sub-state level. And, so, I think there's an opportunity now to move forward on the state level in a way that we haven't been able to

do in the past. And I think there's a combination that say the time is right for--because of three different forces or factors. I'm not quite sure what the word to use is here. But one of them, I'm sure you're aware, was devolution, political devolution, where decision making has been passed from the Federal Government down to the states and sometimes below that. So, this decision making power is now more in the hands of states than ever before, and if that's where decisions are being made, we should have the data at that geographic level to help make that decisions--those decisions.

The second factor, or force, is what I'll call science or technology, and it's a combination of a bunch of things, part of which is just the science of measuring child well-being; that we have a much firmer grasp now of a variety of indicators and measures, and I'm sure Kris Moore could talk for the next several hours about measures she's been working on for the last 50 or 20 years. We've used them now in various surveys. We have a sense of where there's strength and weakness and what doesn't work, and so that field has moved forward greatly over the last 15 or 20 years, and I think is ripe for some real advancement now at the state level.

The other part of this science technology is the computer revolution, for lack of a better word; that we can do things now with computers that were unthinkable even 10 or 15 years ago in terms of getting data, organizing data, making it available to users. So, that field is now ripe I think to move to the state level for making data--collecting data and making it available.

And the third factor here is a little more difficult to describe but I use the word accountability, and what I mean that all this data that we use is collected by taxpayers dollars, and I think increasingly they want to know what they're getting for their dollar. And I think it makes a lot more--we get a lot more support from state and

local people if we can show them data at the state level. I've worked with KIDS COUNT for the last 15 years, and I know, when you talk about national level data, and you're talking to the Governor of Illinois, it's almost irrelevant. What they want is Illinois or probably Chicago or something more detailed. So, I think it's incumbent on us as data producers and data analyzers to try and push this down to the state level to achieve or maintain the support for this effort in the federal statistical system.

Excuse me. One other little factor that's not as big, but I'll mention anyway, I guess. In the TANF--well, the TANF Reauthorization that is underway, for lack of a better word now, the President has said that child well-being should be the main overarching goal of welfare reform or something like that. And I certainly support that wholeheartedly. The next question is well, how are you going to measure well-being and what geographic level are you going to measure it at? And certainly if we're devolving the TANF decisions to state levels and lower, I think we need the data at that same level. So, I think it's important to have whatever measures on child well-being we have at the state level to match up with the approaches that states use for welfare reform.

Let me end with a minute or two in my top five. I've got--there are a whole bunch initiatives underway right now that I think are enormously--are going to be enormously helpful in allowing us to portray a much richer picture of child well-being at the state level than we have been in the past. I want to give you the top five, a la David Letterman. You know, he has 10, but I only have five. And I haven't given a lot of thought to this priority, but a little bit. So, I'm open to suggestion on this.

First is marriage and divorce statistics at the state level. You know, 10 years ago, I could go to the federal statistical system and tell you how many kids were involved in a divorce in Virginia last year. They had a system to do that. Now, we lost

that because of budget cuts in the mid-90's. So, I want to see that kind of system restored. My friends at the National Center for Health Statistics say it would take about \$10 million a year to restore that system and build on it. That seems like a very small price to pay for these events that are so central to our social fabric and our life and certainly in the political realm now. I know the Department of Health and Human Services has an initiative underway to look at where we sit, and how we can get that data restored, either using the old system or some new way. So, I want to urge you to support that and get this--get that kind of data as quickly as we can.

Number four. Some of you may have heard of No Child Left Behind Act. It's got a little bit of press in the last few months. And there's a lot of controversial issues about that that I'm not going to talk about. But one of the things that I don't think a lot of people recognize is that because of that, all states had to participate in the National Assessment of Educational Progress. For the first time ever, we now have math and reading scores for fourth graders and eighth graders for every state and the District of Columbia. We've never had it for all states before. And, in fact, having done KIDS COUNT for 10 years, I don't think we have any measure of outcome, educational outcomes, for states that is available for all states and comparable until this round of NAEP that we now have. So, I don't want to lose that when we--give me two more minutes.

Number three. Slates. State local area integrated telephone system. You may note it because we get immunization data from it, but it's a mechanism which we can use and has been used to gather lots of other data at the state level. The AFCAR, Adoption, Foster Care Analysis and Reporting System, has been underway for about 10 years, and it gives us data now on the most vulnerable children, those in adoption and

foster care and under state supervision. And, for the first time, we have some measures, and we'll continue to have better measures of that very vulnerable population.

And number one on my list is the American Community Survey that's being conducted by the Census Bureau that would give us Census-type data every year for every state and some other levels of geography. But I think the other part about the American Community Survey is the timeliness. We will now get this data about six months after the calendar year ends. And I know for a lot of us, timeliness is a very important issue here. Let me stop there.

DR. CHASE-LANSDALE: Thank you, Bill.

Now, I have the pleasure of introducing Rachel Jones, Science Desk Reporter for National Public Radio.

MS. JONES: I know that most of you would rather I spend my seven minutes explaining to you what the heck NPR was thinking about letting Bob Edwards go--

[Laughter.]

But we're not going to go there. Rather, usually, when I am on a panel like this, I feel that the biggest contribution that I can make is to sort of give you an insight into the decision making at process in newsrooms to sort of explain what editors believe and feel is news; what reporters come up with in that process, to try to let you know about the priorities of what children's issues mean to editors and reporters, and what the challenges are and what the opportunities might be. When this--news of this report came across the desk at NPR, it was shifted over to the science desk, because I have essentially spent the past 10 years in Washington focusing on policy affecting children and families, first for Knight Ridder and now part-time for NPR. And so, they

asked me to assess it and let them know whether or not this is something that in terms of my interest in covering child health and development and research affecting children is this something that we wanted to do.

The initial response from editors in meetings was that this is a compilation of statistics from the past 30 years. And many of these things we've talked about in other stories. We've already done stories on obesity. We've done stories on changing family structure and how it affects children. So what was the news in this report--which was--that was my directive in doing the research on this.

And, so, as I culled through the information, the one thing that jumped out on me was that the years between '81 and '94 were a particularly troubling time for children and youth in America. So, that as the next news meeting, when we talked about that, editors wanted to know why. One of the things that first came to our head was perhaps the crack epidemic. Did this have an impact?

And, so, I was again charged to go out and find out the definitive answer to that question. I called Professor Land, and we had a--actually a very good conversation. He helped me to really think this--these issues through and some of the things he mentioned this morning: the fact that the erosion of industrial jobs and family structures being, children being affected by the fact that their parents lost their jobs during those years; single parent families; more women on the work force. All these things had an impact on child well-being.

So, I was excited after the conversation. I thought--and one other thing I might add. He said that with the economy in the situation that it's in right now, we could be faced with another period or another downturn in child well-being. So, it's sort of a, you know, let's keep in mind what we're doing.

I went back to my editor, and the long story short, she said that that's an interesting policy story, but we don't do policy stories on the science desk.

So, the challenge now, of course, is to interest the national desk in doing this, and this is something that I may or--if not directly or indirectly be able to do. But the point is that when you look at the pieces of this statistic and what the numbers mean, I feel that I'll be able to go back and pitch quite a few ideas from this. For example, the obesity piece. NPR's done plenty of stories on obesity. One of the stories that actually was on my list before this report came out was something called Syndrome X. For those of you who know about that, it's compilation of various results of obesity--hypertension, bone problems. Everything that there--there are complications that come from obesity. What researchers are finding now is that it's affecting more children. It's something that used to be seen in the elderly, but now more children are struggling with Syndrome X.

If I do that story, what I can now do is bring in mention of this child well-being index. I can talk to--interview Professor Land for a story on obesity. Talk about the fact that this report feels that we need to make this a national policy issue.

His comments about county extension offices. You know, I can remember them, being in 4-H as a child. Perhaps they have a role in educating children and families about nutrition. This is something that maybe I could look into. And certainly for an NPR story, that would be great to go into the local county extension office and see what's going on there.

So, I bring these things up to you to say that it's incumbent upon researchers, like Professor Land and others who deal with indices of child well-being, particularly when it comes to policy, to reach out to media organizations, to reporters, to writers who are interested in these issues and to sort of flag them on the fact that there

are ways to report on these issues based on data that enlighten, illuminate. One of the aspects of policy that we cannot ignore is that readers and viewers and people who are consumers of news really are the ones--the engines that are driving a lot of the development of policy. And when politicians say that we respond to what the public wants, the public has to be educated about how these issues affect their lives; how they affect children's lives; and how child well-being affects their whole community. So that--but, again, the education of editors and reporters about these issues is very important, and there are some very encouraging trends that lead me to believe that it's a more receptive attitude in some newsrooms.

The Foundation for Child Development, for example, has been involved in training journalists in child and family policy through their program at the University of Maryland. Also at the University of Maryland is the Casey Journalism Center. It also trains journalists in child and family policy issues.

So, there's a lot to be positive about. But, again, I would end by saying that one of the things that I did at the Knight Ridder Washington Bureau was to try to develop or to raise awareness or interest in a concept of a news wire service that would focus exclusively on children's issues. And I say that to say that the biggest challenge in all of this is something that we can't ignore and that is the definition of what is news. And, as long as the definition of what is news is crime, war, political strife, tension, negativity clashing or whatever, the well-being of children is simply not going to be in the top 10. That's just the reality of the situation, so that we have to, from a media perspective, individual reporters and companies and editors have to get to the point where we realize that these issues are not just on the periphery. They are not just excess things. They feed into actually the well-being of our country and our society as a whole.

DR. CHASE-LANSDALE: Thank you, Rachel. Now, I have the pleasure of also introducing Don Winstead, who's here as the Deputy Assistant for Human Services Policy, the Office of Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation in the Department of Health and Human Services.

MR. WINSTEAD: Thank you very much, Lindsay. I've got some slides that I'm going to show--in case you didn't pick up a copy of them; I hope there were enough copies for folks to have--for two purposes: one is to kind of orient you to a couple of other things that may be of interest if you're interested enough in the issue of indicators to come out today; and then also to maybe frame a couple of comments that I'd like to make.

First of all, as Congressman Camp mentioned and Bill mentioned also, the issue of child well-being is an important policy issue for the Administration. The President's plan to strengthen welfare reform, Working Towards Independence, did propose to establish the well-being of children as the overarching purpose of the TANF program, and here's a quote from the plan. So, this is an issue that we're vitally interested in and see this as a key feature of what we hope will be welfare reform and TANF reauthorization soon.

I'm going to skip over this, and I'm going to come back to it in just a few minutes, just for some concluding comments. I wasn't sure what questions people might ask, so I thought I'd give myself some that I wanted to answer.

A couple of things about some comparisons with some other reports. There's been mention of America's Children: Key National Indicators of Child Well-Being that Ron held up earlier. If you would like to see more about this one, and there's a reference in here on that that gives you a little descriptor, but if you go to

childstats.gov, you can get to that report; and this is a report that I think anyone who's interested in this subject ought to take a look at. And there's information in the material, the written material, about the report and also about the work of the federal statistical agencies' Federal Interagency Forum on Child and Family Statistics that puts out the report, the indicators that are included, and all of that.

I'll also mention if you go to the ASPE Web site at hhs.gov, there are a couple of other reports that you can get to, including Trends in the Well-Being of America's Children and Youth--this is the 2002 edition; 2003 will be out right shortly--and Indicators of Welfare Dependence, the 2003 report is out; is a report to Congress. That's also on our Web site that also includes information on this topic.

There's also a new report that's not on the Web site yet, but will be soon, that Kris knows about, Social Indicators: Measures of Children, Family, and Community Connections, that we've been working on that is looking more in a community context of social indicators. And in the written material that's out on the table, we've done an analysis, just laid out some of the domains in Professor Land's index, as well as America's Children and the social indicators of what some of the different domains, how many indicators within each domain. And there's a two-page matrix that lays out all the different indicators that are in these reports and kind of crosstabs them, just to give you a sense of some other possible approaches to looking at this issue.

But I want to come back to the questions for myself about the index, to close with that.

First of all, I think if we want to address whether it's useful to have an index, there are kind of two key sub questions: first of all, is it informative? And secondly, is it a basis for action?

And I think the Land child welfare index is informative. I think it does add value over having individual indices if: and the if is to the extent that it helps focus attention on the issue. And I think to the extent that it's successful in focusing attention on child well-being then that is an added value for this.

There's material on how it compares to other reports, so a lot of interesting issues about what indicator goes in what domain, et cetera, and I think also an important question is, does this tell us more than just tracking, for example, child poverty, since so many of these issues come off of that. And also I think we need to face the issue of could it be misleading. And I think part of the answer there is once you focus attention, you need to get deeper into the indices and into the individual measures that are behind that. For example, with material well-being, I note in the Land index that one of the measures of material well-being is access to health care, and if you look there, you see some different trends I think that are important. And if you look at what's happened since the implementation of the State Children's Health Insurance Program, you see some important things there that are important trends. So, you need to really get past the domains into the individual indicators to get the most meaning.

The other issue I think is it the basis--or is it a basis for action. And being a former state administrator, that's what I think is the most important is do we get action at the national, state, and local level.

To me, an indicator, it's sort of like going up in the fire tower and looking out on the horizon and seeing smoke. You don't really know until you go look further whether a forest fire is about to start or whether there's a barbecue going on. And I think that indicators need to propel action.

Nationally, and Bill mentioned some efforts to try to get state data, I think one of the things nationally, if I had my wish list, one of the things that we most need to do is to get more longitudinal data and to get richer context for information. Taking indicators and taking cross-sectional data and arraying it year by year does not make it longitudinal. Okay. You can draw a trend line, but I think with a lot of policy things on the national level, enhancing the SIP, doing--looking at other important sources of longitudinal information is something that we really need to give serious consideration to so we can go from taking snapshots to making movies in terms of understanding what's going on.

At the state and local level, I think that while state indicators are very important, and as a former state administrator, you'd hope I'd say that, but I think the most important thing is being able to drive down to local indicators. If you have state-level information but you don't have sub state-level information, it can be very frustrating and sometimes can make it difficult to pinpoint action. There is no such thing as aggregate performance. There is only individual performance that gets added together for the purpose of making charts. Okay. And if you're really going to affect what happens in program performance, you need to disaggregate data, and you need to go down and be able to break it down by country, by service center, et cetera. And I think that's important.

So, getting better and more useful local data I think should also be a priority. I would echo Bill's call for the ACS. I think that's going to be an important contribution to having better local data.

I'll close by pointing out, or making a comment on the issue of weighting that in the 2000 Olympic Decathlon head-to-head, Chris Huppins of the U.S. and Erke

Newell of Estonia each beat each other in five events, and, therefore, were tied. It was through weighting that Erke Newell got the gold medal and Chris Huppins got the bronze.

[Laughter.]

DR. CHASE-LANSDALE: Thanks very much, Don.

I have the pleasure of introducing now Ruth Zambrana, who's the Professor of Women's Studies and Director of Research at the Consortium on Race, Gender, and Ethnicity at the University of Maryland, College Park.

DR. ZAMBRANA: Thank you. Good morning. I want to thank the Brookings Institute, and especially Dr. Ruby Takanishi, a courageous leader and champion for children and families, for this invitation and the opportunity to comment on this index, particularly with respect to its utility to guiding federal social policy.

I have written remarks, because, as Dr. Land mentioned, it's difficult for professors to do anything in less than three hours. So, I will read my remarks.

My remarks are shaped by the focus of my work in the last 10 years in four different areas: my work on indicators of child well-being, by race, ethnicity, and socio-economic status across the domains of health, education, and child welfare; my work with Family Support America, a non-profit organization based Chicago, whose mission is to change the way America works with families to improve the lives of children; my past work with the Casey Foundation on the Neighborhood Transformation-Family Development Initiative; and lastly, more recent work on racial and ethnic disparities in major domains of social concern, namely educational success of economically disadvantaged youth, welfare reform and transitions, and civic engagement.

Although new knowledge in the last five years has acknowledged a wealth divide, a digital divide, a health divide, that is, disparities, this information has not sufficiently provided the catalyst to move beyond aggregate national categories to state- and community-population based data as key sources of uncovering what do we need to do differently to change children's lives.

Thus, I wish to contextualize my remarks within the frame work of what we as researcher-scholars have learned over the last two decades about data that has been disaggregated to specific populations, regions, income groups, et cetera.

A significant lesson has been that the quantification of items, in index or report form, does not tell the whole story of what is happening in different communities and people's lives. They fail to capture two key contexts: one is the assets and strengths, or resiliency, of those groups or individuals who rise above the trend of the aggregate norm and the group or individuals who, for multiple reasons, fall below or outside the aggregate norm.

Secondly, when data are disaggregated by state, race and ethnicity, and socio-economic status, there are impressive differences that demonstrate that all is not well, and that progress has not been an equal reality for all. These findings speak to unequal treatment, such as the recent report by the Institute of Medicine, "Unequal Treatment: Confronting Racial and Ethnic Disparities in Health Care," and our work at the University of Maryland's Consortium on Race, Gender, and Ethnicity for the Casey Foundation, where data show that structural barriers in public schools and public welfare institutions contribute to discriminatory practices that do not strengthen individual or community assets and goals.

Thirdly, there are multiple limitations in the use of national data sets and surveys, such as the underrepresentation of low-income populations, language minority U.S. citizens of Hispanic descent. And often times, these data are not representative of many inner-city communities, rural communities, and U.S.-Mexico border communities where about 75 percent of the individuals are U.S. citizens.

Overall, the factors necessary to include a child well-being index have been the subject of extensive debate and discussion, and certainly no index can accurately include or measure all important areas.

However, the increasing development of data by race, ethnicity, and socio-economic status and the plethora of work on poverty and disparities can inform our work on children.

My remarks fall into three areas: what have we learned about factors that are associated with child well-being? Does the index include what we know, and does it reflect the accurate reality of low-income African American and Latino children in this country? And how do the findings of the index, coupled with other information, provide a basis for federal social policy?

First and foremost, we know that poverty matters, because it is associated with economic instability, stress, poor nutrition, limited access to quality services.

Race and ethnicity matter. However, race and ethnicity cannot be used alone to analyze data, as its meaning is best understood by the interrelationship of race, ethnicity, and poverty. These meetings are further mediated by the seemingly invisible dual service systems in education, health, criminal justice, to name just a few.

Community matters. The after-school activities, the safety of the community, the police, the recreational activities, and the communities where children live influence their well-being.

Does the index reflect the lives of low-income racial and ethnic children? In reviewing these indicators, I looked behind the scenes, as so many people have commented, to illustrate my contextual comments. These are not a critique, but a heuristic exercise.

For example, the indicators of social relationships are two. Undoubtedly, there are a variety of operational definitions for this concept. However, in examining this variable for children, I think of social relationships as measuring connections to the external world of activities.

Thus, I asked myself what are the implications of using the indicator of rate of children in single families as a measure of social relationships? Does it imply that a single parent is the only and most important social relationship?

What we know is that single parents is related to material well-being. At the lower the income of the parent, the less likely that child is to do well. But as a student of children's lives over the last 10 years, I suggest that there are other important indicators that measure children's social relationships and reflect their life experiences.

Two examples are television watching for African American and Latino children, which is twice the rate for white children. The other one is participation in after-school sports, culture, and arts, which again we see that Latino and African American children are half as likely as white children to engage in any enrichment academic or cultural activity.

So, the concern for the well-being of grade school children has drawn attention to these arrangements in out of school activities, and this concern is around social relationships.

Let me say the most unsettling set of indicators are under community domain. Community domain usually involves institutional variables. For example, measurement of the quality of the educational system, number of computers available, number of public and private pre-schools, number of educational opportunities.

I see I have one minute. So, I'm going to go to my recommendations.

I offer recommendations based on what is behind the scenes of these data. My recommendations are also based on the fact that we cannot focus on children without focusing on family. We strengthen families in order to strengthen children.

Child well-being is strongly associated with economically stable families. In looking behind the data, we would see that there's a relationship between race, ethnicity, economic status, and child well-being. Therefore, I think a federal social policy is imperative is a national living wage for individuals and families, if we're going to improve the lives of children.

Child well-being is strongly associated with good health and mental health status. We need a universal health insurance program for families and children, not just for children. Children need healthy families in which to thrive.

We need a set of services, family support services, that assure that families remain health, strong, and stable. And these include the support services such as civic engagement, information on services, et cetera.

We need to build the community infrastructures. It is not about throwing money at programs. It is about building human capital in the communities. And I think our Congress needs to understand what this means.

Let me just end that I think it is finally clear to many of us that the national discourse on child well-being cannot remain color blind or economics neutral. If we are to sincerely develop federal social policy that enhances the well-being of all children in the United States, we must strengthen their families. Thank you.

DR. CHASE-LANSDALE: Thank you. Thank you very much.

And now, our last speaker is Kristin Moore, who is President and Senior Scholar of Child Trends here in Washington.

DR. MOORE: I thank you.

Well, you always like to have your last speaker kind of wrap things up with some very definitive, decisive conclusions. So, here I am.

[Laughter.]

DR. MOORE: Child Trends has done some polling, in collaboration with Bill O'Hare, that indicates that Americans are very poorly informed about trends in child and family well-being. The public is not aware that the rate of teen childbearing is down. The public does not know that welfare rolls are down. The public does not know that violent crimes among teens are down.

In general, the public is unaware of positive trends and exaggerates the magnitude of problems.

This lack of information on the part of the public suggests to me a pretty important argument for a single, simple overall indicator.

It's easy to understand, and it might attract attention. For example, this meeting today. Perhaps a single indicator of child well-being would result in a better informed public.

A third advantage is that a child well-being index reflects a whole child perspective. It doesn't treat children as segmented silos, where issues like drug abuse, pregnancy, and school success are treated as unrelated issues.

Fourth, a single measure makes it much more feasible to provide race-ethnicity contrasts. You can compare one index across three race-ethnicity groups, as Ken has done, in a way that is hard to do with 25 or 80 indicators.

Similarly, fifth, you can provide each contrast when you have one indicator.

And sixth, a child well-being index is useful for international comparisons if the measures are comparable.

How are we doing in terms of both levels and trends of child well-being compared with other nations?

And seventh, the work done by Ken Land and his colleagues is based on theory and precedent in that it draws from a decade's long body of work on social indicators. Although I would have preferred that the theory reflect child development research rather than being a sort of downsized adult theory, it is nevertheless a pretty workable framework.

And eighth, as a member of Ken's advisory group, I can attest to the fact that this work has been very carefully and thoroughly--thoughtfully done. They've done sensitivity analyses and comparisons, and invited input from many people on many occasions like today.

On the other hand, I am concerned that the child well-being index mixes measures of child well-being with measures of family and adult well-being. I have been saying for years that health insurance, poverty, and parental employment are not measures of child well-being. They're important measures of family context, but they're not measures of child well-being.

Measures of child well-being assess the status or development of the children themselves, such as their health, academic achievement, and behavior.

Child outcomes are shown on the right, for example, low birth weight, teen birth rate, reading and math test scores, overweight, suicide, religious attendance. Adult and family variables, shown on the left, include poverty, parental employment, income, single parenthood, and these are more inputs to child outcomes, not measures of child well-being. And I feel quite uncomfortable including measures of family context among the measures of child well-being. In fact, I am more comfortable with tracking child well-being within domains, such as health, education, and behavior, than I am with creating a single, overall index that averages across the different trends.

And I want to share with you a chart prepared by David Johnson, of the Bureau of Labor Statistics, who I think is here today. And it shows indicators in America's children in an overall index and in four domains.

The economic domain is shown in orange. Health is in pink. Behavior is in green, and education is in blue. And then the overall is the dark line in the middle.

Well, as you can see, the trends differ a lot across the domains. Even within domains, trends get averaged, but the problem is less--that averaging problem is less within domains than it is with an overall index.

Second, as Ken acknowledges in what he writes, an overall well-being index does not inform policy. For example, teen birth rates are declining while obesity among children is increasing. But these contrasting trends get averaged in an overall index, and this does not inform policy.

Third, we lack a research base for selecting variables. A lot of the measures, such as suicide, have substantial face validity, but, at present, we lack the research necessary to identify the important constructs, redundant constructs, and missing constructs.

We also lack the knowledge base to create comparable indicators for children of varied ages. In particular, we have many more measures for older children than we have for pre-school children.

Similarly, we lack a research base for weighting the different constructs and domains. How do we weight math test scores against suicide? How should we weight the domain of emotional and spiritual well-being against educational attainment?

Again, Ken and his colleagues are well aware of this issue and have experimented with different weighting strategies. This is not their problem, but a problem with the state of the knowledge base.

Fifth, we lack a full set of indicators. Most salient to me is the absence of positive indicators. The indicator system is not tracking critical positive constructs, like sibling relationships and school engagement. So, it is not possible to incorporate them into an index.

For example, the domain of emotional and spiritual well-being is measured by religious attendance and suicide. These are important constructs, of course, but you have to wonder if there isn't something that might be added.

But, on the other hand, this work to develop a child well-being index has stimulated awareness of the gaps in data and the need for further research. It has stimulated others to develop additional indices and to compare and contrast the advantages of different approaches. My primary concern is that the index might be reified prematurely, like the poverty index has been. Taking advantage of the strengths of the index to stimulate discussion about child well-being, about research needs, about data needs, and about the factors that are driving the index is very helpful, as long as we don't reify the current index prematurely. Thank you.

DR. CHASE-LANSDALE: Thank you, Kris. Well, we have a few moments for questions, and I would like to start it off for a question to the panel, and thank you very much for all of your different perspectives on the index. I am coming at this question as my--wearing my hat as the chair of the board of the Foundation for Child Development, where we have been discussing this issue for some time. We are delighted to have invested in Dr. Land's work and to work with the Brookings Institution to promote the CWI. And I think the comments today about how this is a beginning. We need to think about its various components and various scientific aspects are important because it's a work in progress.

We have, however, funded Dr. Land for the next seven to eight years, and one of our goals is that every year this number gets published, along with all of the background data, and exactly some of the issues that have been raised today about disparities, about what are--what makes up each domain, and so forth.

So, my question to the panel is: how would you respond to the Foundation's goal to create more political will in the United States about children's issues? Is it all possible and what steps would you recommend taking so that the public,

which does not know this, as Kris Moore mentioned, that teenage pregnancy rates have gone down, starts to look for this number the way the public looks for the unemployment rate or the CPI? Is this a reasonable goal? It's our goal to create much more awareness about children in an informed, knowledgeable way so that, in fact, people decide to take action.

So, I would invite your comments about what's news; what's political will; and what action should be taken.

MR. O'HARE: I'll start I guess.

DR. CHASE-LANSDALE: Great.

MR. O'HARE: I certainly support the idea of building a political will for more interest in children and child well-being and studying that in maybe the same way we study the Dow Jones--well, that's from an extreme example. But I think children are very important to our country's future. And most people share that view, but we don't have the kind of measures that we have for the economy, for example, and this old bromide that we value what we measure; we measure what we value. Well, if we aren't measuring it, people will assume that we don't value it. So, I think there's an important there.

The only other comment I think that--and we talked--Ruby and I talked about routinizing this so it comes out every year about the same time, and people are looking for it and expecting it, and kind of saying did it go up or go down I think is a way of building awareness. And I think there's kind of two components to that in my mind. One is the--probably to most people in this room--the kind of infrastructure of child indicator development folks who kind of want to see what's happening and look at

it more. And then a higher level, the news folks, like--higher might not be an example to use--but of people who get this out to the media. You'll take that--

DR. CHASE-LANSDALE: Closer to political will.

MS. JONES: I would--just sitting here thinking about my earlier remarks about what the process of me trying to get it to raise to the level of news, I would suggest that you work with other research bodies. For example, take one of the elements of the indicator--one indicator rather that might deal with health. Let's take the obesity piece. I would say that you try to coordinate the release of the index with some new research that's coming out about obesity, about child victimization, about whatever. That, then, raises the interest of a news room in that oh, there's this new report, a new study in JAMA, something that we can link the two to, and say that this new research says that more children are obese, blah, blah, blah. Concurrently, the child well-being index says that for 2004, more children are whatever. I think--you have to be creative. Reporters have to be creative when going to editors and saying, this is why we want to do this story. And I think that might be one way to do that.

DR. CHASE-LANSDALE: Go ahead, Ruth.

DR. ZAMBRANA: I think what's unique here is that, for a long time as a researcher, we thought that if the data was compelling enough, it would somehow inform policy. And what I like what you're saying, which is very new, is that there's a new understanding that data in and of itself, no matter how compelling, will not become policy unless we change political will.

I do think the index is an important beginning--we have used data in the Federal Government for different types of things--to begin to look at this and look at what is not going well and look at how to invest money in communities and people as

opposed to programs may be a way to help us to move forward. And I think over the next eight years--I don't agree with Kristin--I think we have more than enough data and research. We just have to begin to get the minds who know the community, who've been in the community, to come and inform those of us who are thinking about it with those of us who live it.

DR. CHASE-LANSDALE: Thank you. Kris, you had a comment.

DR. MOORE: Well, of course, I think we need more research, but we have multiple economic indicators, so I'm not sure that it's absolute essential to have just one. I mean, people look for the poverty rate and the unemployment rate and the inflation rate, and they, you know, have some understanding of what that means. So, I think it's possible to have a smaller subset to do that by domains.

I think it might be valuable to have cutoffs, you know, like a--for example, the poverty rate really is--it's a low-income cutoff, and it might be helpful to be able to track at the bottom end and at the top end, as well as just the mean.

MR. WINSTEAD: Lindsay, if I--I think one thing, though, that's--you know, sometimes people want to put out information and see how it translates to political will, as if that's some kind of magical process. And it--you know, having worked with the Florida legislature for many years, it's not that they don't know some of this stuff. It's they have to balance a lot of different priorities.

Secondly, I'd like to just say, again, about the local dimension and how important that is. I think it is important to raise awareness, but when you can localize it as a basis for action. A few years ago, when the southern governors wanted to really focus not only attention but action on issues of infant mortality in the South, because we had specific county-by-county data on low birth weight and very low birth weight

babies and other information from vital records, I can remember vividly, you know, going out, sitting around the table, with medical directors and country health nurses and social workers and all in Jasper, Florida, which all of you know that's a country seat in Hamilton County. And talking about it in Jasper, Florida. Okay. What are we doing with getting people involved in early pre-natal care? What are we doing, you know, with this action and that action. See that mobile clinic. Where is it each day and all of that.

And I think you really need both. You really need to focus attention, but then you also need things that can translate into action. And unless you can take some of these measures and make it real at the local level, then it's hard to make that connection with action.

DR. CHASE-LANSDALE: Thank you. We have a few moments for questions to open it up to you. And I'd like to remind you you need to wait for the mike, and ask questions and not give great speeches, since we are trying to end at noon today. The gentleman over here.

MR. SHERMAN: Arlock Sherman, Center on Budget and Policy Priorities. One question I had--one of the big trends in the last 30 years is a pulling apart. Certainly along many economic dimensions, you had--and it's not something you can necessarily get at by simple white-black breakdown. Black child poverty, measured conventionally, hit its lowest point in 2001, when extreme Black child poverty, by some measures, hit its highest number. And yet, regions were coming together. And, you know, and so, different dimensions are moving in different ways, and I'm wonder if ultimately a single measure helps us right now. If one of the big issues is leaving no

child behind, and society is moving in all different directions at once, does the very notion of a single measure by itself help or hurt?

DR. CHASE-LANSDALE: Does anyone want to respond?

MR. O'HARE: I'll take one quick response, and I think that you're-- certainly it came before. I mean, going beyond the single measure is where you really get the traction. But I think having the single measure raises questions. Does this reflect all children? Is there this kind of racial division that we talked about? So, I think it stimulates people to do the kind of analysis that you're talking about that might not have been stimulated otherwise.

DR. ZAMBRANA: I think a single measure can do it, again, if it's based on what we know. I mean, we know a lot about what are the differences in terms of the divides, in terms of racial and ethnic difference and socio-economic status. So, I think what this--and we need one thing to help to move social policy forward. We have a lot of different studies that give us the data, but none of them have really moved political will or our country forward.

So, I think the measure has the potential to identify key variables from what we have learned in the past 30 years and bring some of those together to show, to illustrate, these differences. I don't know--there are a lot of myths and stereotypes which are perpetuated by the media and by lack of information, and by perhaps the overwhelming nature of so much data that we really don't want to know.

So, I think it does have a potential that we can start here, and I think it can make a difference.

I mean, your work in budget and priorities is fabulous, and there's a lot of good work here. So, I think we're moving towards can one measure begin to talk about some of the major social policies that we need to address.

DR. CHASE-LANSDALE: Thank you. We have time for one or two more questions. Don?

DR. HERNANDEZ: Don Hernandez, the University at Albany. I have just a couple of quick sort of comments and suggestions as we think about the future of analysis of this index but also of data collection, as we think sort of expanding it in new ways. And the first really reinforces something Kris and other people have alluded to, and that is distinguishing between people who are--children who have enormous economic resources, those in the middle, and those at the bottom. The index does tend to focus on the middle overall, and it would be extremely valuable to be able to distinguish the index and components by economic status of the children, with the comment about deep poverty for Black children really epitomizes the need for that. The trends can be very different in different parts of the income distribution.

The other is that one out of five children today lives in an immigrant family. This is up from 13 percent just 10 years ago. There's an enormous expansion in children in immigrant families in the U.S., and we know that they're different with regard to poverty. We know that they're more likely to be in poverty. We know they're less likely to be in one-parent families, and there are other differences. And I just took--sort of a took a quick look at the indicators, and it looks alike about half of them, probably about a dozen, could currently distinguish children by their immigrant family status. And most of the rest could easily have questions added to the data collection instruments that would make it possible to do that. I think that's just a critical distinction

as we think about communities and culture and race and ethnicity to draw that kind of distinction as well as to--We're going to end. Please join me in thanking the panel. I'd like to thank you.

[Applause.]

[Whereupon, at 12:00 p.m., the panel concluded.]