

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The 2024 Texas Kids Count Data Book highlights the state of child well-being across Texas, focusing on health, education, and economic security. Despite some positive trends, significant disparities persist among children of color, those living in poverty, and Texans with limited access to health care and educational resources.



### KEY FINDINGS:

- Texas continues to struggle with high rates of uninsured children, with 9% of children under six and 6% of children aged 6-18 lacking health insurance.<sup>1</sup> Hispanic/Latino children are particularly affected, with an uninsured rate of 15.9%, which is nearly three times the overall rate for all children.<sup>2</sup>
- CHIP enrollment also experienced a decline, with 1% of Texas kids enrolling in 2022 compared to 4% in 2021, pointing to the need for improved access to coverage.<sup>3</sup>
- Food insecurity remains a major issue with 1.7 million children facing food insecurity.<sup>4</sup> Administrative barriers to programs like SNAP limit families' access to food assistance.
- Anxiety and depression rates are rising among teens, as are alarming suicide attempt rates, particularly among Black and multiracial children. In 2023, 21% of Black and 27% of multiracial high schoolers reported attempting suicide, compared to 12% of white high schoolers in Texas.<sup>5</sup>
- Only 61% of Texas 24-month-olds born in 2020 received the seven key vaccines<sup>i</sup> recommended by the Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices (ACIP) for young children, compared to 68% of 24-month-olds born in 2020 nationwide.<sup>6</sup> This was a 10% decline for Texas from 24-month-olds born in 2019.<sup>7</sup>

### POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS:

- **Re-enroll and protect access to Medicaid and CHIP for all eligible children**, while focusing on efficiency to avoid future coverage loss.
- **Remove barriers to SNAP enrollment and expand after-school and summer meal programs** to address food insecurity, particularly in high-need regions like Southeast Texas.
- **Increase access to reproductive and family planning services**, with a focus on addressing racial disparities in prenatal care and improving outcomes for Black mothers.
- **Expand funding for school-based mental health programs** to provide counseling, crisis intervention, and culturally competent support in high-need areas.
- **Increase funding for outreach programs that promote immunizations**, focusing on underserved areas to improve vaccination rates among young children. Simplify access by offering free, mobile vaccination clinics in community centers and schools.

i. These key vaccines include at least 4 doses of the diphtheria and tetanus toxoids and acellular pertussis vaccine; at least 3 doses of the polio vaccine; at least one dose of the measles, mumps and rubella vaccine; 3 or 4 doses of the haemophilus influenzae type b vaccine (depending on vaccine type); at least 3 doses of the hepatitis B vaccine; at least one dose of the varicella vaccine; and at least four doses of pneumococcal conjugate vaccine.

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

 EDUCATION 

## KEY FINDINGS:

- Early childhood education remains a critical foundation for long-term success, yet access to full-day pre-K remains limited and per-student funding has decreased. During the 2022-23 school year, 7% of four-year-olds and 28% of three-year-olds enrolled in public pre-K were in half-day programs rather than full day programs.<sup>8</sup> Additionally, the overall funding per capita rate for all students in Texas decreased between the 2022-23 and 2023-24 school years, falling from \$631.05 to \$414.88.<sup>9</sup>
- Achievement gaps in third grade reading and math levels are evident across races and ethnicities. In spring 2024, 49% of third graders met grade-level reading standards and 41% met grade-level math standards.<sup>10</sup>
- In the 2022-23 school year, 90% of male teachers and 89% of female teachers were retained in their first year, demonstrating a slight difference by gender.<sup>11</sup> However, by the fifth year of teaching, the retention rate for male educators (62%) is 5% higher than it is for female educators (57%).<sup>12</sup>
- While access to the internet and computers is increasingly necessary for educational success, 71,303 Texas children live in households without a computer.<sup>13</sup> There is a clear gap when looking at household income, as only 3% of households earning \$75,000 or more lack an internet subscription compared to 22% of households earning \$20,000 or less.<sup>14</sup>

## POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS:

- **Expand Pre-K and School Funding:** Increase full-day pre-K access, improve K-12 funding, and reduce classroom sizes to create equitable learning environments.
- **Close Gaps in Achievement and Dropout Rates:** Invest in targeted literacy and math programs, summer learning, and career education to address disparities and reduce high school dropout rates.
- **Improve Teacher Retention:** Strengthen teacher retention through better pay and support for educators.
- **Increase Digital Access:** Expand affordable digital access to close the digital divide.

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



### ECONOMIC SECURITY



#### KEY FINDINGS:

- 18% of Texas children live in poverty (approximately 1.4 million) compared to the national rate of 16%.<sup>15</sup>
- Hispanic/Latino children, who make up nearly half of Texas' child population, account for 64% of the children living in poverty.<sup>16</sup>
- More than 2.9 million children in Texas live in households that earn above the poverty threshold but below a living wage, making it difficult for families to meet basic needs.<sup>17</sup>
- In 2022, 33% of Texas children lived in housing cost-burdened households, disproportionately affecting 47% of Black children and 36% of Hispanic/Latino children.<sup>18</sup>
- From Aug. 20 to Sept. 16, 2024, an estimated 39% of adults in Texas households who are behind on rent or mortgage payments reported being very likely or somewhat likely to face eviction or foreclosure in the next two months, compared to 27% nationally.<sup>19</sup>

#### POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS:

- **Raise Wages and Benefits:** Increase Texas' minimum wage and expand access to paid sick leave to ensure families can meet their basic needs.
- **Strengthen Social Safety Nets:** Improve access to Medicaid, CHIP, SSI, SNAP, and TANF by reducing administrative barriers and expanding eligibility.
- **Expand Affordable Child Care:** Increase funding for affordable child care programs to enhance economic mobility for parents and support child care workers.
- **Promote Housing Security:** Expand affordable housing initiatives and rental assistance to reduce housing cost burdens, particularly for Black and Hispanic/Latino families.
- **Enhance tenant education and outreach** for information about their rights and available resources. Expand eviction-diversion services, including mediation and rental assistance, to prevent unjust evictions and promote housing stability for vulnerable renters and children.

The findings in this report underscore the urgent need for policy solutions that address these disparities and ensure every Texas child has the opportunity to thrive.