

Policy Memorandum

FISCAL
RESEARCH
CENTER

GEORGIA STATE UNIVERSITY
ANDREW YOUNG SCHOOL OF POLICY STUDIES
FISCAL RESEARCH PROGRAM
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SUBJECT: Children at Risk

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The concept of "children at risk" requires some defining in order to specify the area(s) of risk as well as the various approaches for reducing risk status. Children ranging from birth to age 21 could be at risk for several possible negative effects or distresses, including:

- failing at school, which could mean low grades or test scores, being held back, and dropping out;
- becoming a delinquent;
- becoming pregnant;
- suffering from a serious illness, either physical or mental;
- living in poverty as an adult;
- becoming a battered child.

In thinking broadly about "children at risk," we developed a more comprehensive assessment of at-risk, which we consolidated into five rather general categories. The following table lists some indicators that we would consider if we were to take a broad perspective of "at-risk." These indicators are measurable and lend themselves well to assessing their impact on important outcomes such as staying on grade level, not being in special education, and improved test scores.

POTENTIAL INDICATORS OF "AT-RISK"

1 Parent-Child Interaction Parental Involvement with School Parent Activities and Involvement with Child Parent Reading to Child	4 Parent Indicators Stable Family Life Housing/Homelessness Frequency of Moving Teen Mother Education Income Employment Substance Abuse
2 Family and Community Neighborhood Social Capital Personal Capital, Family and Friend Support System Fear of Neighborhood Crime Sufficient Food	5 Teacher Indicators Social-Behavioral Ratings or Discipline Problems Academic Ratings Communication Skill Ratings Recommendations for Special Education Expectations for Long-Term School Performance Grades
3 Child Indicators Latch Key Kids Overall Health Disabilities Health Insurance Availability Personality Changing Schools After-School Activities	

Research has found numerous factors that are associated with increased probabilities of suffering from one of these negative effects. Given what we understand you want, we have not provided data that shows the distribution of these factors among children in Georgia, except for economic conditions.

The literature suggests that the lower the income (or other measures of economic well being), the higher the probability that a child will suffer from one or more of these pathologies. A child in a household that is classified as poor has a higher probability of suffering one of these negative effects than does a child not in a poverty-level household. However, that does not mean that there is a big difference in the probability between being in a poverty-level household and a household with an income \$1 above the poverty level. However, it is convenient to classify children being in low-income families as being "at risk." The following tables present the number of children "at risk" using various measures of "low-income."

Poverty Rate

Child poverty has improved significantly since 1993, suggesting that reducing child poverty is an achievable goal. From 1993 to 1998, state welfare caseloads were reduced by 47 percent, mainly due to strong national economy and welfare reform. But the national child poverty rate decreased by only 17 percent during the same period (National Center for Children in Poverty). This indicates that a strong national economy alone is not enough to eliminate child poverty and the role and commitment of states in reducing child poverty is important. The poverty threshold is defined by the U.S. Office of Management and Budget.

ESTIMATES OF GEORGIA POPULATION 18 AND UNDER AT PERCENTAGES OF FEDERAL POVERTY LEVEL (1998)

Below FPL	100-185% FPL	185-200% FPL	200-235% FPL	Total <235% FPL
496,323	402,826	50,337	128,894	1,078,379

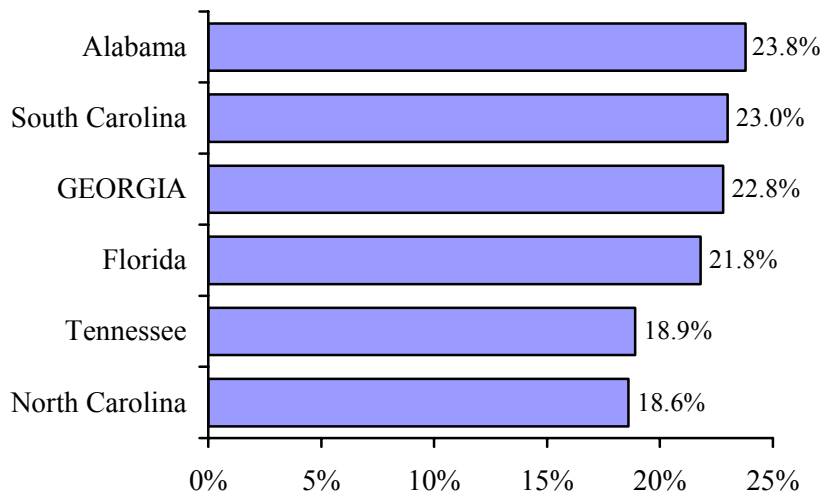
SOURCE: Center for Health Services Research, analysis of March 1998 Current Population Survey Data.

The following information is from the U.S. Census Bureau.

ESTIMATED NUMBER OF CHILDREN UNDER AGE 18 LIVING IN POVERTY IN 1997

	Georgia	United States
Number	470,440	14,113,067
Percent	22.8	19.9
How Georgia ranks	37 th (out of 51 states)	

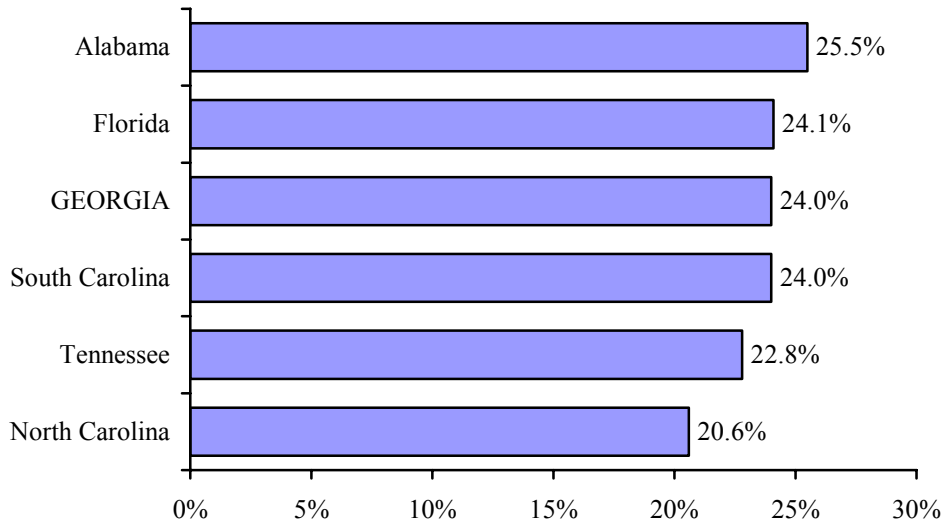
COMPARING GEORGIA WITH THE NEIGHBORING STATES: CHILDREN UNDER AGE 18 LIVING IN POVERTY IN 1997



ESTIMATED NUMBER OF CHILDREN UNDER AGE 5 LIVING IN POVERTY IN 1997

	Georgia	United States
Number	141,774	4,223,539
Percent	24.0	21.7
How Georgia Ranks	35 th	

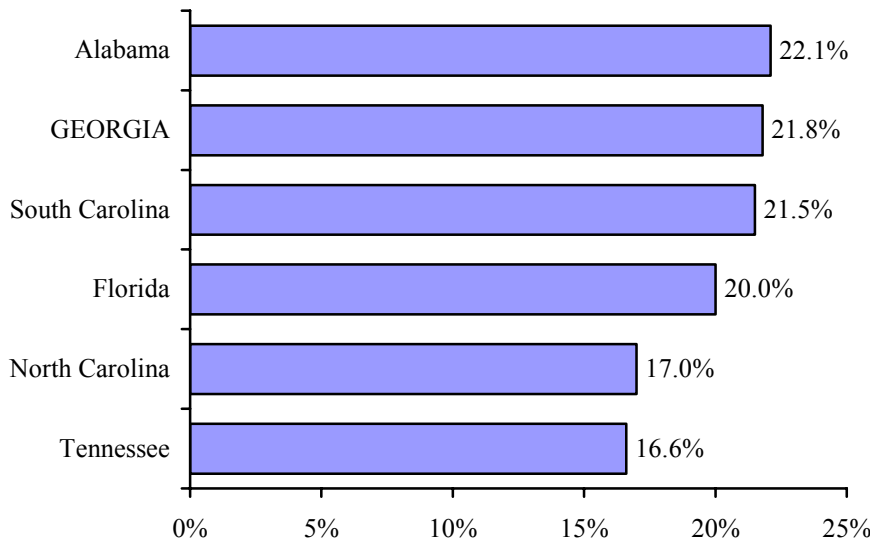
COMPARING GEORGIA WITH THE NEIGHBORING STATES: CHILDREN UNDER AGE 5 LIVING IN POVERTY IN 1997



ESTIMATED NUMBER OF CHILDREN BETWEEN AGES 5 AND 17 LIVING IN POVERTY IN 1997

	Georgia	United States
Number	311,355	9,306,705
Percent	21.8	18.4
How Georgia Ranks	40 th	

COMPARING GEORGIA WITH NEIGHBORING STATES: CHILDREN BETWEEN AGES 5 AND 17 LIVING IN POVERTY IN 1997



Eligibility for Certain Social Service Programs

When considering the definition of financial at-risk, the Office of School Readiness (OSR) refers to a Category One definition for four year olds attending a Georgia lottery-funded Prekindergarten Program (Pre-K), which is defined as:

the child’s participation in one of the following [programs]: *Food Stamps*, *SSI*, *Medicaid*, *Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF)*, or *PeachCare*. Children who participate in the free and reduced meal program through the center/school in which they attend may also be counted if income eligibility is verified on each child and kept on file for review.

While the most recent data is not available, the following table quantifies the estimated number of four year olds receiving various financial benefits. Different agencies group children by different age groups, so we provided both the age group reported by a state agency, as well as our estimate of the number of four year olds receiving benefits. We assumed that children in the age ranges listed below received benefits in equal proportions, probably an unrealistic assumption. Additionally, these categories are neither mutually exclusive nor are they comprehensive.

ESTIMATED POPULATION

	-----Age-----					Source
	0-6	0-17	0-18	0-19	4yr old est.	
July 1998 Estimated Population Served by Pre-K	800,126	2,025,995		2,253,108	113,401 71,000	Census Bureau ARC Estimation PARIS Reports
TANF	78,251				11,090	HRBM0235R01 PARIS Reports
Food Stamps	123,802				17,546	HRBM0270R01 and HRBM0350R01
SSI		33,216			1,859	Department of Medical Assistance
Medicaid	287,757	536,999	553,255	566,135	27,419	GHPC 1999 data
PeachCare	53,111	133,512	136,352	136,352	7,051	GHPC 1999 data
Combined Medicaid and PeachCare	340,868	670,511	689,607	702,487	34,470	GHPC 1999 data
Estimated Number of Children w/o Health Insurance				384,000	19,327	Children's Defense Fund

Approximately 63% of all four year olds in Georgia attend a lottery funded Pre-K program. The Applied Research Center estimates that over one-half of the children attending Pre-K are eligible for Category One status. It is estimated that the Food Stamp program, one of the larger social programs available to lower income families, is used by approximately 15% of all families with four year olds in 1998. Approximately 10% of all four year olds are in families that received TANF benefits in 1998. It is estimated that about 30% of all families with four year olds either receive medical benefits through either Medicaid or PeachCare. Finally, about 2% of all four year olds benefit from the SSI program.

The following tables provide more details regarding the data in the above table.

GA CHILD POPULATION BY ETHNICITY

18 and under population	White children 18 and under (58%)	African American children 18 and under (35%)	Children of other or 2+ Races 18 and under (7%)
2,288,145	1,329,492	789,790	168,863

SOURCE: Census 2000 Population Count.

CHILDREN'S HEALTH INSURANCE STATUS

Health Insurance Status	Medicaid	PeachCare	Uninsured
Age 18 and Under	553,255	142,271	278,676

SOURCE: Medstat system data for Medicaid and PeachCare counts, June 2001; Uninsured estimate from Center for Risk Management and Insurance Research, tabulations of Current Population Survey data 1999.

ESTIMATES OF GA CHILD POPULATION BY AGE

Infants <1	1-2 year olds	3 year olds	4 year olds	Total children age 4 and under	Total 18 and under population
119,066	233,824	113,070	114,190	580,150	2,169,813

SOURCE: 1999 Census Bureau Population Estimates Program.

ESTIMATES OF CHILDREN 18 AND UNDER BY FAMILY INCOME

Family Income <\$10,000 (16%)	Family Income \$10-20,000	Family Income \$20-30,000	Family Income \$30-40,000	Family Income \$40-50,000	Family Income >\$50,000
283,344	295,968	343,963	255,465	192,849	798,224

SOURCE: Center for Health Services Research, aggregate analysis of 1998, '99, and '00 Current Population Survey Data.

Free and Reduced Lunch

The Georgia Department of Education reports that in October 2000, 510,737 public school students in Georgia, or 35.3 percent of enrollment (full time equivalent), were eligible for free lunch, and 113,861 students, or 7.9 percent, were eligible for reduced lunch. Thus, 624,598 students, or 43.2 percent, were eligible for free and reduced lunch. We have this information by school, and with some time could determine the number and percentage by type of school, i.e., elementary, middle, high school. For comparison purposes, the following table shows the number of student eligible for free and reduced lunch for Georgia and surrounding states for 1999-2000.

STUDENT ELIGIBLE FOR FREE AND REDUCED PRICE MEALS (SCHOOL YEAR 1999-2000)

	Number of Students	Percent of All Students
Georgia	611,015	42.9%
Alabama	328,183	45.0%
Tennessee	N/A	N/A
North Carolina	497,886	39.0%
South Carolina	307,524	46.1%
Florida	1,054,044	44.3%
Louisiana	442,320	58.5%
Mississippi	316,818	63.3%

SOURCE: Lee Hoffman. 2000. "Overview of Public Elementary and Secondary Schools and Districts: School Year 199-2000" National Center for Education Statistics, Washington, D.C.