

“Success by Seventeen” (i.e., 17, 18, or 19) OCONEE COUNTY

Many of the serious difficulties of adolescence have deep roots in problems emerging during the pre-school years of life and during unsuccessful academic careers in kindergarten through grade five. These problems are described through data on pages 1-9 of the Kids Count report in terms of family, economic status, health, readiness, and early school performance. This data presents an alarming picture of children’s life circumstances and development during the early years.

	Year	Total	White	African American & Other
Low birthweight babies	2001	7.0%	6.9%	8.0%
Births to teen mothers under 18	2001	5.7%	5.6%	6.8%
Births to teen mothers under 20	2001	15.3%	14.0%	25.0%
Births to mothers not completing high school	2001	26.3%	25.2%	35.2%
Births to single mothers*	2001	30.7%	26.2%	65.9%
Children 0-5 in single parent families	2000	25.0%	20.9%	48.0%
Children 6-17 in single parent families	2000	25.4%	23.0%	41.0%
Females in the labor force with kids under 6	2000	65.6%	66.5%	59.6%
Females in the labor force with kids 6-17	2000	70.4%	70.7%	68.3%
Poverty among kids ages 0-5	2000	16.1%	13.0%	30.8%
Poverty among kids 6-17	2000	12.3%	11.7%	15.8%
First grade “not ready”	2001	17.4%	14.5%	29.0%
Failures grades 1-3	2000	13.3%	12.5%	17.5%
Special Education placement, ages 8-9	2002	23.6%	23.8%	22.6%
PACT below basic in reading grade 3	2002	21.2%	19.0%	32.1%
PACT below basic in math grade 3	2002	23.7%	20.9%	37.3%

* Data include paternity acknowledgements.

Statewide trends: Single parent families have increased. More and more parents of young children are working. Education of parents has improved. Infant mortality is down, but low birthweight has not improved. Poverty declined dramatically in the 1970s but has not changed much for young children since then, especially for the growing numbers of children in families headed by single mothers. School readiness has recently improved for the first time since the early 1980s, as assessed by teachers of 1st grade students. Large percentages of students are still placed in special education, even though many of them are recognized as disabled only in academic learning but not in other areas of life. School failures and students over-age for grade 3 have declined, as indicated by the following data for Oconee County:

	1991	1992	1993	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001
1 st graders not “ready”	26.9%	NA	24.5%	28.7%	33.5%	24.2%	25.5%	22.4%	17.7%	18.7%	17.4%
Failures grades 1-3	NA	29.6%	7.9%	6.0%	6.8%	7.4%	8.7%	11.3%	9.7%	13.3%	NA
Over-age for grade 3	NA	29.1%	25.2%	22.5%	21.0%	20.2%	14.2%	15.0%	21.6%	13.9%	20.6%

With so many of today’s teens not having enjoyed success by ages six to eight through the support of their families, communities and schools, they are vulnerable to the negative social pressures of contemporary media influences and youth culture. The consequences are reflected in the table on the next page summarizing data from pages 9 - 16 of the Kids Count Report.

While many students are making solid progress in school, too many others are performing below minimum standards of the basic academic skills. Approximately 40% of 4th graders in South Carolina perform below the basic level on the National Assessment of Education Progress in math and 45% in reading, as compared with 22.0% of 4th graders below basic in math and 20.4% in reading on the PACT test in the county. Statewide, in the 8th grade, 45% perform below the basic level on the NAEP in math as compared with 37.3% in the county on the PACT test, and 35% statewide below basic on NAEP in reading as compared with 32.2% in the county on PACT. Compared with national standards, the percentage of low performing students reported by Kids Count may underestimate the numbers of students not achieving national minimum competency standards in the basic skills of reading, writing, and math.

Page 10 of the Kids Count report presents data trends over 15 years, including grade 8 BSAP and first time administration of national norm-referenced tests in grades 4 and 9 during 1983, 1990, and 1995. Statewide these results did not show positive trends during the 1990s; however, positive trends have been achieved since 1999 on PACT. Most of the poor performers eventually are part of the one third of students who later fail parts of the high school Exit Exam and are among the quarter to third of youth in South Carolina who do not graduate. By ages 25 - 34, one sixth have still never graduated or passed the GED.

Oconee County Youth					
	Total	White		African-American and Other	
		Male	Female	Male	Female
PACT grade 5 below basic Math	24.3%	23.7%	18.2%	37.2%	40.6%
Reading	25.0%	27.7%	13.8%	50.0%	32.8%
PACT grade 8 below basic Math	37.3%	37.8%	28.7%	58.6%	50.7%
Reading	32.2%	33.5%	19.9%	61.4%	49.3%
Exit Exam failing one or more parts in 10th grade	24.3%	23.4%	21.3%	32.5%	45.9%
Dropouts by grade 12??	26.2%	27.4%	23.4%	39.3%	21.5%
Pregnancy ages 14-17	3.4%	N/A	3.4%	N/A	3.7%
Alcohol use in past 30 days by students grades 7-12	32.3%	33.1%	33.7%	34.8%	22.9%
Drug use in past 30 days by students grades 7-12	18.2%	22.3%	15.6%	20.2%	9.5%
Juvenile delinquency ages 15 - 17	3.5%	4.1%	1.4%	11.1%	4.1%

** This is calculated using 12th grade enrollment data. Graduation data are not available by gender and race.

Risk-taking behaviors: Too many adolescents assert independence by rejecting adults and adopting or experimenting with the youth culture promoting excessive risk-taking. The 2001 DAODAS survey showed that of county high schoolers in the last year: 44.2% would be unlikely to tell an adult if they heard a student threaten to harm someone and 57.0% unlikely to tell if they saw a student with drugs at school; 18.2% had carried a gun or knife for self-defense, 22.1% had been in a fight, 10.3% had received in-school suspension, 22.8% felt hopeless for two weeks or more, 10.8% seriously considered suicide, and 12.3% had stolen something worth more than \$5.

Pregnancy rates of 14-17 year olds in the county have decreased from their post-1980 peak of 5.2%, falling to 3.4% in 2001. During the peak year approximately 15.6% of girls had become pregnant by age 18, but in 2001 approximately 10.2% had become pregnant by age 18, with roughly one-third becoming pregnant twice. This should come as no surprise since the 2001 Youth Risk Behavior Survey (YRBS) for South Carolina found that 38% of all females and 49% of males had engaged in sexual intercourse by age 15; that over 50% of males and 48% of females in the 11th and 12th grades had intercourse during any three month period; and that 27% of girls and 33% of boys in the 12th grade had intercourse with four or more persons during their young lives.

Alcohol and drug abuse is widespread among teens, especially middle class or wealthy children with ample spending money and available automobiles to “cruise around” without parental supervision. The DAODAS survey in 2001 showed that in a typical month 39.2% of high school students in county consume alcohol, and 23.3% binge drink 5 or more drinks. Drug use among high school students statewide increased significantly during the 1990s, with monthly marijuana use almost doubling from 12.5% in 1993 to 23.9% in 2001, according to the YRBS. The 2001 DAODAS survey indicated that 22.9% of county high school students used illegal drugs during the past month.

Delinquency is a serious problem among teens, typically starting in middle school and becoming increasingly prevalent in high school and the young adult years. In South Carolina, over 10% of all youth and nearly 20% of males are referred to the Family Courts for delinquency by age 18. Unfortunately, the data on arrested and adjudicated youth substantially underestimates the prevalence of teens who engage in crime at some time in their youth: roughly 20% - 30% overall and 35% - 55% for males. Approximately two-fifths of the referrals to the Solicitor for delinquency are elementary and middle grades students ages 14 and under. Over one quarter of delinquents come from families with incomes below \$10,000. Less than one fifth come from families comprised of both natural parents. Moreover, over two-fifths have a family member with a criminal or delinquent record. Regrettably, rates of delinquency among youth 15-17 have increased substantially in Oconee County over the past 20 years:

	Total	White Males	White Females	African American & Other Males	African American & Other Females
1982	3.0%	3.4%	1.8%	7.1%	2.4%
1990	2.5%	3.3%	1.0%	6.0%	1.8%
2002	3.5%	4.1%	1.4%	11.1%	4.1%

For further information, please contact Kim Hazel-Lohr or Baron Holmes at the SC Kids Count Project, 1000 Assembly St. Suite 425, Columbia, SC 29201; and Phone: (803) 734-1295; Fax: (803) 734-3619. Data and website related questions should be directed to Anne Wilson at 1000 Assembly St. Suite 425, Columbia SC 29201, Phone:(803) 734-4810; Fax: (803) 734-3619. You may also view our reports on the World Wide Web at www.sckidscount.org