

State of Child Welfare 2011 Data Sources and Explanation

General data information

The *2011 State of Child Welfare* report compares two years of data on a set of key child welfare performance indicators. The report is designed for the reader to note changes in and across local, county type and state data from one year to the next.

County Type

The statewide report and the county reports include county type and state totals. Comparing data at the county level is most appropriate when comparing a county against another one of the same type. County type (rural, rural mix, urban mix, urban) is based on 2000 Census population density.

Rural No Urbanized Population	Rural Mix Up to 49% Urbanized	Urban Mix 50% to 74% Urbanized	Urban 75% or More Urbanized
Adams	Armstrong	Beaver	Allegheny
Bedford	Butler	Berks	Bucks
Bradford	Cambria	Blair	Chester
Cameron	Carbon	Centre	Dauphin
Clarion	Fayette	Cumberland	Delaware
Clearfield	Franklin	Erie	Lackawanna
Clinton	Lawrence	Lancaster	Lehigh
Columbia	Lycoming	Lebanon	Luzerne
Crawford	Mercer	Washington	Montgomery
Elk	Perry	Westmoreland	Northampton
Forest	Schuylkill	York	Philadelphia
Fulton	Somerset		
Greene	Susquehanna		
Huntingdon	Wayne		
Indiana	Wyoming		
Jefferson			
Juniata			
McKean			
Mifflin			
Monroe			
Montour			
Northumberland			
Pike			
Potter			
Snyder			
Sullivan			
Tioga			
Union			
Venango			
Warren			

Scope and Size

Care should be taken in making generalized statements related to small numbers of children in order to avoid assuming a significance that cannot be supported by a small data set.

Status

The status column within the report notes whether the change in the indicator from the previous year has made progress, lost ground or if there has been no significant change. This status notation was determined by calculating the rate of change between the first year and second year, then comparing it to an established benchmark of “significant” change (i.e., a 3 percent positive or negative change). Changes that fell below this benchmark were labeled as “no significant change.” It is important to note that some of the indicators do not include a status notation because of the inability to qualify if change in that particular indicator indicates progress or lost ground (e.g. change in child abuse substantiations, age of children, etc.).

Time period

The indicators within the report capture a full year. For instance, all children entering, in and leaving foster care during the year are included the figures. It is worth noting that county children and youth agencies often review and cite measures that only include the numbers of children served on a given day or point in time.

Foster Care

In the context of this report, foster care is used to describe all children in substitute or out-of-home care except for the section of the report that examines specific placement setting types. In the context of placement settings, foster care is used to describe specific family-based relative and non-relative care.

Report Indicators

Child Abuse Reports

This indicator provides the total number of suspected child abuse reports throughout the year in Pennsylvania.

Pennsylvania has a differential response system for reporting and responding to child abuse and neglect reports. Reports are classified, depending on their degree of severity, as either Child Protective Services reports or General Protective Services reports. Child Protective Services reports include sexual abuse, physical abuse, or serious physical neglect. General Protective Services reports include less severe reports of general neglect such as lack of adequate housing, truancy, parent-child conflict. Only Child Protective Services reports are noted in the *State of Child Welfare* report as these are the only cases tracked in the ChildLine and Abuse Registry. General Protective Services reports are reported directly to the county agency by the public or forwarded to county children and youth agencies by ChildLine for assessment. In the commonwealth, county Children and Youth Agencies provide many families with services following General Protective Services assessments.

The rate per 1,000 children was calculated by dividing the suspected cases of child abuse by the 2000 Census child population from birth through age 17.

SOURCE: *2009 and 2010 Child Abuse Reports* extracted from the ChildLine and Abuse Registry (1/1/09 – 12/31/09 and 1/1/10 – 12/31/10), Pennsylvania Department of Public Welfare, Office of Children, Youth and Families, U. S. Bureau of the Census, Census of Population and Housing, 2000.

Child Abuse Substantiations

This indicator notes the percentage of child abuse reports that are substantiated. Substantiated cases of child abuse are incidents of abuse that have been determined to meet Pennsylvania's [definition of child abuse](#) per the Pennsylvania Child Protective Services Law. Following a child protective services investigation, a determination is made as to whether the child abuse report is substantiated. This determination can be made by the county child welfare agency (referred to as an indicated report) or by the courts (referred to as a founded report).

SOURCE: *2009 and 2010 Child Abuse Reports* extracted from ChildLine and Abuse Registry (1/1/09 – 12/31/09 and 1/1/10 – 12/31/10), Pennsylvania Department of Public Welfare, Office of Children, Youth and Families

Repeated Child Abuse

This indicator shows the rate of children who experience more than one incident of substantiated child abuse. There are occasions when subsequent instances of substantiated abuse occur and counties are aware of the initial instance of abuse. This is not always the case, as indicated by the following passage from the Pennsylvania Department of Child Welfare's 2010 Annual Child Abuse Report:

“During the course of an investigation, it is possible that other previously unreported incidents become known. For example, an investigation can reveal another incident of abuse which was never before disclosed by the child or the family. These previously unreported incidents are registered with ChildLine and handled as separate reports. Also, a child may be abused in one county then move to another county and become a victim of abuse again. This would be considered reabuse whether or not the original county agency referred the matter to the new county agency. In both examples, such reports would be re-abuse of the child. Therefore, it is not accurate to assume that the victim and the family were known to the county agency in all instances where a child was a victim of multiple incidents of abuse. The statistics on reabuse should be understood within this context.”

It is important to note that repeated child abuse may include overstated data.

SOURCE: *2009 and 2010 Child Abuse Reports* extracted from ChildLine and Abuse Registry (1/1/09 – 12/31/09 and 1/1/10 – 12/31/10), Pennsylvania Department of Public Welfare, Office of Children, Youth and Families

In-home Services

In order to get a complete picture of the child welfare system, reliable data are needed for every key decision point from the initial report of child abuse or neglect through children exiting the system. While Pennsylvania has made great strides to improve its data

collection efforts, reliable data are still lacking for General Protective Services, in-home services and evidence-based practices delivered through Special Grants funding through the Needs Based Plan and Budget.

The in-home services indicator should reflect the number of children receiving services in their home to address issues of abuse and neglect. This data point is tracked by the CY-28 file submitted by counties to Pennsylvania Department of Public Welfare (DPW), Office of Children, Youth and Families. The CY-28 file is still under review and refinement. In addition, the local collection of the data is believed to vary from one jurisdiction to another, resulting in reporting inaccuracies. After discussions with DPW, it was decided that the number of children served during the year is the most reliable indicator to quantify the number of children receiving in-home services. The number listed is consistent with their reporting.

SOURCE: CY-28 reports to the Department of Public Welfare, Office of Children, Youth and Families and Hornby Zeller Associates.

Children Entering Foster Care

This indicator shows the total number of children who entered foster care placement between 4/1/09 – 3/31/10 (2010) and 4/1/10 – 3/31/11 (2011), as well as the percentage of children who entered foster care during the year for the first time. This indicator can be a duplicated count as a child can enter placement more than one time during the period and would be counted each time. First-time entries, however, are unduplicated.

SOURCE: AFCARS Longitudinal File produced by Hornby Zeller Associates for Pennsylvania Department of Public Welfare, Office of Children, Youth and Families

Children in Foster Care

This indicator illustrates the unduplicated total number of children in foster care placement from 4/1/09 - 3/31/10 (2010) and 4/1/10 – 3/31/11 (2011). It breaks out children in care by age, race/ethnicity and placement setting.

Age: Age represents the child's age at the end of the period, specifically 3/31/10 (2010) and 3/31/11 (2011) if the child was in placement at the end of the period. If the child left foster care during the year, then his or her age is captured at the discharge date.

Race and ethnicity: Race and ethnicity breakouts include White, African American, Other and Latino. (Latino is an ethnicity and not a race.) It is important to note that children can simultaneously be reported under multiple races. However, only eight counties have the ability to capture multiple races in their data systems, so the reporting of multiple races is relatively small. The "Other" category includes children who were not White and not African American, including a small number of Asian, American Indian, and Unable to Determine.

Placement setting: This indicator shows the latest placement setting that children are in during the year 4/1/09 – 3/31/10 (2010) and 4/1/10 – 3/31/11 (2011). Placement settings

are the different environments that children can be placed in when they enter the foster care system. Pre-adoptive settings, as well as foster family settings (both relative and non-relative) are family-based placement settings. Group homes and institutions are more restrictive placement settings and are often referred to as congregate care settings.

One should note that there are some inconsistencies across the counties in the use of trial home visits and in the number of children on a runaway status, often due to the impact of county payment and data systems. Because of the relatively small number of children and the reporting inconsistencies noted above, status is not reported for supervised independent living, runaway and trial home visits.

SOURCE: AFCARS Longitudinal File produced by Hornby Zeller Associates for Pennsylvania Department of Public Welfare, Office of Children, Youth and Families

Timely Reunification with Parents or Relatives

This indicator shows the percentage of all children who entered foster care for the first time in a 12-month period (4/1/08 – 3/31/09 (2010) and 4/1/09 – 3/31/10 (2011)) and were discharged to reunification with their parents or relatives in less than 12 months from the date of removal. Children must have been in foster care more than eight days to be included in this indicator. Reunification data are collected between the periods of 4/9/08 – 3/31/10 (2010) and 4/9/09 – 3/31/11 (2011).

It is important when reviewing reunification data to recognize the interrelationship with re-entry data. Ideally, children who must enter foster care will be reunified quickly and permanently with their birth parents or relatives – and not experience re-entry into foster care.

SOURCE: AFCARS Longitudinal File produced by Hornby Zeller Associates for Pennsylvania Department of Public Welfare, Office of Children, Youth and Families

Re-entry into Foster Care

This indicator shows the percentage of all children who were discharged to reunification with their parents or other relatives in a 12-month period (4/1/08 – 3/31/09 (2010) and 4/1/09 – 3/31/10 (2011)) and subsequently re-entered foster care in less than 12 months following their reunification (4/2/08 – 3/31/10 (2010) and 4/2/09 – 3/31/11 (2011)). The data system does not allow the capture of enough information on children discharged from care who re-entered foster care within the first year (4/1/08 – 3/31/09 (2010) and 4/1/09 – 3/31/10 (2011)) to determine whether that discharge was a reunification to parents or relatives or discharge for another reason. This may result in an over-reporting of reunifications and subsequent re-entries.

Some counties may also have an over-count of re-entries because of nuances in their billing systems. For example, when a child has run away from his or her foster placement, the county may close out the child's foster care setting for purposes of payment. This action may result in the child being registered as leaving foster care. When the child is found, the county notes the child's placement setting for payment purposes,

which may also register the child as a re-entry. A similar example can occur in some counties that stop the foster care setting payment during a temporary trial home visit. Trial home visits are often used to support the reunification of children in foster care with their birth parents or relatives and typically occur as children are being prepared to permanently return home.

SOURCE: AFCARS Longitudinal File produced by Hornby Zeller Associates for Pennsylvania Department of Public Welfare, Office of Children, Youth and Families

Children Leaving Foster Care

This indicator shows the number of children leaving foster care between 4/1/09 - 3/31/10 (2010) and 4/1/10 - 3/31/11 (2011) by discharge reason and the median length of time in foster care (in months) for those children to be discharged. The percent listed under the total reflects the number of children served during the year who left placement. This number can be a duplicated count as a child can exit multiple times during the reporting period. Reunification, adoption, guardianship and live with other relatives are considered exits to permanent arrangements. Emancipation, transfer to another agency, and runaway are exits to non-permanent arrangements. As noted under placement setting, counties vary in how they report runaways. This section also shows the unduplicated number of children remaining in care at the end of the year (3/31/10) and (3/31/11) and the median length of stay for those children.

SOURCE: AFCARS Longitudinal File produced by Hornby Zeller Associates for Pennsylvania Department of Public Welfare, Office of Children, Youth and Families

Foster Care Placement Stability

This indicator notes the percentage of children in foster care between 12 and 24 months who experienced three or more placement settings. The files are comprised of all children in foster care between 12 and 24 months served during the timeframe of 4/1/09 – 3/31/10 (2010) and 4/1/10 – 3/31/11 (2011).

SOURCE: AFCARS Longitudinal File produced by Hornby Zeller Associates for Pennsylvania Department of Public Welfare, Office of Children, Youth and Families

Caseworker Visits

This indicator represents the percentage of children who were visited on a monthly basis by a county or private agency child welfare worker. This percentage was determined from a statewide sample of children in foster care and calculating the number of full calendar months caseworkers met the requirement to conduct monthly visits, divided by the number of full calendar months that children in the sample were in foster care. The sample was extracted from the AFCARS longitudinal file, which includes children discharged in the first AFCARS reporting period, children discharged in the second reporting period, and children in care on the last day of the second period. Pennsylvania is currently meeting the federal standard for monthly casework visitation.

SOURCE: Statewide samples 10/1/08 – 9/30/09 (2010) and 10/1/09 – 9/30/10 (2011) collected by the Pennsylvania Department of Public Welfare, Office of Children, Youth and Families