COLORADO CHILDREN'S CAMPAIGN

*Every Chance for Every Child*

# *Child Data and Policy Overview for House District 17*

## *Why Focus on Kids*

The future of our children and the future of our state are conclusively linked. For our state to thrive, our children must thrive. At the Children's Campaign, we believe that to be successful, all kids need:

- Quality, affordable health care, including physical, mental and oral health services, and the community environments and supports to be healthy.
- High quality and nurturing early learning and developmental experiences that ensure they are ready for school and on track for success.
- Effective, engaging schools that lead to their graduation from high school on time and equipped with the skills to pursue college, career and life.

Investments that help children grow up healthy and strong—physically, academically and social-emotionally—offer returns that extend to their families and communities. As the next generation of parents, innovators, employees, entrepreneurs, and community leaders, the children of Colorado embody the state's future. When we work together to give *every* chance to *every* child, all Coloradans stand to benefit.

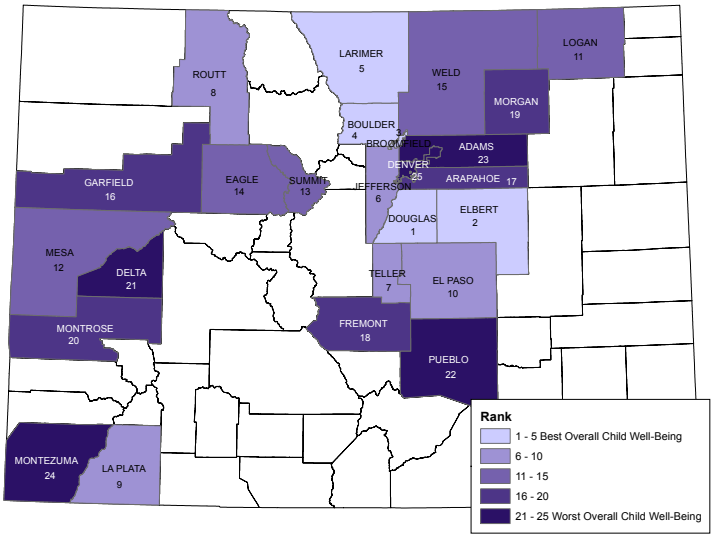
# How Colorado Kids Are Faring

## 2014 Colorado Child Well-Being Index

*KIDS COUNT in Colorado!* is an annual publication of the Children's Campaign that provides the best available state- and county-level data to measure and track the well-being of our state's children. The report features the Colorado Child Well-Being Index that ranks counties based on 12 indicators. It includes Colorado's 25 largest counties, which are home to 95 percent of all Colorado children under age 18:

### Indicators included in the Colorado Child Well-Being Index:

- Low-weight births
- Uninsured children
- Overweight or obese children
- Infant mortality rate
- Teen birth rate
- Single-parent families
- Children in poverty
- Births to women with less than 12 years of education
- Families relying on low-cost food
- High school dropout rate
- Teens not attending school and not working
- Fourth grade students reading below grade level




| County | Rank | Change from 2013 |
|---|---|---|
| Douglas | 1 | ---- |
| Elbert | 2 | ---- |
| Broomfield | 3 | ---- |
| Boulder | 4 | ---- |
| Larimer | 5 | ---- |
| Jefferson | 6 | ---- |
| Teller | 7 | Up 1 |
| Routt | 8 | Down 1 |
| La Plata | 9 | Up 1 |
| El Paso | 10 | Up 1 |
| Logan* | 11 | Up 8* |
| Mesa | 12 | ---- |
| Summit | 13 | Up 1 |
| Eagle | 14 | Down 5 |
| Weld | 15 | ---- |
| Garfield | 16 | ---- |
| Arapahoe | 17 | ---- |
| Fremont | 18 | Down 5 |
| Morgan | 19 | Up 3 |
| Montrose | 20 | Down 2 |
| Delta | 21 | Down 1 |
| Pueblo | 22 | Down 1 |
| Adams | 23 | Up 1 |
| Montezuma | 24 | Down 1 |
| Denver | 25 | ---- |

*Note: Due to a data anomaly, it was necessary to discard data for teens not attending school and not working in Logan County. Therefore, Logan County's rankings in the 2014 index should be interpreted with caution. For more information, please see the full *2014 KIDS COUNT in Colorado!* report.

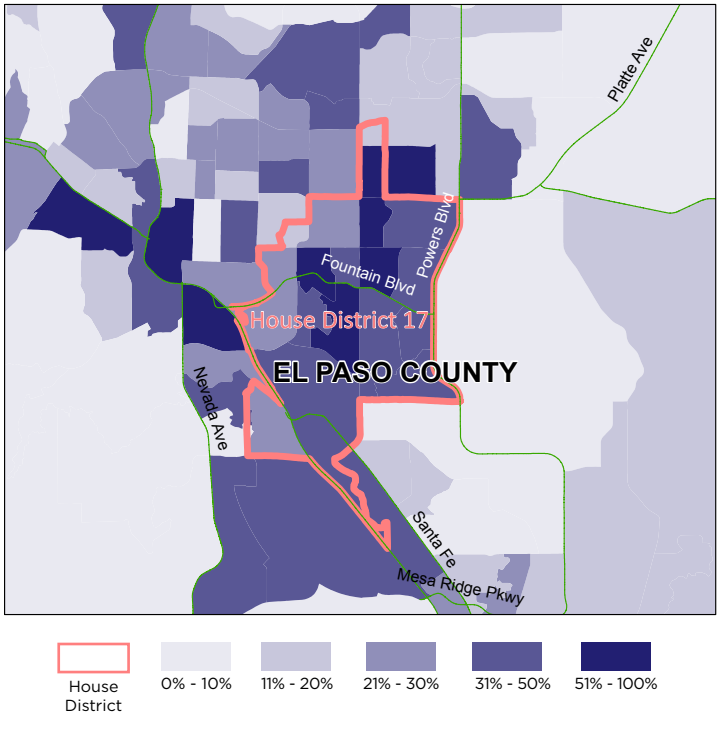
## Broad Trends and the Shadow of Poverty

Colorado children are privileged to grow up in one of the most beautiful settings in the world. For the many children who enjoy advantages such as positive and nurturing interactions with their parents and caregivers, quality health care, high-performing schools, nutritious foods and safe outdoor places to play, Colorado is a great place to be a kid. Unfortunately, not all children in Colorado share in these opportunities. According to the latest data, 224,000 Colorado kids—18 percent of the total child population—lived in poverty in 2012. Research plainly shows that children living in poverty are more likely to start school at a disadvantage, more likely to be in poor health, less likely to graduate high school on time, and more likely to live in poverty as adults.

With one in every six Colorado children living in poverty in 2012, more children were living in poverty than during the deepest part of the recession. Since 2000, the state's child poverty rate has grown faster than almost anywhere else in the nation. Colorado children are more likely to live in poverty than adults (1.3 times more likely) and seniors (2.4 times more likely); and our youngest children (under the age of five) experience the highest poverty rates among all children. Children of color in Colorado are much more likely to live in poverty than their non-Hispanic white peers.

Child poverty rates vary broadly across the state, as illustrated in the adjacent map of child poverty by Census tract.

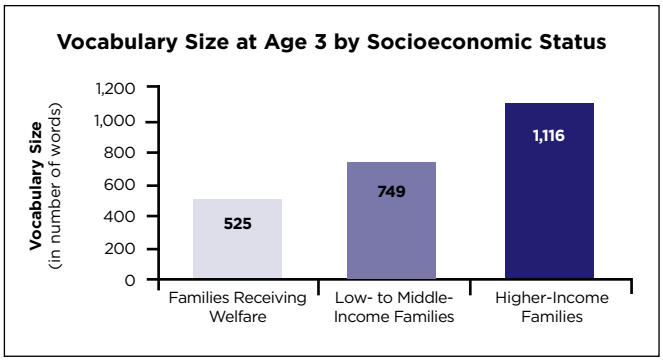
### Percent of Children in Poverty by Census Tract:



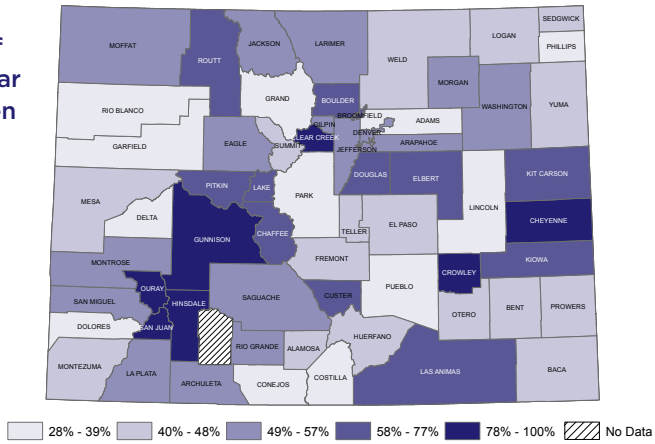
# How Children in House District 17 Are Faring

## Early Childhood Care and Education:

*Early Language Development.* A growing body of research illustrates that the opportunity to succeed in school is shaped by experiences in the early years, long before children walk through the kindergarten door. Without adequate support for very young children and their caregivers, gaps develop early and grow over time. On average, children in low-income families hear less than a third of the words that children of higher-income families hear. As a result, by the time they are 3 years old, upper income children have heard 30 million more words than children in low-income families and their vocabularies are twice as large. Waiting until children enter the K-12 system to deal with these gaps is unlikely to address the differences in experiences that occur very early in their lives.




**Percent of 3- and 4-Year Old Children Attending Preschool**




*Preschool Access.* Each year, tens of thousands of Colorado children enter kindergarten for the first time, but not all of them start on equal footing. While some children have already built the foundations of school success, others are being exposed to numbers and letters, socializing with classmates, and learning about books for the first time. Access to quality preschool is one of the best predictors of early academic success and school readiness. But this access varies widely across the state, as illustrated by the adjacent map.

## Health:

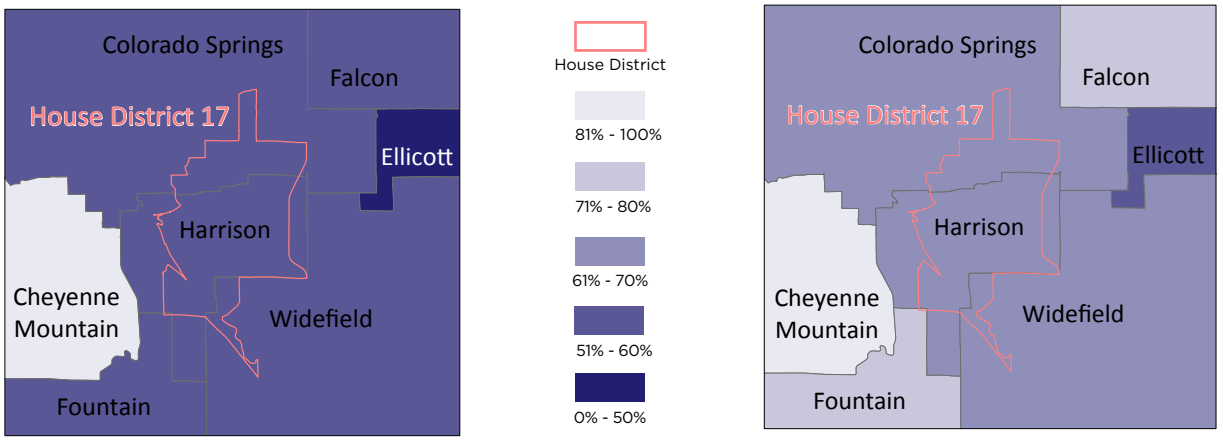
The chart below shows key child and maternal health indicators for the state and county or counties included in this electoral district.

| Child and Maternal Health | Colorado | El Paso |
|---|---|---|
| Births to Women Receiving Early Prenatal Care (2012) | 80.2% | 81.6% |
| Uninsured Children (2012) | 9.1% | 9.7% |
| Overweight and Obese Children (2010-2012) | 27.0% | 32.0% |
| Teen Birth Rate per 1,000 Females Ages 15-19 (2012) | 24.3 | 23.5 |
| Children Eligible for Medicaid or CHP+ but Not Enrolled (2012) | 15.9% | 18.6% |

## K-12 Education:

The maps below show the percentage of students who scored at the proficient level or above across all grades measured by the 2013 Transitional Colorado Assessment Program (TCAP) in math and reading by school district.

**Percent of Students Proficient or Advanced in Math and Reading**




The chart below shows other key education indicators by school district, with state data as a benchmark.

| Education | Colorado | Harrison 2 | Colorado Springs 11 |
|---|---|---|---|
| Kindergarteners in a Full-Day Program (2013) | 70.0% | 97.0% | 99.0% |
| 4th Graders Proficient in Reading (2013) | 68.0% | 70.0% | 67.0% |
| High School Graduation Rate (2013) | 76.9% | 77.5% | 66.0% |

# Policy Priorities to Improve the Well-Being of Colorado Children

***Ensuring a Healthy Start.*** From conception through age 8, children's bodies and minds develop at a rapid pace and they establish the foundations and habits for health that will carry them through the rest of their lives. Children thrive when the environments in which they live, learn and play are safe, stimulating and supportive, and when they have access to healthy foods and learn personal care habits and strategies that support a healthy lifestyle. Children need and deserve quality, affordable health care from prenatal health services for mothers throughout pregnancy to comprehensive well-child care, including immunizations, developmental screenings and early oral health care. Children benefit when their parents, caregivers, educators and health care providers have the knowledge, skills and resources to support their healthy development. Voluntary home visiting programs are one smart strategy for supporting both new parents and young children. Identifying impediments to healthy development and intervening early can deliver the best, most cost-effective outcomes for children and their familes.

***Covering All Kids.*** Children with health coverage, whether through private insurance or a public program like Medicaid or the Child Health Plan Plus (CHP+), are more likely to get the preventive services they need to grow up healthy and to access care in a timely manner and cost-effective setting when they are sick or injured. We've made great progress in reducing the number of uninsured kids in Colorado. Since 2004-2006, the percentage of uninsured kids has dropped from 14 percent to 8 percent. However, more than 100,000 Colorado kids remain uninsured. The uninsured rate for low-income children and children in poverty is about twice as high as the statewide average. Many of these children are eligible for coverage through Medicaid or CHP+, but not enrolled. We must capitalize on recent progress and continue working to ensure all children have quality, affordable health coverage.

***Increasing Access to Quality Early Learning Opportunities.*** An at-risk child who attends high-quality preschool and full-day kindergarten is less likely to fall behind in school. However, only a fraction of Colorado children who need high-quality preschool programs can enroll. Just 7 percent of 3-year-olds and 21 percent of 4-year-olds are served through the Colorado Preschool Program, Head Start and Preschool Special Education. Among the 40 states with a state-supported preschool program, Colorado ranks 37th in overall spending. A child's brain develops most rapidly birth through age 5, and research shows that this period is the most effective time to invest in the early nurturing, learning and health experiences that lay the strong foundation for later success. Brain science, policy research, and the needs of children all point in the direction of increased investments in quality early learning.

***Setting Meaningful Standards for What Students Should Learn and Measuring Their Progress***. Ensuring that Colorado's children are prepared for college, career and life when they graduate requires we set high expectations and monitor students' progress toward those goals. The new Colorado Academic Standards that were adopted in 2010 are higher, better and more coherent than our state's previous expectations. The standards are designed to provide our students with the 21st century skills they need to succeed in a globally competitive and ever-evolving economic landscape, including problem-solving, creative thinking and real world application. The standards build in complexity from grade level to grade level to eliminate skill gaps and ensure that our students are prepared for graduation. The success of standards, however, requires that we know whether students are achieving these expectations. Colorado is moving forward with better, more timely, and more aligned assessments of student progress. Supporting educators and schools to successfully implement standards and aligned assessments is one of our best strategies for helping all children succeed.

***Effectively Financing Schools.*** During the past decade, Colorado has emerged as a national leader in crafting innovative solutions to challenges facing its public school system. However, it has been more than 20 years since we modernized our school finance formula. The state has much to do to ensure that our formula has accountability for public dollars, is equitable for all students, drives innovation, and is sufficient to meet the needs of Colorado's changing student population. Schools are facing the challenges of rebounding from the cuts of the Great Recession and need greater support to be successful. We must also ensure that state funding of schools targets our investments appropriately and balances the many priorities we have for our students.

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# To Learn More

To learn more about these indicators and additional state and county-level data related to child well-being, please refer to the full *2014 KIDS COUNT in Colorado!* report or the KIDS COUNT Data Center. Both can be found at www.coloradokids.org.

Please contact Dan O'Connell, Government Affairs Director, for more information about the Children's Campaign or our policy priorities at dan@coloradokids.org or 303-620-4569.

Together, we can ensure every chance for every child in Colorado to grow into their potential.

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