

# **Idaho KIDS COUNT Data Brief: Low-income Families with Young Children**

## **DATA BRIEF SUMMARY**

### **Low-income Families Struggle to Afford Child Care**

Idaho's future success rests on the shoulders of the success of its youngest citizens. Their early experiences will shape the architecture of their brains in lasting ways and build the foundation – strong or weak- for their own development and that of Idaho. A new report by Idaho KIDS COUNT examines four key risk factors that impact outcomes for young children- poverty, parents' education level, single parent status, and minority status.

According to this report nearly half (48%) of all young Idaho children live in low-income families where child care and early education are difficult to afford and place children at risk. This means that an estimated 61,542 children ages 0-5 (a number equal to the entire population of Meridian) live in families with incomes below 200 percent of the federal poverty level (FPL) or \$41,300 for a family of four. On average, this the amount determined necessary to meet family's basic needs.

Also reported is the fact that a higher percentage of Idaho young children live in families with incomes between 150 and 200 percent of FPL (\$30,975- \$41,300 for a family of three) than any other state in the nation and that Idaho is one of only seven states who do not make children eligible for child care subsidies at this level. The Idaho Child Care Program (ICCP) currently establishes eligibility at 42 percent of the State Median Income or \$20,475 annually for a family for three. This compares to an established national benchmark of 85 percent of the State Median Income. This means that in Idaho low-income parents with young children are struggling to pay full child care expenses for approximately 42,364 children who should qualify for child care assistance according to national benchmarks. Even at the current low eligibility level, Idaho requires recipients to pay above seven percent of their earnings in co-payments. Idaho is one of only eleven states with this requirement.

This report further examines the underlying cause for Idaho's poverty rates and finds that minority status and the parent population without a high school diploma or GED explains more than 65 percent of the cross county variation. Contrary to public perception, single marital status is not the leading contributor to poverty. In fact, the percentage of young Idaho children in families of married, lower income parents (32.8 percent) is greater than that of any other state.

According to Linda Jensen, director for Idaho KIDS COUNT, "this report further quantifies the need for policy makers to take a hard look at how Idaho is supporting low-income working families with young children. More and more children are being born in Idaho to parents who work in low-wage jobs and can't afford quality child care. It seems to me that investing in a quality, affordable child care system is in the strategic self interest of this state. Effective state child care policies help parents in lower income families gain and sustain productive employment and affordable, quality child care increases the likelihood that children will succeed in school and life and contribute back to the state. "