

# Lit Scan

Facts & Figures from the Colorado Literacy Research Initiative

Volume 4 ♦ Number 11

October 16, 2000

## Poverty Rate Even Higher Than Expected For At Risk Families

Official and Experimental Poverty Rates for Individuals in Full-Time Working Families With Children, 1998

Characteristic	U.S. Census	National Academy of Sciences	Adjusted NAS
<b>Total</b>	<b>7.8</b>	<b>9.7</b>	<b>10.3</b>
<b>Race/Ethnicity</b>			
White, non-Hispanic	4.3	5.6	5.9
Hispanic	19.2	24.9	26.1
<b>Family Type</b>			
Married couple	5.9	8.1	8.2
Single father	10.3	12.6	15.3
Single mother	17.8	18.7	20.8
<b>Parental Education</b>			
Less than high school	23.6	27.3	27.8
High school graduate	8.9	10.9	11.5
Some college	5.0	7.1	7.6
College graduate	1.3	2.3	2.7
<b>Parents' Age</b>			
Less than 25	20.7	24.8	26.6
25-34	10.2	12.9	13.8
35-64	6.1	7.7	8.1

### HIGHLIGHTS

- Low parental education is associated with a higher poverty rate (23.6-27.8%) than race/ethnicity, family type, or parents' age.
- Improvements in parental education are also associated with the greatest reduction in poverty rate.

The latest available data from the U.S. Census Bureau indicates that poverty continues to strike hardest at families also experiencing other conditions that put their children at risk of educational failure. Chief among these conditions are race/ethnicity, family type, parental education, and parents' age.

The table above reports official and experimental poverty rates, including a refinement of the Census Bureau's official poverty statistic by the National Academy of Sciences Panel on Poverty and Family Assistance and another version of that statistic that adjusts for differences by region and metropolitan area.

Whichever poverty statistic one chooses, the message is a clear one. The poverty rate is dramatically higher for families from racial/ethnic minority groups (such as Hispanics), single parent families, families headed by high school dropouts, and families of young adults.

In ascending rank-order:

- Families headed by single mothers are more than twice as likely to be poor as married couple families.
- Families of young adults are more than three times as likely to be poor as families of other adults.
- Hispanic families are almost five times as likely to be poor as white families.
- Worst of all, families of high school dropouts are more than nine times as likely to be poor as families of college graduates.

Why is parental education such a strong predictor of poverty as well as children's educational failure? An individual's failure to complete high school increases dramatically the likelihood that he or she will become an under-age single parent. Or, perhaps more likely, becoming an underage single parent leads frequently to an individual failing to complete high school. As great a tragedy as that is, it is compounded by the next generation being raised in an environment of economic privation and low educational expectations--circumstances in which the deck is stacked against the children themselves experiencing educational success.

### **SOURCES**

---

John Iceland. **Current Population Reports: Poverty Among Working Families: Findings From Experimental Poverty Measures, 1998.** U.S. Census Bureau. Issued September 2000. Available at: < <http://www.census.gov/prod/2000pubs/p23-203.pdf> >

### **CONTACT INFORMATION**

---

For more information about this study or other projects of the Colorado Literacy Research Initiative, contact: Keith Curry Lance, Colorado Department of Education, 201 E. Colfax Ave., Suite 309, Denver, CO 80203-1799, (303) 866-6737, fax (303) 866-6940, e-mail [klance@sni.net](mailto:klance@sni.net)