



**The Nelson A. Rockefeller Center at Dartmouth College**

*The Center for Public Policy and the Social Sciences*

**Policy Research Shop**

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## Tracking Child Poverty in Vermont

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### *An Evaluation of Vermont Child Poverty Council Benchmarks*

Presented to the Vermont Child Poverty Council

PRS Policy Brief 1011-03

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### **1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

This report has been prepared for the Vermont Child Poverty Council (VCPC), a subcommittee of the Vermont state legislature tasked with reducing childhood poverty by fifty percent by the year 2017. The VCPC tasked the Policy Research Shop to find out whether or not the data for measuring a series of benchmarks concerning poverty was being adequately tracked and which organizations tracked the data.

Poverty levels in the state of Vermont are relatively low compared to the nation as a whole, but still present a great challenge to the state. Vermont has the 11th lowest percentage of children in poverty (13.2 percent) and the 14th lowest percentage of people in poverty overall.<sup>1</sup> However, the characteristics of those in poverty in Vermont are somewhat different from those in the nation as a whole. Poverty in Vermont is mostly white and rural, while the majority of individuals in poverty throughout the nation are minorities in urban areas.<sup>2</sup> While Vermont is not the only state where such a phenomenon exists, the different demographic profile potentially poses a unique set of challenges when it comes to alleviating poverty. That is why a unique set of benchmarks was created to help define and identify issues with child poverty in the state.

The report provides the findings of the Policy Research Shop (PRS), a research center at the Rockefeller Center of Dartmouth College. The PRS was able to determine whether or not each benchmark set by the VCPC was tracked, which organization provided the most recent data to track this benchmark, and specific data corresponding to the benchmark. The benchmarks do not provide a minimum standard to be met, but will rather help the VCPC track Vermont's progress on reducing poverty in a comprehensive way. In this report, the PRS provides recommendations on means by which to consolidate the data and make it more readily available to the VCPC. The PRS also identifies missing data, provides recommendations as to how to collect data for benchmarks not currently tracked, and proposes minor changes to the benchmarks that would provide a better measure of poverty. Overall, we can conclude the following:

1. The data necessary to track most of the benchmarks is currently available through existing state, federal, and non-governmental agencies.
2. Though the data is being tracked, it is spread out between a variety of entities that may or may not share data. If a database were created containing all of the data concerning child poverty and welfare in Vermont, organizations would be able to act more cohesively.
3. The wording of some of the VCPC benchmarks makes it difficult to standardize tracking and analysis. These benchmarks could be revised to better measure child poverty.



## **2. THE BENCHMARKS OF THE VERMONT POVERTY COUNCIL**

### *2.1 The Vermont Child Poverty Council*

The Vermont Child Poverty Council was created by Act 68 of the 2007 General Assembly of the Vermont State Legislature. The Council was intended to facilitate the reduction of child poverty in the state of Vermont by fifty percent by the year 2017, ten years after its creation. The VCPC began its work by holding public hearings throughout each of Vermont's fourteen counties and outlining a course of action by which to accomplish its objective.<sup>3</sup> It is currently staffed by six members of the state legislature and eight other individuals. The Council meets approximately once every two months.<sup>4</sup>

The VCPC has received several prepared documents analyzing the status of childhood poverty in Vermont. These analyses have come from a variety of sources, including the National Center for Children in Poverty, a previous PRS report, and many non-governmental organizations. These documents have helped to delineate the current status of poverty in Vermont as well as to outline a series of benchmarks by which to continually measure poverty throughout the state.<sup>5</sup> The data for these benchmarks must be readily updated to determine the successes or shortcomings of Vermont Child Poverty Council initiatives.

### *2.2 Overview of the Poverty Benchmarks*

The Council created a set of benchmarks to be used in analyzing child poverty throughout the state of Vermont.<sup>6</sup> These benchmarks require gathering quantitative data in the following categories: general poverty information, mending the safety net (welfare, housing, and medical insurance) education, getting ahead through employment (youth work status and wages), economic stability, and strengthening families and communities. The broad range of subjects within the benchmarks is crucial to helping the Vermont legislature identify problem areas within the state as well as to develop a comprehensive approach to the issue of child poverty. The list of benchmarks submitted by the VCPC can be found in the appendix.

### *2.3 Research Goals*

The task submitted by the VCPC was to determine whether each of the outlined benchmarks is being tracked and which organization has the data. The paper does not analyze the existing data, but instead finds the most accessible sources of data, gathers the most recent data, and if data cannot be found, suggests why it is missing and how the VCPC might best be able to collect it. The ultimate goals of the research are to provide the Council with a comprehensive list of where updated data for the benchmarks can be found and to evaluate the effectiveness of the benchmarks as a whole.



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### **3. DATA COLLECTION PROCESS**

Data was gathered through a variety of means. A substantial number of the benchmarks were already tracked for by a non-governmental organization called Voices for Vermont's Children. However, several of the benchmarks in the education and economic stability categories were not tracked. The PRS procured information about existing data through telephone interviews with organizations that collect poverty data, by looking through the publications of national organizations for Vermont state-level poverty data, and by searching the Internet for databases with information pertaining to the benchmarks. The benchmarks are specifically evaluated in sections 4 to 9, which cover each of the benchmark categories. Tables that include all the benchmarks, the organizations that track the data, and the most recent numbers may be found in the appendices.

The main task was attempting to find information that was not tracked by Voices for Vermont's Children, an organization that already tracks a large number of the benchmarks. Though many of these benchmarks are adequate indications of the conditions of poverty in any state, some are not tracked or are only partially tracked.

A problem encountered throughout the research was that the data on several tracked benchmarks was outdated. The Vermont Child Poverty Council was created in 2007, so data gathered before the creation of the Council was considered too old in many cases to apply to its work over the last few years. It is also more difficult to use outdated data for analyzing poverty because recent political and economic conditions have strongly affected the number of people living in poverty. The existing sources of data for the benchmarks often did not provide annual data across many years, which would have been the most beneficial to the Council. Because of these limitations, this report provides only the most recent data.

In addition, the data figures for Vermont are small compared to other states, and some key data sources lack representative samples of Vermont's poverty population. For example, the American Community Survey, one of the main sources of data for poverty research, did not obtain a large sample size in Vermont, and warns that their data for the Vermont poverty population is likely unreliable. This leads to the possibility that a large portion of the demographic information regarding poverty in Vermont could be inaccurate.

The final problem encountered was that in some cases, relevant pieces of the information for an individual benchmark were available, but the data did not completely satisfy the benchmark. Many sources did not disaggregate their poverty data into the various factors specified by certain benchmarks. Benchmarks that are partially met are noted and discussed.



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**4. GENERAL POVERTY BENCHMARKS**

<b>Benchmark</b>	<b>Tracking Organization</b>
VT children living in poverty, NAS model (number and percentage) by state and county/region	Not Available
Track number and percentage of children living in families below 50 percent, 100 percent, and 200 percent of the federal poverty line using ACS data (by state and county/region where possible).	Voices For Vermont’s Children
JFO Basic Needs Budget update; Percentage of VT families earning income to meet that budget	Joint Fiscal Office: <i>Basic Needs Budget and the Livable Wage 2009</i> + Livable Income Study Committee: <i>Act 21 Research and Analysis In Support of the Livable Income Study Committee</i>

Of the three general benchmarks, only the first one is not currently tracked. The second part of the third benchmark is tracked, but the data is relatively outdated.

Ideally, what is necessary to accurately calculate the above benchmarks is to get individual household level income data. However, there are limits. First of all, such data is often justifiably confidential, and a representative of the Vermont Department of Taxes confirmed that such data would not be accessible to public and that “the Department of Taxes does not participate in the Basic Needs Budget determination or analysis.”<sup>7</sup> A practical alternative would be using sampling methods based on surveys of a few representative households. The methodology used by the American Community Survey (ACS) does exactly that. The problem is that the ACS does not always provide county and regional level data on an annual basis. For instance, during both 2008 and 2009, the ACS only has county level data for Chittenden County.

Updates for the Joint Fiscal Office’s (JFO) Basic Needs Budget reports are readily accessible online.<sup>8</sup> One way to be as rigorous as possible at the current stage would be to get the sampled household information from the ACS and then categorize the individual data according to JFO criteria. However, because of the fact that Vermont has a relatively small population and the fact that the ACS sampled only three million households, separating Vermont data from the national pool could cause data distortions. The JFO does not have additional information regarding the “percentage of VT families earning income to meet that budget.” The number of families falling below the so-called livable income defined in the JFO annual reports was estimated to be about 60,000 in the report entitled *Act 21 Research and Analysis In Support of the Livable Income Study Committee*. However, this number is not tracked after the report.



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The first benchmark mentions tracking poverty according to the National Academy of Sciences (NAS) model, which is a relatively recent method for measuring poverty in the U.S. that has not come into common use. The federal poverty thresholds used for the benchmark “number and percentage of children living in families below 50 percent, 100 percent, and 200 percent of the federal poverty line,” initially introduced in 1964, are based on cash income and account only for the cumulative impact of inflation.<sup>9</sup> Researchers have called for a more adaptable measure that would better reflect changes first in consumption patterns and then in antipoverty policies regarding taxes and benefits.<sup>10</sup> In 1995, the NAS recommended a new approach in measuring poverty. There is no standardized set of variables to be included in the NAS model, and in 2008 and 2009, a bill titled “Measuring American Poverty Act” was introduced in the Congress and is referred to Senate committees as of January 24, 2011. The table below shows general differences between the current poverty measure and the NAS approach.

**Table 1. Comparison of the Current Federal Poverty Measure and the NAS Approach**

<b>Item Measured</b>	<b>Federal Poverty Measure</b>	<b>NAS Poverty Measure</b>
Poverty threshold (minimum level of income deemed necessary to achieve an adequate standard of living)	Updated yearly but based on outdated assumptions about consumption	Based on current consumption needs
Non-cash Income (e.g., food stamps, etc)	Not considered as part of resources available	Cash-like benefits included as Income
Out-of-pocket medical expenses	Not considered as an expense	Deducted from Income as an expense
Work expenses (e.g., childcare)	Not considered as an expense	Deducted from Income as an expense
Taxes	Not considered as an expense	Deducted from Income as an expense

*Source: Legislative Commission to End Poverty in Minnesota by 2020 (p. 17)*

The sources that Voices for Vermont’s Children uses in tracking the number and percentage of children living in families below 50 percent, 100 percent and 200 percent of the federal poverty line are from table S1703 (“Selected Characteristics of People at Specified Levels of Poverty in the Past 12 Months”), from the American Fact Finder<sup>11</sup> (50 percent, 100 percent), and from the Kids Count Data Center<sup>12</sup> (“Data Across States,” 200 percent data).

The Vermont Child Poverty Council could recommend coordination between the Vermont Department of Taxes and the Joint Fiscal Office in order to track the third benchmark mentioned in this section.



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Measuring poverty based on an NAS model customized for Vermont can be done, although it might be more complicated than getting the number and percentage of households meeting the JFO Basic Needs Budget. As the study will show in the following sections, there are relatively fewer quick-fix solutions to track the benchmarks included in this category. Also, all the general indicators of poverty mentioned above require household level data, obtained through either surveying or possibly through sampling from an existing dataset. The JFO Basic Needs Budget might not be as comprehensive as the NAS model, but it may serve a similar purpose of customizing poverty thresholds based on the state characteristics.

**5. MENDING THE SAFETY NET – WELFARE BENCHMARKS**

<b>Benchmark</b>	<b>Tracking Organization</b>
Track number of families and children who are homeless using: a) “Any Given Night” survey b) Transition time to stable housing measure	Voices for Vermont’s Children + U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development + Vermont Coalition to End Homelessness
Track number of families paying at least 30 percent of their income for housing and utilities (cost-burdened households)	Voices for Vermont’s Children
Reach-Up enrollment rate; compare to child poverty rate	Voices for Vermont’s Children
3SquaresVT enrollment rate + average wait time for processing new applications	Voices for Vermont’s Children + Vermont Department for Children and Families
Rate of uninsured children eligible for public insurance	Department of Banking, Insurance, Securities and Health Care Administration

Voices for Vermont’s Children and government agencies are doing an excellent job in tracking most of the benchmarks in this category. The organization’s 2010 report “Challenging Poverty: Supporting Children and Families in Difficult Times” exemplifies what policy makers can learn from the above figures when they try to understand the progress of Vermont in the overall issue of poverty.

For the homelessness indicators, the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) provides annual statewide data on the transition time to stable housing measure. However, HUD’s data does not directly provide the average time that homeless individuals and families spend in transitional shelters. Rather, HUD shows the percent composition of the length of stays.



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Lastly, the Vermont Coalition to End Homelessness carries out a one-day counting of homeless individuals annually.

Voices for Vermont's Children tracks the 3SquaresVT enrollment rate, and the Economic Services Division of the Vermont Department for Children and Families tracks the average wait time for processing 3Squares applications. Information on the latter is not readily accessible but could be obtained through contacting the operations team inside the division.

The Department of Banking, Insurance, Securities and Health Care Administration annually performs a "Vermont Household Insurance Survey" and presents the results to the State Legislature. The most recent results came out on February 4, 2010 when the department randomly contacted 5,072 households through landline phones and cell phones and found that 745 of them were uninsured.<sup>13</sup> The report on the survey has detailed analysis of the socioeconomic characteristics of those who are not insured and has a specific section on children lacking health insurance.

The method that the Department of Banking, Insurance, Securities and Health Care Administration used deserves more attention in that this technique could be replicated for the Department of Taxes to play a better role as an information provider. The information from the Department of Taxes could supply valuable information for the building of an NAS model and for tracking the percentage of families meeting the JFO Basic Needs Budget requirements. In a similar context, the average wait time for 3SquaresVT applications could be made more accessible, for instance, by being updated yearly on the Economic Services Division's web page.



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**6. EDUCATION BENCHMARKS**

<b>Benchmarks</b>	<b>Tracking Organization</b>
Number and percent of all children and low-income children in pre-K	National Child Care Information and Technical Assistance Center: <i>State ECE Profile Vermont</i> + National Institute for Early Education Research: <i>The State of Preschool 2009, State Preschool Yearbook</i> + pre[k]now.org: <i>Vermont State Profile</i> + Vermont Department of Education
Track percentage of children entering kindergarten fully ready for school, and disparities in this measure between lower-poverty and higher-poverty schools	Vermont Agency of Human Services: <i>Report on Vermont's "School Readiness Assessment Initiative" 2008-2009 and Report on Kindergarten Readiness 2009-2010</i>
Post-secondary aspiration rate among high school seniors, overall and disaggregated by gender and parental educational attainment	Vermont Student Assistance Corporation: <i>Vermont Senior Survey and Follow-Up 2007-2008</i> + Understanding Vermont: <i>Postsecondary Education Data Supplements 2008</i>
Number and percent of high school seniors taking the Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT), disaggregated by gender, family income, and highest level of parental education	The College Board: <i>SAT Total Group and State Reports 2010</i>
Number and percent of 19 year olds enrolled in college, disaggregated by family income status	Not available
Cohort graduation rates, overall, and disaggregated by gender, poverty, disability, and ELL status	Voices for Vermont's Children: <i>Bridging the Gap 2009</i> + Vermont Department of Education: <i>Dropout &amp; High School Completion Report 2008-2009</i>
Percent of 3-8 and 11th graders scoring proficient or higher on NECAP assessments, overall, and disaggregated by gender, poverty, disability, and ELL status	Voices for Vermont's Children: <i>Bridging the Gap 2009</i> + Vermont Department of Education: <i>NECAP Assessment State Results 2005-2010</i>
Percent of 4th and 8th graders scoring proficient or higher on NAEP assessments, overall, and disaggregated by gender, poverty, or disability status	Voices for Vermont's Children + National Center for Education Statistics – Institute of Education Sciences: <i>The Nation's Report Card 2009</i> + U.S. Department of Education: <i>Summer 2010 EDFacts State Profiles</i>
Track number of individuals with post-secondary education	Voices for Vermont's Children



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All but one of the education benchmarks are at least partially tracked. For some of the cases, certain specifications within the benchmark are not actively tracked. For example, the data for kindergarten readiness is not disaggregated by the poverty level of the school. Additionally, there is often a lack of standardization in the definition and measurement of certain poverty variables. The words “low-income” and “poverty” are tracked differently by different organizations. Some data sources disaggregate their data along a gradient of family incomes while others consider a student’s free-and-reduced lunch status. Another example of a definition ambiguity is the term “pre-K.” Existing data on pre-K enrollment is measured by various combinations of age, free-and-reduced lunch status, enrollment in government-funded pre-K programs (Head Start, EEI, EEE), and enrollment in ADM-funded programs.

For the benchmark “Number and percent of 19 year olds enrolled in college, disaggregated by family income status,” there is currently no data. Past studies on college enrollment by groups like the Vermont Student Assistance Corporation (VSAC) do track actual college enrollment rates in comparison to aspiration rates using a senior survey, but they do not separate their data by student age or family income. This benchmark is difficult to track because graduating high school senior classes generally have students aged anywhere between 17 to 19 years of age. To successfully track this benchmark, the data collection would need span across multiple graduated senior classes.

This benchmark could be more easily met if the age specification was replaced by “high school graduates of the previous year” or something similar. Also, many students choose to go out of state for college, which their high schools may or may not have tracked, and Vermont agencies would have difficulties in tracking enrollment of Vermont students in other states. A system could be implemented by the Vermont Department of Education that lets high school counselors collect information from their students about their college enrollment status and their family income.

To evaluate better the status of education for children living in poverty in Vermont, additional benchmarks could be established. For example, it may be important to track the retention of students from elementary and middle school to high school. It would also be useful to track school adequacy (teacher to student ratio, funding, test scores) in districts with high percentages of low-income students. Finally, information concerning student criminal violations could be monitored, especially if the data is disaggregated by poverty status, school quality, and race. Any new data on education could be gathered by the Vermont Department of Education from individual school districts as part of a mandatory annual assessment of Vermont schools.



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### 7. GETTING AHEAD THROUGH EMPLOYMENT BENCHMARKS

<b>Benchmark</b>	<b>Tracking Organization</b>
Percent of teens not in school and not working	Voices for Vermont's Children + Annie E. Casey Foundation – Kids Count Data Center: <i>Vermont 2010 Kids Count Data Book</i>
Percent of teens not in school and not high school graduates	Voices for Vermont's Children + Annie E. Casey Foundation – Kids Count Data Center: <i>Vermont 2010 Kids Count Data Book</i>
Track number and percent of jobs paying above poverty earnings	Voices for Vermont's Children
Median income by state and county	Voices for Vermont's Children + US Census Bureau

The data for benchmarks in this category is generally available, though there may be some inaccuracies. Voices for Vermont's Children may have access to data for each of these benchmarks, but existing data may actually under-represent poverty in the state.

First, the benchmark “median income by state and county” is not really tied to the status of impoverished individuals. The data for median income takes into account the incomes of those people not living in poverty. Instead, to better indicate the level of poverty, the benchmark could also ask for the median income of low-income families, disaggregated by family size, county, education level, and other demographic variables.

In addition, it is difficult to track individuals in this category because employers or educational establishments do not document them. For example, it is difficult to track an individual who does not work, does not attend school, or does not have a high school diploma. Compiling this information would require a great deal of effort to extract data from these documents. Voices for Vermont's Children currently tracks each of these benchmarks; however, one must be wary that the data provided, no matter how thorough, may be an underrepresentation of the true threshold of the benchmark.

One plausible solution for the issue of underrepresentation in the sample might be to have applicants list their employment status (employed, student, unemployed, etc.) when renewing their driver's license. This might be a simpler solution to the issue of underrepresentation, as driver's licenses are common in the state, and registration is often more user-friendly than tax forms to users. Driver's license information is also easier to sort through than tax forms.



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**8. ECONOMIC STABILITY BENCHMARKS**

<b>Benchmark</b>	<b>Tracking Organization</b>
Track benefit cliffs using NCCP Family Resource Simulator	National Center for Children in Poverty: <i>Work Supports in Vermont</i>
Determine and track the availability of child care for nontraditional work schedules	Not Available
Track how the child care subsidy rates compares to market rates	Vermont Agency of Human Services: <i>Child Care Market Rate Survey</i> + Center for Law and Social Policy: <i>Vermont Childcare Assistance State Profile: 2008</i>
Track the number and percent of economically insecure families with young children receiving child care assistance	Center for Law and Social Policy: <i>Vermont Childcare Assistance State Profile: 2008</i>

There was one pertinent example of missing data the Economic Stability benchmark category. The PRS was unable to find data concerning the availability of childcare for nontraditional work schedules.

This data may be unavailable for a variety of reasons. The most probable of these is that the benchmark is inherently broad in that “nontraditional work schedules” can be extremely varied. In order to collect all of the information required to fulfill the benchmark, it would be necessary to contact every public and private provider of child care in the state, record their hours of operation, fees for providing child-care, and additional fees charged for additional hours of service that some patrons would require. Currently, the state provides mandatory certification for caregivers statewide and also tracks each recognized service across the state. These organizations or individuals are placed into a database that is accessible to the public. Individuals in search of childcare may then put in their home address and determine prospective institutions in their area.

The purpose of the “Determine and track the availability of child care for nontraditional work schedules” benchmark was to make sure that those who work nonconventional hours are also able to obtain childcare in the event that their employer does not already provide this service. However, it may be more effective if the Council were to track simply the number of families who currently lack access to childcare providers because of unconventional work hours. The difference here is that any parents working outside a set standard of regular work hours can be grouped together as opposed to finding data for each work schedule. Tracking this data will enable the state to concentrate its efforts on those who are unable to obtain childcare and work to



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find viable solutions. It would circumvent the task of having to catalogue and update information for all of the institutions that provide childcare and will eventually provide efficient solutions to individuals who are unable to obtain this necessary service because of the hours they work.

### 9. STRENGTHENING FAMILIES AND COMMUNITIES

<b>Benchmark</b>	<b>Tracking Organization</b>
Track percentage of “new families at risk”- percentage of first births to unmarried mothers under 20 with less than 12 years of education	Voices for Vermont’s Children
YRBS Survey Results by state and county	Voices for Vermont’s Children

Both of the benchmarks require data that are tracked by Voices for Vermont’s Children. Again, the data collected may face the issue of underrepresentation because many of those who are in poverty often do not have access to reliable health-care. They also lack the money to seek medical attention for non-life-threatening issues.

These benchmarks are health-related topics and are generally more readily accessible to the state government and private institutions. However, one must account for the possibility of missing data in these data sets. The only data available is from those who receive treatment in a hospital and are currently receiving health-care assistance through the government or some private organization. Those who do not currently receive healthcare, receive treatment in a hospital, or complete regular physicals are probably not recorded in the survey and are not accounted for. Thus, while the data is available, it may under-represent the problems that Vermont children and at-risk mothers currently face.

A potential solution to this problem of underrepresentation is to track the prevalence of obesity and asthma at public schools. Many of the individuals who live in poverty and struggle with obesity and asthma may not regularly seek medical attention, but are required to attend some form of formal education, the most probable of which is the public school in their area. Should the public schools keep records of rates of obesity and asthma, the data might be more representative of the true number of children that suffer from these conditions.



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### **10. CONCLUSIONS**

#### *10.1 Analysis of Benchmark Usage*

Benchmarking is a widely used means of measuring progress toward social goals or performance of an organization.<sup>14</sup> In the domain of public policy, benchmarks allow lawmakers and government officials to set clear directions and to obtain quantitative feedback on their efforts. At the same time, by possibly providing a standardized system that facilitates both sharing of methodologies and sources for data, benchmarks can lead to enhanced cooperation and communication between different agencies and departments. Private sector participants can also participate better in the policy making process due to the increased accessibility to datasets.<sup>15</sup> Setting appropriate benchmarks and tracking information to make assessments take due diligence, especially in terms of updating reliable information. Some of the criteria for effective benchmarking can be found in Appendix D.

#### *10.2 Evaluation of Benchmark Viability*

Of the 27 benchmarks, three are untracked, two are partially tracked, and 22 are fully tracked. Of those, 15 are currently tracked by Voices for Vermont's Children. The Vermont Child Poverty Council benchmarks are by and large realistic goals that are feasible indicators of child poverty in the state of Vermont. Even if they have not been fully tracked, the benchmarks are, as a whole, measurable and useful – they can be interpreted in quantifiable ways and clearly connect to the issue of child poverty. This is proven by the fact that most of the data for the benchmarks is already being collected by state, national, and non-governmental agencies for their own internal functions. See Appendix D for the most recent data for each benchmark that the PRS could collect.

However, there are some exceptions. A few benchmarks either word things in a way that makes it difficult to standardize tracking and analysis or call for the tracking of data that does not really address the issue of child poverty. The first of these is the benchmark “VT children living in poverty, NAS model (number and percentage) by state and county/region” in the General Poverty category. The NAS model is currently still in the process of development as an alternative measure of poverty. Few states have adopted the model, and since Vermont has not, the data is currently unavailable. Another benchmark with internal problems is the “Number and percent of all children and low-income children in pre-K” benchmark in the Education category. In this case, “low-income” is not sufficiently defined; many data sources exist for this benchmark, but they all measure “low-income” in different ways. A third benchmark, “Number and percent of 19 year olds enrolled in college, disaggregated by family income status,” undergoes data collection difficulty in that current education data mainly groups individuals by graduation year, not by age, and that out-of-state enrollment is not currently tracked. Finally, the “Determine and track the availability of child care for nontraditional work schedules” benchmark lacked data because of the infeasibility of identifying all “nontraditional” work schedules.



### *10.3 Suggestions for Database Continuity*

Even though most of the data is being tracked, it is spread out between a variety of sources that may or may not share data. If a database were created containing all of the data concerning child poverty and welfare in Vermont, organizations would be able to act more cohesively. This report creates two general databases for use by the Vermont Child Poverty Council. See Appendix A for a cumulative table of all the benchmarks, whether or not they are tracked, and where the data can be found. See Appendix B for a database of contact information for agencies that deal with child poverty or other related issues. Appendix C lists selected figures of the most recent data available for each benchmark, where possible.

Of all the different child poverty research and advocacy organizations, the VCPC is best suited for acquiring and maintaining the database. Unlike non-governmental organizations and government departments, the Vermont Child Poverty Council has direct influence on the Vermont legislature, is directly focused on people living in poverty, and is a central organization and encompasses representatives from other agencies. By creating, expanding, updating, and making public a database of poverty data in relation to the Council's benchmarks, the VCPC would be able to make cohesive and comprehensive policies to combat child poverty in the state.

A recommendation for future research would be to analyze the current methodologies for the collection of different areas of data in Vermont and eventually provide a standardized method that reduces overlap and inefficiency in data collection. This would allow different categories of data to be collected using methods that are complementary.



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**11. APPENDIX A – CUMULATIVE BENCHMARKS TABLE**

<b>Category</b>	<b>Benchmark</b>	<b>Tracking Organization (Contact)</b>
<b>GENERAL</b>	VT children living in poverty, NAS model (number and %) by state and county/region	Not Available
	Track number and percentage of children living in families below 50%, 100%, and 200% of the federal poverty line using ACS data (by state and county/region where possible).	Voices For Vermont’s Children (Nicole Mace)
	JFO Basic Needs Budget update; % of VT families earning income to meet that budget	Joint Fiscal Office: <i>Basic Needs Budget and the Livable Wage 2009</i> + Livable Income Study Committee: <i>Act 21 Research and Analysis In Support of the Livable Income Study Committee</i>
<b>MENDING THE SAFETY NET</b>	Track number of families and children who are homeless using: a) “Any Given Night” survey b) Transition time to stable housing measure	Voices for Vermont’s Children (Nicole Mace) + the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development + Vermont Coalition to End Homelessness
	Track number of families paying at least 30% of their income for housing and utilities (% cost-burdened households)	Voices for Vermont’s Children (Nicole Mace)
	Reach-Up enrollment rate; compare to child poverty rate	Voices for Vermont’s Children (Nicole Mace)
	3SquaresVT enrollment rate + average wait time for processing new applications	Voices for Vermont’s Children (Nicole Mace) + Vermont Department for Children and Families (Pam Dalley)
	Rate of uninsured children	Department of Banking, Insurance,



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<b>Category</b>	<b>Benchmark</b>	<b>Tracking Organization (Contact)</b>
	eligible for public insurance	Securities & Health Care Administration (Dian Kahn)
<b>EDUCATION</b>	Number and percent of all children and low-income children in pre-K	National Child Care Information and Technical Assistance Center: <i>State ECE Profile Vermont</i> + National Institute for Early Education Research: <i>The State of Preschool 2009, State Preschool Yearbook</i> + pre[k]now.org: <i>Vermont State Profile</i> + Vermont Department of Education (Brad James)
	Track percentage of children entering kindergarten fully ready for school, and disparities in this measure between lower-poverty and higher-poverty schools	Vermont Agency of Human Services: <i>Report on Vermont's "School Readiness Assessment Initiative" 2008-2009 and Report on Kindergarten Readiness 2009-2010</i>
	Post-secondary aspiration rate among high school seniors, and overall and disaggregated by gender and parental educational attainment	Vermont Student Assistance Corporation: <i>Vermont Senior Survey and Follow-Up 2007-2008</i> + Understanding Vermont: <i>Postsecondary Education Data Supplements 2008</i>
	Number and percent of high school seniors taking the Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT), disaggregated by gender, family income, and highest level of parental education	The College Board: <i>SAT Total Group and State Reports 2010</i>
	Number and percent of 19 year olds enrolled in college, disaggregated by family income status	Not available

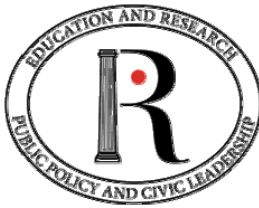


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Category	Benchmark	Tracking Organization (Contact)
	Cohort graduation rates, overall, and disaggregated by gender, poverty, disability, and ELL status	Voices for Vermont’s Children (Nicole Mace): <i>Bridging the Gap 2009</i> + Vermont Department of Education: <i>Dropout &amp; High School Completion Report 2008-2009</i>
	Percent of 3-8 & 11th graders scoring proficient or higher on NECAP assessments, overall, and disaggregated by gender, poverty, disability, and ELL status	Voices for Vermont’s Children (Nicole Mace): <i>Bridging the Gap 2009</i> + Vermont Department of Education: <i>NECAP Assessment State Results 2005-2010</i>
	Percent of 4th & 8th graders scoring proficient or higher on NAEP assessments, overall, and disaggregated by gender, poverty, or disability status	Voices for Vermont’s Children (Nicole Mace) + National Center for Education Statistics – Institute of Education Sciences: <i>The Nation’s Report Card 2009</i> + U.S. Department of Education: <i>Summer 2010 EDFacts State Profiles</i>
	Track number of individuals with post-secondary education	Voices for Vermont’s Children (Nicole Mace)
<b>GETTING AHEAD THROUGH EMPLOYMENT</b>	Percent of teens not in school and not working	Voices for Vermont’s Children (Nicole Mace) + Annie E. Casey Foundation – Kids Count Data Center: <i>Vermont 2010 Kids Count Data Book</i>
	Percent of teens not in school and not high school graduates	Voices for Vermont’s Children (Nicole Mace) + Annie E. Casey Foundation – Kids Count Data Center: <i>Vermont 2010 Kids Count Data Book</i>
	Track number and percent of jobs paying above poverty earnings	Voices for Vermont’s Children (Nicole Mace)



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<b>Category</b>	<b>Benchmark</b>	<b>Tracking Organization (Contact)</b>
	Median income by state and county	Voices for Vermont’s Children (Nicole Mace) + US Census Bureau
<b>ECONOMIC STABILITY</b>	Track benefit cliffs using NCCP Family Resource Simulator	National Center for Children in Poverty (Nancy C. Cauthen): <i>Work Supports in Vermont</i>
	Determine and track the availability of child care for nontraditional work schedules	Not Available
	Track how the child care subsidy rates compares to market rates	Vermont Agency of Human Services: <i>Child Care Market Rate Survey</i> + Center for Law and Social Policy: <i>Vermont Childcare Assistance State Profile: 2008</i>
	Track the number and percent of economically insecure families with young children receiving child care assistance	Center for Law and Social Policy: <i>Vermont Childcare Assistance State Profile: 2008</i>
<b>STRENGTHENING FAMILIES AND COMMUNITIES</b>	Track percentage of “new families at risk”- percentage of first births to unmarried mothers under 20 with less than 12 years of education	Voices for Vermont’s Children (Nicole Mace)
	YRBS Survey Results by state and county	Voices for Vermont’s Children (Nicole Mace)



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**12. APPENDIX B – DATABASE OF SOURCES**

<b>Data Source</b>	<b>Contact Information</b>
Annie E. Casey Foundation – Kids Count Data Center	Site: <a href="http://datacenter.kidscount.org/">http://datacenter.kidscount.org/</a> Phone: (410) 547-6600 Email: <a href="mailto:webmail@aecf.org">webmail@aecf.org</a>
Center for Law and Social Policy (CLASP)	Site: <a href="http://www.clasp.org/in_the_states?id=0045">http://www.clasp.org/in_the_states?id=0045</a> Phone: (202) 906-8000
Children’s Defense Fund	Site: <a href="http://www.childrensdefense.org/">http://www.childrensdefense.org/</a> Phone: 800-CDF-1200 (800-233-1200) Email: <a href="mailto:cdinfo@childrensdefense.org">cdinfo@childrensdefense.org</a>
Education Commission of the States (ECS)	Site: <a href="http://www.ecs.org/">http://www.ecs.org/</a> Phone: (303) 299-3600 Email: <a href="mailto:ecs@ecs.org">ecs@ecs.org</a>
Kids Are Priority One Coalition	Site: <a href="http://www.kidsarepriorityone.org/index.html">http://www.kidsarepriorityone.org/index.html</a> Contact: Barbara Postman, Policy Coordinator (802) 229-6377 <a href="mailto:bpostman@voicesforvkids.org">bpostman@voicesforvkids.org</a>
National Association for the Education of Young Children	Site: <a href="http://www.naeyc.org/">http://www.naeyc.org/</a> Phone: (202) 232-8777
National Center for Childhood Poverty	Site: <a href="http://nccp.org/profiles/VT_profile_6.html">http://nccp.org/profiles/VT_profile_6.html</a> Contact: Nancy C. Cauthen <a href="mailto:cauthen@nccp.org">cauthen@nccp.org</a>
National Center for Education Statistics – Institute of Education Sciences (IES)	Site: <a href="http://nces.ed.gov/">http://nces.ed.gov/</a> Phone: (202) 502-7300
National Child Care Information and Technical Assistance Center (NCCIC) – Administration for Children & Families – US Department of Health & Human Services	Site: <a href="http://nccic.acf.hhs.gov/">http://nccic.acf.hhs.gov/</a> Phone: (800) 616-2242 Email: <a href="mailto:info@nccic.org">info@nccic.org</a>
National Infant & Toddler Child Care Initiative – Administration for Children & Families – U.S. Department of Health and Human Services	Site: <a href="http://www.acf.hhs.gov/index.html">http://www.acf.hhs.gov/index.html</a>
National Institute for Early	Site: <a href="http://nieer.org/">http://nieer.org/</a>



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<b>Data Source</b>	<b>Contact Information</b>
Education Research (NIEER)	Phone: (732) 932-4350
Pre-K Now	Site: <a href="http://www.preknow.org">www.preknow.org</a> Phone: (202) 540-6524
The College Board	Site: <a href="http://professionals.collegeboard.com/data-reports-research">http://professionals.collegeboard.com/data-reports-research</a>
The Vermont Community Foundation – Understanding Vermont	Site: <a href="http://www.understandingvt.org/">http://www.understandingvt.org/</a> Phone: (802) 388-3355 Email: <a href="mailto:info@vermontcf.org">info@vermontcf.org</a>
U.S. Department of Education	Site: <a href="http://www2.ed.gov/rschstat/landing.jhtml">http://www2.ed.gov/rschstat/landing.jhtml</a> Phone: 1-800-USA-LEARN (1-800-872-5327)
Vermont Department for Children and Families	Site: <a href="http://dcf.vermont.gov/">http://dcf.vermont.gov/</a> Phone: 1-800-649-2642 or (802) 241-3110 Contact: Pam Dalley (802)241-2994 <a href="mailto:pam.dalley@ash.state.vt.us">pam.dalley@ash.state.vt.us</a>
Vermont Agency of Human Services	Site: <a href="http://humanservices.vermont.gov/">http://humanservices.vermont.gov/</a> Phone: (802) 241-2220 Contact: Robert Hofmann
Vermont Association of Child Care Resource and Referral Agencies	Site: <a href="http://www.vermontchildcare.org/">http://www.vermontchildcare.org/</a> Email: <a href="mailto:info@windhamchildcare.org">info@windhamchildcare.org</a>
Vermont Department of Banking, Insurance, Securities & Health Care Administration	Site: <a href="http://www.bishca.state.vt.us">www.bishca.state.vt.us</a> Phone: (802) 828-3301 Email: <a href="mailto:BISHCA-PubInfo@state.vt.us">BISHCA-PubInfo@state.vt.us</a> Contact: Dian Kahn <a href="mailto:dkahn@bishca.state.vt.us">dkahn@bishca.state.vt.us</a>
Vermont Department of Education	Site: <a href="http://education.vermont.gov/">http://education.vermont.gov/</a> Phone: (802) 828-3135
Vermont Department of Taxes	Site: <a href="http://www.state.vt.us/tax/">www.state.vt.us/tax/</a> Phone: (802) 828-2295 Contact: Maria Cano (802) 828-6802 <a href="mailto:maria.cano@state.vt.us">maria.cano@state.vt.us</a>  Contact: William J. Smith (Bill), Tax Policy Statistician (802) 828-5613 <a href="mailto:William.Smith@state.vt.us">William.Smith@state.vt.us</a>
Vermont Legislative Joint Fiscal	Site: <a href="http://www.leg.state.vt.us/jfo/">http://www.leg.state.vt.us/jfo/</a>



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<b>Data Source</b>	<b>Contact Information</b>
Office	
Vermont Student Assistance Corporation (VSAC)	Site: <a href="http://services.vsac.org/wps/wcm/connect/VSAC/vsac/home">http://services.vsac.org/wps/wcm/connect/VSAC/vsac/home</a> Phone: (800) 642-3177 or (802) 655-9602 Email: <a href="mailto:info@vsac.org">info@vsac.org</a>
Voices for Vermont's Children	Site: <a href="http://voicesforvtkids.org">voicesforvtkids.org</a> Contact: Nicole L. Mace, M.S., J.D., Research Coordinator (802) 229-6377 <a href="mailto:nicolem@voicesforvtkids.org">nicolem@voicesforvtkids.org</a>



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**13. APPENDIX C – TABLE OF SELECTED DATA**

<b>Category</b>	<b>Benchmark</b>	<b>Most Recent Data Examples</b>		
1.General	<i>NAS Model</i>	<i>Not Available</i>		
	<i>ACS Children in Poverty ('09)</i>	Under 50%: 7,167	Under 100%: 16,470	Under 200%: 39,000
	<i>JFO Basic Needs Budget</i>	<i>Not Available</i>		
2.Safety Net	<i>Homelessness ('10)</i>	“Any given night”: 497 families, 766 under 17		
	<i>Housing and Utilities ('09)</i>	Owners: 38.2%	Renters: 51.3%	
	<i>Reach-Up ('08)</i>	8,082 (6.2%)		
	<i>3SquaresVT ('08)</i>	20,590 (15.7%)		
	<i>Uninsured Children ('09)</i>	76.9% (Total Uninsured Children = 3,869)		
3.Education	<i>Pre-K ('09)</i>	Enrollment of 3 and 4 yr olds in State-funded Pre-K: 4,651 (35.4% of all 12,938)  Enrollment in Average Daily Membership (ADM) funded Pre-K and Early Education Initiative (EEI) = 45% of 4 year olds and 13% of 3 year olds		
	<i>Kindergarten Readiness ('09)</i>	Children who were rated “practicing” or “performing independently” in: Social and Emotional Development (77.4%), Approaches to Learning (79.3%), Communication (84.2%), Cognitive Development (72.9%), Wellness (79.1%)		
	<i>Aspiration Rate ('08)</i>	Post-Secondary Aspiration Rate: Males (70.6%), Females (81.8%)		
	<i>Seniors Taking the SAT ('10)</i>	Number of Test-takers: 5164		
	<i>19 Year Olds in College</i>	<i>Not Available</i>		
	<i>Cohort Graduation Rates ('08)</i>	Cohort Graduation Rate: 85.6%		
		Male: 83.46% of 3,767	Female: 87.86% of 3,575	
	<i>NECAP ('09)</i>	(11 <sup>th</sup> ) Reading: 69%	Math: 35%	Writing: 51%
		(3-8 <sup>th</sup> ) Reading: 67%	Math: 66%	Not Available
	<i>NAEP ('09)</i>	(4 <sup>th</sup> ) Reading: 41%	Math: 51%	
(8 <sup>th</sup> ) Reading: 41%		Math: 43%		
<i>Post-secondary Education</i>	<i>Contact Voices for Vermont's Children</i>			
4.Employment	<i>Not In School, And Not Working ('08)</i>	6%		



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<b>Category</b>	<b>Benchmark</b>	<b>Most Recent Data Examples</b>
	<i>Not In School, No High School Degree ( '08)</i>	4%
	<i>Job Payment</i>	<i>Contact Voices for Vermont's Children</i>
	<i>Median Income ( '08)</i>	\$77,127 for a family of 4
5.Economic Stability	<i>NCCP Benefit Cliffs</i>	<i>Variable Outcomes</i>
	<i>Child Care Schedules</i>	<i>Not Available</i>
	<i>Child Care Subsidy</i>	<i>Variable Outcomes</i>
	<i>Child Care Assistance ( '08)</i>	\$4,800 monthly
6.Strengthening Families	<i>Births To Unmarried Mothers ( '08)</i>	22 per 1,000 females
	<i>YRBS Survey</i>	<i>Variable Outcomes</i>



**14. APPENDIX D – POLICYMAKING GUIDELINES TABLE**

***Characteristics of High-Quality and Effective Data for Policy Making (Feldman et al. 1994)***

<b>Technical Characteristics</b>	
<b>Content</b>	Cover one or more major health policy or program concerns with sufficient detail to clarify the implications of alternative policy choices.
<b>Currency (Timeliness)</b>	Appear on a sufficiently timely basis and with the appropriate frequencies that they provide a relatively current profile and can be credibly used.
<b>Completeness</b>	Achieve sufficiently high submissions, reporting, or response rates and item completion, to limit biases leading to distorted conclusions.
<b>Reliability</b>	Provide classification and coding consistency to enhance interpretability and reduce confusion.
<b>Analytical Flexibility</b>	Support both routine and special analyses, particularly on an interactive or real-time basis.
<b>Strategic Characteristics</b>	
<b>Cross-System Flexibility</b>	Allow users to merge, compare, or jointly use data from complementary systems; include compatible and consistent variable definitions, coding categories, and a linkage mechanism.
<b>Adaptability</b>	Allow data content and/or reporting to be readily modified to address changing needs.
<b>Accessibility</b>	Provide clear reports to a non-technical audience; make available diverse reports or information tailored to different decision needs or users, and provide access to public-use data sets at a reasonable cost so they can be independently analyzed.



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<b>Translation and Policy Applicability</b>	Effectively translate technical data to policy-relevant information.
<b>Dissemination</b>	Accurately and fully inform potential users or decision-makers about the resources and how to access them effectively.

Source: Feldman P., Gold M., Chu K. "Enhancing Information for State Health Policy." *Health Affairs*, 13(3): 238, 1994.

**15. ENDNOTES**

- <sup>1</sup> 2008 American Community Survey Tables R1701-1704. [http://factfinder.census.gov/servlet/STTable?\\_bm=y&-qr\\_name=ACS\\_2008\\_1YR\\_G00\\_S1703&-geo\\_id=04000US50&-context=st&-ds\\_name=ACS\\_2008\\_1YR\\_G00\\_&-tree\\_id=308&-\\_lang=en&-format=&-CONTEXT=st](http://factfinder.census.gov/servlet/STTable?_bm=y&-qr_name=ACS_2008_1YR_G00_S1703&-geo_id=04000US50&-context=st&-ds_name=ACS_2008_1YR_G00_&-tree_id=308&-_lang=en&-format=&-CONTEXT=st)
- <sup>2</sup> US Census 2008 American Community Survey
- <sup>3</sup> Improving the Odds for Kids: Vermont Child Poverty Council, Appendix IV
- <sup>4</sup> Improving the Odds for Kids: Vermont Child Poverty Council, Appendix V
- <sup>5</sup> The Vermont Child Poverty Council Documents. <http://www.leg.state.vt.us/workgroups/ChildPoverty/>
- <sup>6</sup> Benchmarks assessed as of 10/26/10
- <sup>7</sup> William J. Smith, Tax Policy Statistician at the Vermont Department of Taxes, [William.Smith@state.vt.us](mailto:William.Smith@state.vt.us)
- <sup>8</sup> <http://www.leg.state.vt.us/jfo/Reports%20by%20Subject.htm>
- <sup>9</sup> <http://aspe.hhs.gov/poverty/faq.shtml#programs>
- <sup>10</sup> Measuring Poverty at the State Level by Sheila Zedlewski, Linda Giannarelli, Laura Wheaton, and Joyce Morton
- <sup>11</sup> [http://factfinder.census.gov/servlet/STSelectServlet?\\_lang=en&-ts=306772651250](http://factfinder.census.gov/servlet/STSelectServlet?_lang=en&-ts=306772651250)
- <sup>12</sup> <http://datacenter.kidscount.org/data/acrossstates/Rankings.aspx?ind=47>
- <sup>13</sup> 2009 Vermont Household Health Insurance Survey Presentation to the State Legislature (<http://www.bishca.state.vt.us/sites/default/files/VHHIS-Presentation-Legislature-2009.pdf>)
- <sup>14</sup> Davis, Elizabeth E., Weber, Bruce A. "Linking Policy and Outcomes: A Simulation Model of Poverty Incidence"
- <sup>15</sup> OECD – 2008. A publication of the Investment Division of the OECD Directorate for Financial and Enterprise Affairs.