

Summary of Research Findings:
State Legislative Leaders' Perceptions of KIDS COUNT

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for

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Summary of Research Findings: State Legislative Leaders Perceptions of KIDS COUNT

Executive Summary

At the request of the Annie E. Casey Foundation, the State Legislative Leaders Foundation (SLLF) administered a survey to 333 state legislative leaders from across the nation¹ to assess their attitudes and perceptions about the KIDS COUNT Data Book and learn whether and how leaders use the data in the public policy arena. KIDS COUNT is a national annual study that tracks and measures national and state-by-state trends reflecting the overall status of children in the United States. SLLF gathered responses from 140 of the 333 state legislative leaders who received the survey, yielding a response rate of 42%. Major findings are listed below.

Leaders Awareness and Perceptions

- Almost nine out of ten legislative leaders who responded are aware of KIDS COUNT and it is used in varying ways by almost three-quarters of those leaders.
- KIDS COUNT and other data provided by the Casey Foundation is used by more leaders than all but one other source of relevant data.
- Almost ninety percent of the legislative leaders indicate they are satisfied with the data that is currently available for tracking the status and well-being of children in their state.
- More than ninety percent of the legislative leaders indicate that state-by-state measures are very or somewhat important, with nearly half rating this data as very important.
- On the whole, legislative leaders seem satisfied with the format and information of the Data Book. Less than one in ten legislative leaders would prefer that KIDS COUNT be presented in multiple volumes.
- Less than five percent of the respondents suggested additional data would be useful. Some of the issues suggested were regarding: literacy rates, suicide among young people, accurate high school dropout statistics, and data on adoption and foster care. Some respondents suggested the Data Book include analysis of data and its relationship to various contextual factors and its relevance to policy proposals.

Access to KIDS COUNT Data Book

¹ Legislative Leader is defined as Speaker, Speaker Pro Tempore, Majority Leader or Minority Leader in the 49 state houses or assemblies and President, President Pro Tempore, Majority Leader or Minority Leader in the 50 state senates (including unicameral Nebraska). By this definition, there are 339 legislative leaders. However, the three leaders from the District of Columbia were excluded, as were three leaders who had responded to the survey when it was administered to a sample of rank-and-file members in 2003.

- Almost three-fourths of the legislative leaders are familiar with the KIDS COUNT Data Book or web page.
- Legislative leaders obtain copies of the KIDS COUNT Data Book in a variety of ways, including by mail, directly from an advocacy group, from a legislative colleague or from a staff person.
- Well over half of the legislative leaders find the KIDS COUNT Data Book to be very useful, very clear and understandable, and very relevant to policy makers. Somewhat paradoxically, fewer than half of the respondents find the information to be *very timely*.

Evaluation of KIDS COUNT Data and State Groups

- About seven of ten legislative leaders were familiar enough with KIDS COUNT to evaluate the quality of its contents. About thirty percent were not familiar with the Data Book.
- A majority of the legislative leaders who were aware of the KIDS COUNT Data Book very strongly agree that its data is *clear, credible, useful* and *relevant to policy makers*. Over sixty percent of the respondents believe that KIDS COUNT data is *not equally respected by all sides of the ideological spectrum*.²
- Over two-thirds of the legislative leaders found the data from the state grantee to be *credible*, while six in ten found it to be *useful*, but only a third found it to be *respected by all sides*.

Use and Impact of the KIDS COUNT Data Book

- The KIDS COUNT data appears to be well used by legislative leaders with over half using the data for crafting legislation. Other common uses include to keep informed on children's issues, to prepare speeches and to provide background information.
- A majority of legislative leaders believe the data in KIDS COUNT matters, with more than sixty percent of the respondents indicating that it has a major or moderate impact on public attitudes and public policy regarding children.
- Legislative leaders do use data when making policy regarding children and families. Four out of five leaders indicate that accurate and relevant data has a major or moderate impact on decisions they make regarding family and children's policy.

² Because this question did not specify particular ideological groups, its exact meaning is unclear. Based on the ideological difference evident in other parts of the survey, we may infer that leaders believe the data is less respected by conservatives. However, it is impossible to draw that conclusion from the data.

Influence of Party and Ideology

- Republicans are more likely than Democrats to recall receiving the KIDS COUNT Data Book in the mail (82 percent to 59 percent). Legislative leaders who receive the Data Book from a person or group they know and trust are more likely to use it than those who receive it only in the mail.
- Although Democrats are significantly more likely than are Republicans to use KIDS COUNT data and to find it *credible* (93 percent to 85 percent), *useful* (93 percent to 69 percent), *timely* (93 [percent to 81 percent) and *relevant to policymakers* (89 percent to 77 percent), *a majority of leaders from both parties find the data valuable.*
- Self-identified liberals are more likely to describe KIDS COUNT data as *credible, useful, relevant, respected* and *important to public awareness and policy* than are conservatives.
- Leaders from both parties use the data, but in **clearly** different ways. Democrats use KIDS COUNT data primarily *to craft policy, keep themselves informed* and *write speeches.* Republicans are more likely to use it to *keep themselves informed, provide background information* and *confirm the accuracy of data from other sources.*
- While a majority of all legislative leaders view KIDSCOUNT data positively, Senate leaders tend to view the KIDS COUNT data more favorably and use it more than House leaders. This difference may be due to the fact that Senate leaders tend to have more legislative experience and thus, a greater appreciation for data or to the fact that more of the House chambers are controlled by Republicans.
- Those who believe children are worse off in their state are more likely to believe KIDS COUNT data is *timely, credible, useful, and relevant for policy makers* than are those leaders who hold a more optimistic view of the status of children in their state.

Summary of Research Findings: State Legislative Leaders Perceptions of KIDS COUNT

Introduction

KIDS COUNT was initiated by the Annie E. Casey Foundation in 1990 in an effort to track the status of children in the United States using indicators available on a state-by-state and national basis. By providing policymakers and citizens with benchmarks of children's well-being, KIDS COUNT seeks to enrich local, state and national discussions concerning ways to secure better futures for all children.³

The KIDS COUNT initiative has a national component and a state component.

- At the national level, the primary activity is the publication of the annual KIDS COUNT Data Book, which provides measures of children's educational, social, economic and physical well-being. This book typically provides national profiles and national indicator maps, as well as profiles and rankings for each state. It also includes an essay describing current issues facing children.
- At the state level, the Annie E. Casey Foundation funds state organizations that provide a more detailed, community-by-community picture of the condition of children. These organizations comprise a national network that seeks to clearly define the current status of children in each state, thereby serving as both a source of invaluable data and a catalyst for states seeking to improve their overall performance in enhancing the lives of children.

In an effort to understand whether these materials are reaching legislative leaders, the Annie E. Casey Foundation commissioned the State Legislative Leaders Foundation to conduct a survey of leaders to determine what they know about KIDS COUNT and how they utilize the data in formulating and shaping public policy. This survey was designed to complement a study of rank-and-file legislators, appropriate committee chairs and legislative staff, conducted by the National Conference of State Legislatures and the Centers at the Graduate School of Public Affairs at the University of Colorado.

The Importance of Legislative Leaders

Scholars, journalists and legislators all acknowledge that state legislative leaders play a pivotal role in shaping public policy. Indeed, most would agree that the top leaders in each chamber have the greatest impact on whether or not a proposal becomes law and if it does, the shape, form and nature that law will take.⁴ Legislative leaders are responsible for setting the policy agenda of the legislature, determining who and what will be heard on the floor, assigning

³ Annie E. Casey Foundation, *KIDS COUNT Data Book: State Profiles of Child Well-Being 2003* p. 224

⁴ Malcolm E. Jewell and Marcia Lynn Whicker, *Legislative Leadership in the American States* (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 1994) pages 1-16; Alan Rosenthal, *Heavy Lifting: The Job of the American Legislature* (Washington, DC: CQ Press, 2004) page 209-231.

members and chairs to legislative committees and determining which bills will be considered by which committees. They represent the legislature to the executive, the media, the public and the lobbying community. They determine the tone and tenor of the legislative session. Alan Rosenthal accurately notes that “. . . legislative leaders are the fulcrum on which much of the work of the legislature hinges. It would be difficult for the legislature to do its job without leadership.”⁵

This statement is no less true when it comes to legislation and policy relative to children and families. Legislators in formal positions of leadership have a dramatic influence on the lives of the nation’s children. They determine if, when and in what context legislation relative to children gets on the legislative agenda. It is the leaders who must balance the needs of children with those of the elderly, the poor, the business community and the general public. As the 1995 SLLF Report noted, “Today, the role of legislative leaders is more complex than ever as leaders seek to balance the needs and often the competing interests of a growing range of constituencies within and outside the legislature.”⁶

For the purpose of this project, we define legislative leaders as Speakers of the House, Senate Presidents, Majority Leaders, Minority Leaders, and Pro Tempores. In all, 333 legislative leaders were surveyed, with 140 completing the survey (response rate of 42%).

Survey and Methodology

The initial survey was developed by the National Conference of State Legislatures based on information gathered from a focus group of six legislators and three legislative staffers who represented various ideological and partisan positions as well as the different geographic regions of the country. The group met in September 2003 to provide feedback on the KIDS COUNT Data Book and to critique a draft survey designed by NCSL staff. The State Legislative Leaders Foundation further refined the survey, adding some questions relevant specifically to leaders.

To maximize the response rate, we employed the *Dillman Total Design Method*. This approach tends to maximize survey responses among elites. This method involves an introductory letter, a mailing with the survey from someone the respondents will likely recognize and respect, a follow-up postcard and follow up letter and copy of the survey.

In the first week of June 2004, all 333 legislative leaders received a letter from Representative Lois DeBerry, Speaker Pro Tempore of the Tennessee House—a nationally recognized champion of children’s rights—and the incoming Chair of the State Legislative Leaders Foundation. Her letter informed the leaders of the importance of the study and that they would soon be receiving a brief questionnaire which she encouraged them to complete and return promptly. Shortly thereafter, the leaders received a letter from Stephen G. Lakis, President of the State Legislative Leaders Foundation, along with a copy of the survey. Subsequent mailings included a post card and another copy of the survey along with a letter from Thomas H. Little,

⁵ Alan Rosenthal, *Heavy Lifting: The Job of the American Legislature* (Washington, DC: CQ Press, 2004) page 209.

⁶ State Legislative Leaders Foundation, *State Legislative Leaders: Keys to Effective Legislation for Children and Families* (Centerville, MA: State Legislative Leaders Foundation, 1995) page 8.

Director of Curriculum Development and Research for the State Legislative Leaders Foundation
 These mailings yielded the following approximate⁷ response rates:

- 1st Survey and letter 21%
 - Postcard 8%
 - 2nd Survey and letter 13%
- Total Response Rate 42%

As indicated in Appendix 2, the respondents bear a remarkable resemblance to the total population of leaders. There are no statistically significant differences between the respondents and the total population in terms of political party, leadership position, race or gender. The respondents are weighted a bit in favor of House and Assembly leaders over Senate leaders, but the difference is not significant (59% of the respondents are House or Assembly leaders vs. 53% of the population).

Findings

The results and analysis of the survey are presented below. Partisan and ideological responses are presented and discussed in cases where there were statistical differences between the responses of the partisan or ideological groups.

Table 1: How much do you use each of these organizations to obtain information on the status and well-being of children?			
Organization	Use	Don't Use but Aware	Not Aware
National Conference of State Legislatures	93%	3%	3%
KIDS COUNT	73%	14%	12%
The U.S. Census Bureau	70%	23%	7%
Other Federal Government Agencies	68%	18%	14%
Heritage Foundation	46%	32%	22%
Focus on the Family	40%	28%	33%
Children's Defense Fund	39%	41%	20%
National Center for Children in Poverty	32%	27%	41%
Child Trends	19%	25%	56%

Where Do Legislative Leaders Get Their Information Regarding Children and Families?

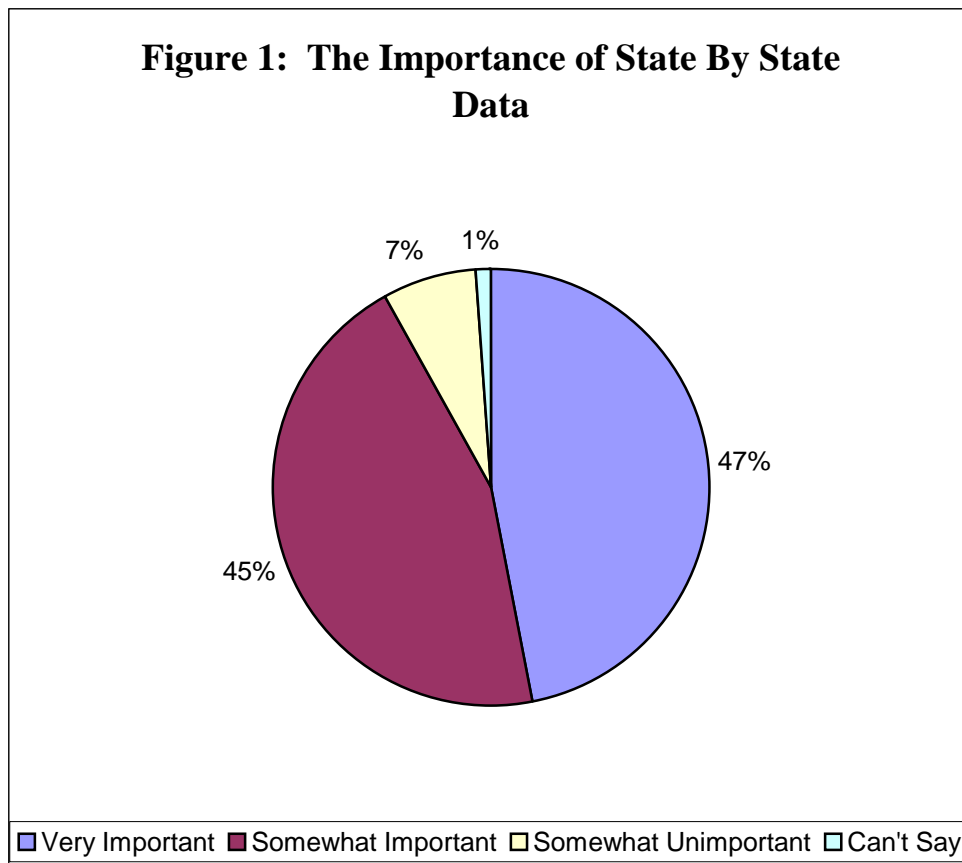
In the aggregate, state legislative leaders appear to be well aware of the KIDS COUNT Data Book and the Casey Foundation. According to the data presented in Table 1, almost three-

⁷ It is impossible to know exactly how many of the surveys were the result of the first mailing and the post card, because some may have been mailed while the postcard was in the mail. The second round of surveys was identified with a different color pen, so we could evaluate the effectiveness of the second mailing.

quarters of the legislative leaders indicate a use of KIDSCOUNT data. More than one in five respondents indicate they use KIDS COUNT and Casey information *a lot*. Another third indicate they use it *some*. Knowledge and use of KIDS COUNT data does tend to vary by party, however, with almost a third of the Democrats indicating they use it a great deal compared to just over one in ten of the Republicans.

As indicated in Table 1, awareness of the particular sources of data seems quite high among legislative leaders, with six of the potential sources of information recognized by more than three-quarters of the leaders. Data provided by the National Conference of State Legislatures, the U.S. Census Bureau and additional federal agencies were all utilized by more than sixty percent of the respondents. The Children’s Defense Fund, Heritage Foundation, Focus on the Family and the National Center for Poverty were referenced by between thirty and forty percent of the respondents. One in five of the respondents volunteered that they utilized sources of data specific to their state, usually state government agencies, when developing policies relative to children.

Satisfaction with Current Data on Children. The vast majority of state legislative leaders indicated they are generally satisfied with the state of data regarding children and families. More than ninety percent suggested they are *somewhat* or *very satisfied* with the type and level of data available to them. According to the responses presented in Figure 1, more than ninety percent of the leaders indicated that comparative state-by-state data, a key quality of the KIDS COUNT Data Book, was important to them.



However, these results do not suggest that improvements cannot be made in the nature or presentation of the data. More than one in ten (sixteen) leaders suggested additional data that might be included in future KIDS COUNT Data Books. Suggested additional data included information on suicide, literacy rates, premarital sex, education accountability measures, more accurate drop out rates, and data on adoption and foster care.

Other leaders indicated a desire for more analysis of relationships rather than just the presentation of data. For example, they suggested an analysis of poverty by ethnicity, the relationship between crime and delinquency data, and an analysis of data as it relates to specific policy solutions.

Table 2: Partisan Differences in Use of Sources		
	Democrats	Republicans
National Conference of State Legislatures	92%	95%
KIDS COUNT	83%	65%
The U.S. Census Bureau	74%	66%
Other Federal Government Agencies	72%	64%
Heritage Foundation	23%	67%
Focus on the Family	31%	48%
Children’s Defense Fund	59%	22%
National Center for Children in Poverty	40%	25%
Child Trends	25%	14%

The Partisan Perspective

A comparison of Democrats and Republicans yields a significant partisan difference in the sources of data noted by legislative leaders. According to Table 2, leaders in both parties use data provided by NCSL and the federal government at a similar rate. However, there are significant differences in the uses and awareness of the other sources. Democrats are significantly more likely to use KIDS COUNT and data from the Children’s Defense Fund and the National Center for Children in Poverty, while Republicans are significantly more likely to rely on data from Focus on the Family and the Heritage Foundation. Republicans also volunteered a reliance on information provided by CATO, the American Legislative Exchange Council and the Economic Policy Institute. Democratic and Republican leaders were both quite satisfied with the quality and nature of the data available to them. Interestingly, Republican leaders were less likely than Democrats to believe that comparative state data was necessary for making effective public policy.

How and What Do Legislative Leaders Know About the KIDS COUNT Data Book?

Over seventy percent of the respondents indicated they are familiar with the Data Book (50% with the book only and 21% with the book and the website). Under three percent of the respondents are familiar with just the website, while about a quarter are not familiar with either.

Table 3: How have you heard about KIDS COUNT?	
How Heard about KIDS COUNT	Percent of Those Familiar with KIDS COUNT Naming Each Source
Received the Data Book in the mail	69%
From an advocacy group	46%
From a state legislative staffer	29%
From a state government agency	21%
In a newsletter or other publication	19%
From a state legislator	18%
In the newspaper	18%
From a service provider	17%
From a constituent	14%
Was given the Data Book in person	11%
On radio or television	7%
On the Internet	9%
From a local government agency	7%
From a local elected official	7%
Some other way	3%

Seven of ten leaders received a copy of the Data Book by mail. This was by far the most commonly mentioned method of gaining familiarity with KIDS COUNT. Just under half recall being made aware of KIDS COUNT from a member of an advocacy group. Other important sources were legislative staff, state agencies, newsletters or publications, and other legislators

Just about forty percent of the respondents indicated their awareness was based primarily on personal sources (advocates, constituents, staffers, etc.), while another forty percent stated they were made aware of the Data Book mostly by impersonal means (received a copy in the mail, newsletter, media, etc.). About twenty percent indicated they had a balance of personal and impersonal sources.

A look at the awareness and sources of information by party again suggests significant differences. While eighteen percent of the Democratic leaders indicated they are not familiar with the Data Book or the website, more than thirty percent of the Republicans made that claim. Further, of the leaders who are aware of the website or Data Book, Democrats are much more likely to note that they had become familiar with KIDS COUNT because of a personal reference from an advocate, a constituent, a staffer or a fellow legislator. Republican leaders have a much less personal connection to KIDS COUNT and have a limited context within which to understand or use the data.

How Do Legislative Leaders Evaluate the KIDS COUNT Data?

Legislative leaders from both parties think quite highly of the data provided in the KIDS COUNT Data Book. Two-thirds of the legislative leaders, regardless of their party affiliation, believe the data provided is *very credible* and almost as many feel it is presented in a manner that is *very clear and understandable*.

Almost sixty percent indicated the data is *very useful*, while over half felt the data provided is *very relevant to policy makers*. Just under half of those familiar with KIDS COUNT think the data is *very timely*, while almost as many indicated it is *somewhat timely*.

While the general evaluation of the KIDS COUNT Data Book is positive, legislative leaders believe the data is *not respected by all policy makers*. Only a third indicated the data is *very respected* by those with differing opinions, while one in ten feel the data has *little or no respect* among those with opposing views.

In other words, while most legislative leaders believe the data in KIDS COUNT is *credible, useful and relevant*, they are not convinced that everyone else holds the data in such high esteem.

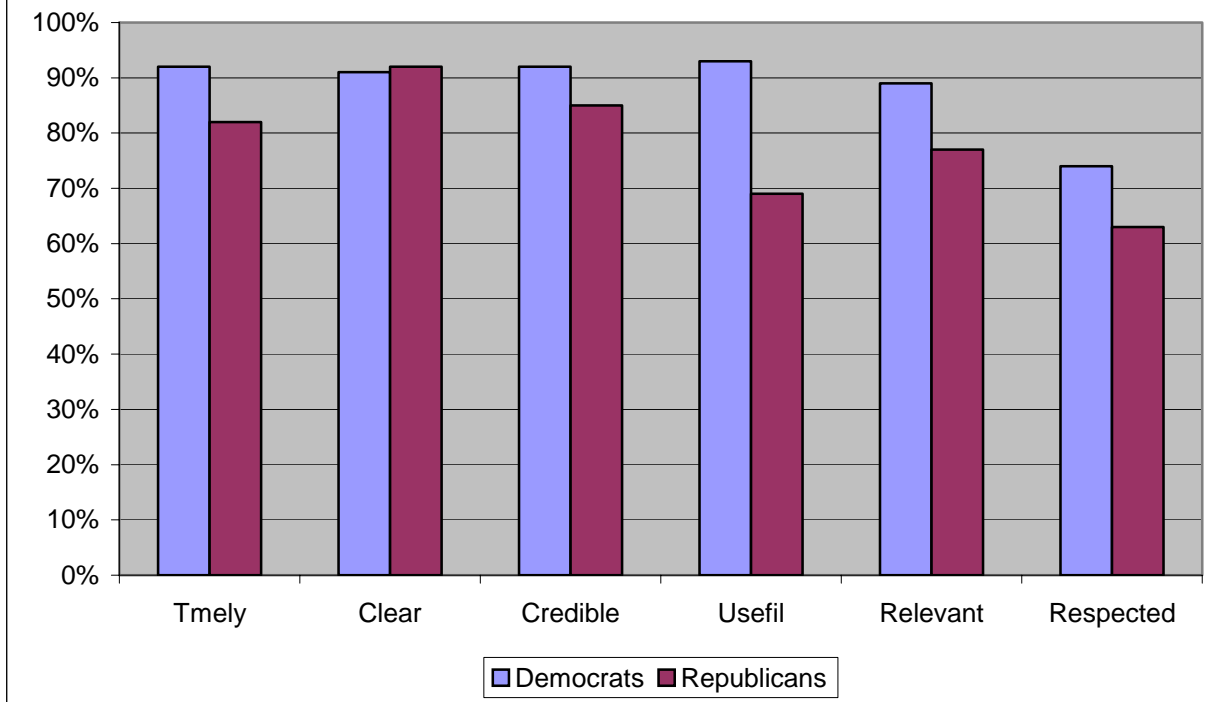
Table 4: Leaders' Views of KIDS COUNT Data Book*				
	Very	Somewhat	A Little	Not
Timely	48%	40%	11%	1%
Clear and Understandable	63%	29%	2%	6%
Credible	66%	23%	4%	6%
Useful	58%	23%	11%	1%
Relevant to policy makers	53%	31%	10%	1%
Respected by people with differing political views	33%	36%	9%	1%
* Percentages are based on responses from legislative leaders who say they are familiar with KIDS COUNT.				

A look at the evaluation of the work done by KIDS COUNT grantees in each state finds a similar level of support. About two-thirds of the respondents find the data to be *very credible*, six in ten find it to be *very useful* and only a third find it to be *respected by those with differing opinions*.

Once again, the data reveals a significant difference in partisan perspectives. Democrats and Republicans alike believe KIDS COUNT data is presented in a clear and understandable manner. They also agree the data is not as highly valued or respected by leaders across the political spectrum. While a majority of the leaders respect and use the information in KIDS COUNT, leaders in both parties believe others do not hold the data in such high regard.

On a similar partisan divide, there are significant differences between the parties regarding the credibility, relevance and usefulness of the data. Democratic leaders were significantly more likely than their Republican counterparts to find the KIDS COUNT data to *timely, credible, relevant and useful*. Overall, Democrats have a great deal more confidence in the data provided in KIDS COUNT than do their Republican counterparts.

Figure 2: Evaluation of KIDS COUNT by Party Leaders



How Do Legislative Leaders Use the KIDS COUNT Data Book?

In the survey, legislative leaders were asked to indicate how they use the KIDS COUNT data. The KIDS COUNT Data Book is most definitely a valuable resource for the more than seventy percent of the leaders who are aware of it. Of the 102 respondents who were aware of the KIDS COUNT Data Book, only four indicated they do not use it for at least one of the eight purposes listed. Most legislative leaders indicated multiple uses for the data with the average leader indicating that he or she used the data for three or four purposes. One leader checked all of the categories!

The proportion of leaders indicating use by category is listed in Table 5. The most common uses of the data were purely informational. Over two-thirds of the leaders indicated they use the data to keep themselves informed regarding the needs of children in his or her state and almost as many noted they use the book to do background research on an issue. Well over half of the legislative leaders indicated using the data in KIDS COUNT in the preparation of speeches and just over fifty percent noted that they use it to craft legislation, policies and programs. Finally, a significant proportion of legislative leaders use the data as a backup—to check or confirm other sources of data or to hold state agencies accountable.

Clearly, the KIDS COUNT Data Book serves many valuable purposes for legislative leaders, providing them with credible information to increase their own understanding, develop specific policy proposals and make sure others are providing accurate information and effective services.

	Percent Using Information
To inform myself about children’s needs	68%
To do background research on an issue	65%
In speeches	55%
To craft legislation, policies or programs	51%
To check or confirm other data sources	44%
In committee or council deliberations	41%
To hold state agencies accountable	31%
To write grant proposals	2%
* Percentages are based on responses from legislative leaders who say they are familiar with KIDS COUNT	

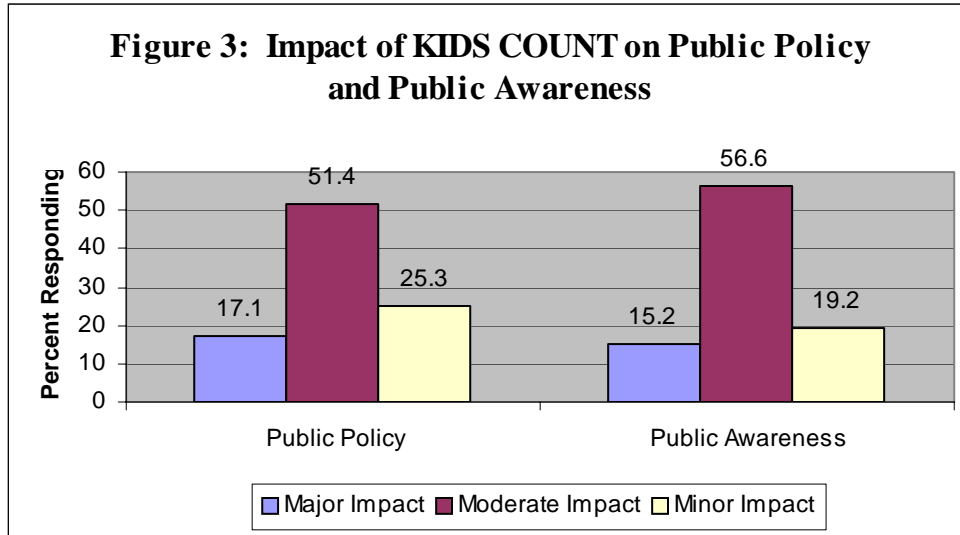
Once again, the general distribution of responses hides some interesting and significant partisan differences. Democrats are significantly more likely to use KIDS COUNT data in speeches, to craft legislation, in committee deliberations, and to perform background research for an issue. In contrast, as Table 6 vividly shows, Republicans are much more likely than Democratic leaders to use the data to confirm or challenge other sources of data. This confirms the earlier finding that Republicans find the data a bit less credible—rather than accepting it at face value, they want to evaluate it in light of data from other sources in which they perhaps have greater faith. Interestingly, an almost identical proportion of Democrat and Republican leaders use the data to keep informed.

	Percent Using Information	
	Democrats	Republicans
To keep informed	68%	67%
For background research	74%	55%
In speeches	75%	37%
To craft legislation	59%	43%
In committee deliberations	49%	33%
To confirm data from other sources	37%	51%
To hold agencies accountable	36%	26%
To write grants	3%	0%

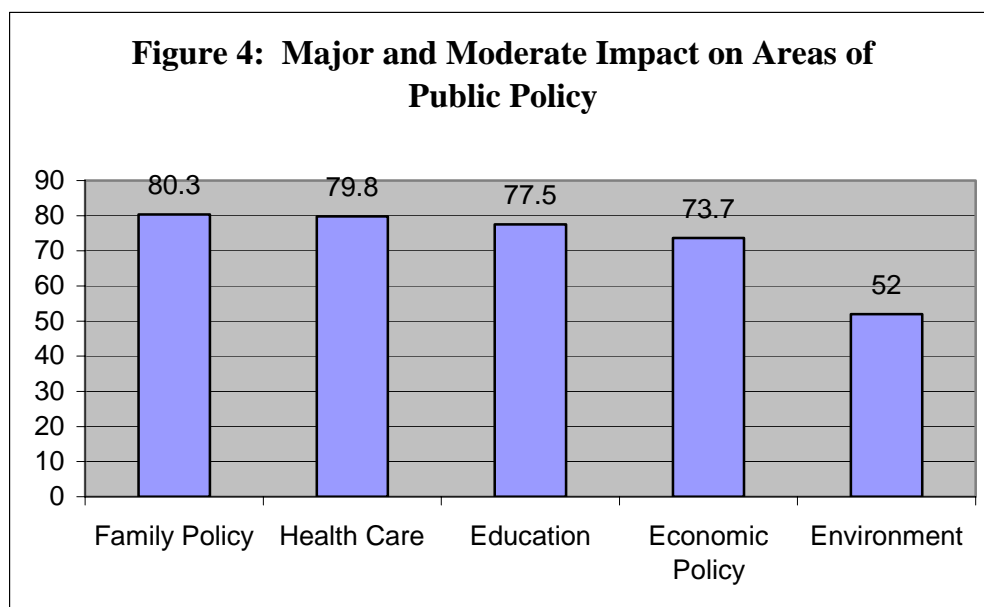
Legislative leaders of both parties use the data in KIDS COUNT, but they tend to use the data in markedly different ways—Democrats to craft policy, promote their ideas and work the legislative process and Republicans to examine the context of issues and to evaluate various sources of similar data.

Identifying The Impact of KIDS COUNT Data

In addition to having an impact on the way legislative leaders do business, it is also clear that the KIDS COUNT Data Book has a significant influence on public policy and public awareness. According to the survey, more than ninety percent of the respondents believe that KIDS COUNT has some impact on both public policy and public awareness.



The kind of data provided by KIDS COUNT matters when it comes to public policy for children and families. The importance of data on policy related to children and families is similar to its importance in other key areas of public policy. About a quarter of the respondents indicated that data has a *major impact* on public policy relative to children and families. This is a bit lower, but comparable to the proportion of leaders who think data has a *major impact* on health care policy, economic policy and education policy. It is much higher than the one in ten respondents who feel data has a *major impact* on environmental policy. When we combine the moderate and major impact categories, the impact of data on children and family issues is greater than all of the other five and it is the only issue area in which no respondent indicated that data had *no impact* on public policy. Legislative leaders do believe that the kinds of quantitative data provided by the Annie E. Casey Foundation are important when they make decisions on children’s policy.



Do Factors Other Than Party Matter?

As indicated earlier, political party has a dramatic impact on the way legislative leaders perceive, learn about, evaluate and utilize the KIDS COUNT Data Book. Other factors also seem to matter, including ideology, the geographic nature of the leader's legislative district, legislative chamber and legislative experience.

Ideology. Liberals tend to rely more heavily on and think more highly of the data from KIDS COUNT than do moderates and conservatives. They are more likely to know about and use the KIDS COUNT Data Book than are their less liberal colleagues and they tend to feel it has a greater impact on both public policy and public opinion. While conservatives use the KIDS COUNT Data Book mostly to keep themselves informed on children's issues and confirm or challenge data from other sources, liberals look to it in proposing legislation, preparing speeches and holding agencies accountable as well as keeping themselves informed.

Density of Legislative District. Because the challenges their constituents face are so distinct, urban, suburban and rural legislators⁸ tend to think and act differently from one another. This also appears to be true when it comes to the awareness, use and evaluation of the KIDS COUNT data and other data relative to children's issues.

While urban legislators are not significantly more likely to be aware of the Casey Foundation and the KIDS COUNT Data Book, they are more likely than suburban and rural legislators to trust and use the data they provide. Urban legislators are more likely to find the data in KIDS COUNT to be timely, credible, useful and relevant than are their more rural colleagues. Further, rural legislators are less likely to believe that the data provided in KIDS COUNT has a major impact on public opinion and public policy. Interestingly, they also are less likely than the more liberal leaders to believe that data has a significant impact on policy in education, the environment, and the economy.

Legislative Chamber. With the exception of the Nebraska Unicameral, all state legislatures are bicameral with a larger, often more reactive lower house and a smaller, generally more deliberative upper chamber. The results of the survey suggest there are significant differences between leaders in each of the chambers, with House or Assembly leaders offering a different view of KIDS COUNT than their Senate counterparts. Senate leaders, who report an average of three years more legislative experience (16.3 years) than their House or Assembly counterparts (13.6 years), are more aware of the variety of information sources at their disposal. They are more likely to be aware of data provided by the National Center for Children in Poverty and Child Trends. They are also more likely to evaluate the data in KIDS COUNT more positively, more often citing it as timely (92 percent to 84 percent) and respected than did their colleagues in the lower chamber.

Legislative Experience. Seasoned legislative leaders are more likely to be aware of and use information provided by the National Center for Children in Poverty, Child Trends, the Children's Defense Fund and the National Conference of State Legislatures. It follows that these leaders tend to use the KIDS COUNT Data Book for background information more often than

⁸ Those leaders from districts they considered "mixed" are excluded from this analysis.

their junior colleagues, but no other differences exist in the evaluation of the quality or impact of the data.

Table 7: The Relationship Between Political Party and District Density and Political Ideology			
	District Density		
	Urban	Suburb.	Rural
Democrats	77.4%	50.0%	40.0%
Republicans	22.6%	50.0%	60.0%
	Political Ideology		
	Liberal	Moderate	Conservative
Democrats	100.0%	70.7%	7.7%
Republicans	0.0%	29.3%	92.3%

Underlying Effects of Political Party. While each of these factors has some impact on the awareness, use, evaluation and perceived impact of KIDS COUNT data, it should be noted that both district density and ideology are highly correlated with political party. Rural legislators are more likely to be Republican and urban legislators Democrat. Liberal legislative leaders are more likely to be Democrats (in this case, they are exclusively Democrats) and conservative leaders more likely to be Republican. However, while party explains some of the apparent effects of differences in district and ideology, many of the relationships hold (For example, conservatives, whether they are Democrats or Republicans, are less likely to find KIDS COUNT data *credible, useful or respected.*)

Conclusion: Good News, Challenges and Recommendations

Good News. The survey of legislative leaders reveals a significant amount of good news for The Annie E. Casey Foundation and those who produce and distribute the KIDS COUNT Data Book.

- **Leaders know and like KIDS COUNT and Casey.** A majority of legislative leaders from both parties are aware of the Casey Foundation and the Data Book and use the data provided therein. Leaders of both parties find the information to be credible, accessible, useful and relevant.
- **Legislative leaders use KIDS COUNT.** According to the survey, the KIDS COUNT Data Book does not sit around gathering dust on the shelf. Over two-thirds use the data to keep themselves informed or conduct background research and more than half use it to craft legislation and prepare speeches. Four out of ten leaders use it to check or confirm data from other sources or to prepare for committee deliberations.

- **KIDS COUNT influences policy.** Most legislative leaders believe that the data provided in the KIDS COUNT Data Book has a positive effect on both public opinion and public policy. The survey also reveals that hard data does influence children’s policy just as much as it influences education, economic and health care policy, and more than it influences environmental policy. The KIDS COUNT Data Book is providing a useful and necessary service to legislative leaders across the country.

Challenges. The survey results also reveal challenges for the Annie E. Casey Foundation and the editors of the KIDS COUNT Data Book.

- **Some like and use KIDS COUNT more than others.** While most legislative leaders have a positive perception of KIDS COUNT, there are significant differences among particular groups. For example, KIDS COUNT is not as highly regarded, known, respected or used by leaders who are conservative, Republican or rural. Republican leaders are as likely to turn to data from the Heritage Foundation, the Census Bureau and other federal agencies as they are to utilize KIDS COUNT data. Republicans, conservatives and leaders from rural districts are less likely than their Democratic colleagues to find the information in KIDS COUNT to be credible, timely, useful or relevant to policy makers and also are less likely to use it to craft legislation, prepare speeches, and hold agencies accountable. In general, Republican leaders tend to use the KIDS COUNT Data Book less often and for a smaller variety of purposes.
- **Not all leaders are aware of the Data Book.** While about seventy percent of the leaders were aware of the Data Book or the website, almost a third were not. Given the critical importance of leaders to the success of legislation in the state legislature, the impact of the Data Book is heavily linked to its use and recognition by those leaders.
- **The challenge of timely data.** While most leaders felt the data was accessible and easy to understand, over half of the respondents indicated that the data provided in the Data Book was not as timely as they would have preferred. The most recent data in the 2004 Data Book was from 2001.
- **Many leaders do not have a personal connection to KIDS COUNT.** Leaders who received the Data Book by mail (by far the most common means of conveyance), void of context or a “face” to put with the data, were more likely to have a negative perception of the data and to use it less than were those respondents who were made aware of the book by an advocate, staff member, another legislator or a constituent.

Recommendations. Based on the responses we received from these 140 state legislative leaders, we offer the following recommendations to further strengthen the utility of this exceptional document.

- **Get personal with legislative leaders.** Take advantage of the network of advocates, legislators and state officials that Casey has across the country to provide legislative leaders with information and with the KIDS COUNT Data Book. Leaders who receive the Data Book from a person are more likely to use and evaluate it positively. Use advocates, friendly legislators, staffers and state officials to assist in distributing KIDS COUNT to leaders of both parties.

- **Determine what leaders want and need.** In order to provide data that is useful to legislative leaders, the Casey Foundation must make a concerted effort to understand the challenges faced by legislative leaders. Over the past decade, Republicans, who are less familiar and trusting of the Casey Foundation, have become the majority party in over half the state chambers. The Casey Foundation should conduct studies, hold focus groups and strive to build relationships with those Republican leaders who are currently less likely to use Casey data.
- **Increase visibility of the website.** The Internet has become a primary source of information for legislative leaders in America. And yet, less than a quarter of the legislative leaders surveyed were aware of the KIDS COUNT Data Book website. Make leaders aware of the website via electronic mail and regular mail and reference it on any publications or information distributed to leaders. Note very prominently in the Data Book that additional information will be posted on the website as it becomes available.
- **Use the website to provide more timely information.** Continue to use the website to provide the most timely information possible. While the Data Book, by necessity of publication, may be a bit dated, the website can, and does, contain the most recent figures possible.
- **Offer bullets and “sound bites.”** Two of the most prominent uses of the KIDS COUNT Data Book are in preparing speeches and developing and defending legislative proposals. While leaders can glean significant information from the Data Book to achieve these purposes, it would be useful to provide some very brief statements of key and interesting findings. The current “Summary and Findings” section would seem to fit this purpose, but it is 18 pages long—not very brief. Begin each section of the national profile page with two or three statements of key findings and then set aside a section at the end of the national profiles to pull all of those statements together. They will make great points for speeches and floor debates.
- **Offer analysis and interpretation of data.** Although most legislative leaders were generally satisfied with the state of the data on children and family issues, some did note an interest in additional data and more analysis. Include some essays in the Data Book or a separate publication that explores relationships between some of the indicators and other important social, economic or demographic variables. This would give the leaders some context in which to understand the numbers. Information on the website is already moving in the direction of examining relationships.
- **Work with national organizations to increase visibility and acceptance.** If you can’t beat ‘em, join ‘em! The survey makes it clear that different legislative leaders rely on different organizations for their information. Encourage various national organizations to include a link to the KIDS COUNT website on their webpage and perhaps note the publication of the Data Book in their publications or on their website. Encourage other organizations to join the battle more directly and offer programs that seek to clearly describe the status of children in America today and what this means for America’s future and the future of her children.

- **Continually seek input from users.** The needs and interests of legislators and policy makers are constantly changing. Continue to seek direction and guidance from users of the Data Book and to take that information into account when developing and revising the publication and the website.

Appendix 1: Distribution of Survey Responses

Status of Children: Survey on Information Needs and Use

1. Listed below are some national organizations that compile and disseminate statistical information on children and families. Please tell us how much you use each of these organizations to obtain information on the status and well-being of children.

Please circle one response on each line

	Use a lot	Use some	Use a little	Don't use, but aware	Don't use, Not aware
The U.S. Census Bureau	2.2	31.9	35.5	23.2	7.2
Other federal government agencies	2.9	26.1	39.1	18.1	13.8
National Center for Children in Poverty	2.9	8.0	21.0	26.8	41.3
Child Trends	.7	5.1	13.1	24.8	56.2
Children's Defense Fund	5.1	13.8	20.3	41.3	19.6
KIDS COUNT/Annie E. Casey Foundation	21.2	32.8	19.0	14.6	12.4
Focus on the Family	5.8	17.4	16.7	27.5	32.6
Heritage Foundation	6.5	18.8	21.0	31.9	27.1
National Conference of State Legislatures	30.9	41.2	21.3	3.7	2.9

2. Please list any other organizations that are important sources of information for you on the status and well-being of children.

3. How important is it to you to have access to comparative state-by-state measures on the status and well-being of children? Circle one response.

1	Very important-----	46.7%
2	Somewhat important-----	45.3%
3	Somewhat unimportant -----	6.6%
4	Very unimportant	
5	Can't say-----	1.5%

4. Overall, how satisfied are you with the data that are currently available to you for tracking the status and well-being of children in your state? Circle one response.

1	Very satisfied -----	21.9%
2	Somewhat satisfied -----	69.3%
3	Somewhat dissatisfied -----	7.3%
4	Very dissatisfied -----	.7%
5	Can't say-----	.7%

5. If there is any specific type of information on children and teens that is important to you but that you haven't been able to find, please describe it.

No	-----	87.7%
1	-----	11.6%
5	-----	.7%

KIDS COUNT is a project of the Annie E. Casey Foundation that provides national and state-by-state indicators of child well-being on an annual basis through the national KIDS COUNT Data Book and website. Additionally, the Foundation supports state organizations that may provide reports with local data and analyses of state issues.

6. Are you familiar with the national KIDS COUNT Data Book or website? *Circle one response.*

- 1 Yes, familiar with KIDS COUNT Data Book ----- 50.0%
- 2 Yes, familiar with KIDS COUNT website ----- 2.9%
- 3 Yes, familiar with both ----- 21.0%
- 4 No, familiar with neither **Skip to q. 12** ----- 26.1%

7. How have you heard about KIDS COUNT? *Please check all that apply.*

- a. From a constituent ----- 13.8%
- b. From a state legislator ----- 18.2%
- c. From a state legislative staffer ----- 29.1%
- d. From a state government agency ----- 21.4%
- e. From a local elected official ----- 6.9%
- f. From a local government agency ----- 5.8%
- g. From an advocacy group ----- 46.6%
- h. From a service provider ----- 16.5%
- i. On radio or television ----- 6.8%
- j. In the newspaper ----- 17.6%
- k. In a newsletter or other publication ----- 19.4%
- l. On the Internet ----- 8.7%
- m. Received the Data Book in the mail ----- 69.6%
- n. Was given the Data Book in person ----- 10.7%
- o. Other ----- 2.9%

8. Were you aware of KIDS COUNT prior to joining the legislature? *Circle one response.*

- 1 Yes ----- 13.7%
- 2 No ----- 66.7%
- 3 Can't recall ----- 19.6%

9. Would you say the KIDS COUNT data book is:

Please circle one response on each line

	Very	Some- what	A little	Not	Can't Say
Timely.....	47.5	39.6	5.9	1.0	5.9
Clear and Understandable.....	63.0	29.0	2.0	0	6.0
Credible.....	67.0	23.0	4.0	0	6.0
Useful.....	58.4	22.8	10.9	1.0	6.9
Relevant to policy makers.....	52.5	30.7	9.9	1.0	5.9
Respected by people with differing political views	32.7	35.6	8.9	1.0	21.8

10. The KIDS COUNT Data Book includes a lot of information. Would you prefer to get this information in a single volume as it currently is presented, or would you prefer that the information be separated into several different publications? Circle one response.

- 1 Prefer single volume ----- 75.0%
- 2 Prefer several different publications -----9.0%
- 3 No preference ----- 15.0%

11. In what ways do you use the information provided by KIDS COUNT? Please check all that apply.

- a. To craft legislation, policies or programs ----- 51.0%
- b. In committee or council deliberations ----- 41.2%
- c. In speeches ----- 54.9%
- d. To check or confirm other data sources ----- 43.6%
- e. To hold state agencies accountable ----- 31.4%
- f. To do background research on an issue ----- 64.7%
- g. To inform myself about children’s needs ----- 67.6%
- h. To write grant proposals -----2.0%
- i. Other -----2.0%

12. The Annie Casey Foundation also funds KIDS COUNT initiatives within states. Are you familiar with the work that _____ is doing in your state? Circle one response.

- 1 Yes ----- 68.4%
- 2 No **Skip to question 14** ----- 31.6%

13. Would you say the Kids Count work done by _____ is:
Please circle one response on each line.

	Very	Some- what	A Little	Not	Can't Say
Credible.....	67.4	22.5	6.7	2.2	1.1
Useful.....	58.0	28.4	9.1	2.3	2.3
Respected by people with differing political views..	34.1	37.5	11.4	5.7	11.4

14. Thinking about all aspects of the KIDS COUNT program, what impact, if any, do you think KIDS COUNT has had on each of the following.
Please circle one response on each line.

	Major impact	Moderate impact	Minor impact	No impact	Can't say
Public awareness of problems faced by children and families in your state.....	12.5	52.3	18.8	3.1	13.3
Public policy in your state.....	14.1	47.7	24.2	.8	13.3

15. We are interested in how much impact statistical data has on your public policy decisions. Please indicate the impact of data (charts, numbers, statistics, etc.) on your support in each of the following areas of policy:

	Major impact	Moderate impact	Minor impact	No impact	Can't say
Children and Family Policy (TANF, Childcare, etc)	26.9	54.6	14.6	0	3.8
Health Care Policy (Medicare, Medicaid, etc.)	36.4	43.4	16.3	.8	3.1
Economic Policy (taxes, incentives, etc.)	34.9	38.8	19.4	3.9	3.1
Education Policy (testing, curriculum, funding, etc.)	34.1	43.4	17.1	2.3	3.1
Environmental Policy (pollution, development, etc.)	10.9	41.1	27.9	15.5	4.7

16. How many years have you served in your state legislature?

Average: 14.65 Years
 Range: 1 year to 41 years

17. Would you characterize your constituents as: Circle one response.

- 1 Mostly urban ----- 27.4%
- 2 Mostly suburban ----- 26.7%
- 3 Mostly rural----- 34.1%
- 4 Too mixed to say ----- 11.9%

18. How would you describe your political orientation? Circle one response.

- 1 Strongly liberal -----3.0%
- 2 Liberal ----- 11.4%
- 3 Middle of the road -----43.2%
- 4 Conservative-----34.8%
- 5 Strongly conservative-----7.6%
- 6 Can't say

19. In your opinion, which of the following statements most accurately reflects your assessment of the status of children in your state:

- 1 Worse off, relative to the rest of the country----- 18.5%
- 2 Better off, relative to the rest of the country -----50.8%
- 3 About the same as children in the rest of the country----- 30.8%
- 4 No Opinion

20. If you have ideas for improving the content, presentation, or distribution of KIDS COUNT, please describe them.

3.7% offered improvements.

**Appendix 2: A Comparison of the Population of Leaders
and those who Responded to the Survey**

Comparison of the Sample and the Population of Legislative Leaders			
Characteristic	Group	Population	Sample
Number		333	140
Party	Republicans	51.7%	52.9%
	Democrats	48.3%	47.1%
Chamber	House/ Assembly	53.2%	59.3%
	Senate	46.8%	40.7%
Position	Speaker	15.0%	19.3%
	President	12.0%	7.9%
	Pro Tempore	18.9%	16.4%
	Majority Leader	28.8%	32.1%
	Minority Leader	25.2%	24.3%
Gender	Male	87.7%	87.1%
	Female	12.3%	12.9%
Ethnicity	White	94.0%	93.6%
	African American	3.0%	4.3%
	Hispanic	1.8%	0.7%
	Asian/ Pacific Islander	1.2%	1.4%