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## Kids and Families in Rural Wisconsin Face Unique Challenges

New WISKIDS Count Series Explores the Special Economic, Educational, and Health Care Challenges Outside of State's Urban Centers

Rural areas contribute so much to the Wisconsin's economic and cultural vitality; but children and families in rural areas of the state face a unique set of problems and challenges. A new series of WisKids Count reports from the Wisconsin Council on Children and Families examines the well-being of rural Wisconsin kids, a population that is often ignored in discussion of issues surrounding the needs of vulnerable families in the state.

Key points in the series include:

- In 2009, 6 percent of children in rural counties were without health insurance, compared to 4 percent of children in urban parts of the state.

- Close to half (47 percent) of Wisconsin students who are English Language Learners (ELL) attend school in a district that receives no state support for bilingual/bicultural education.

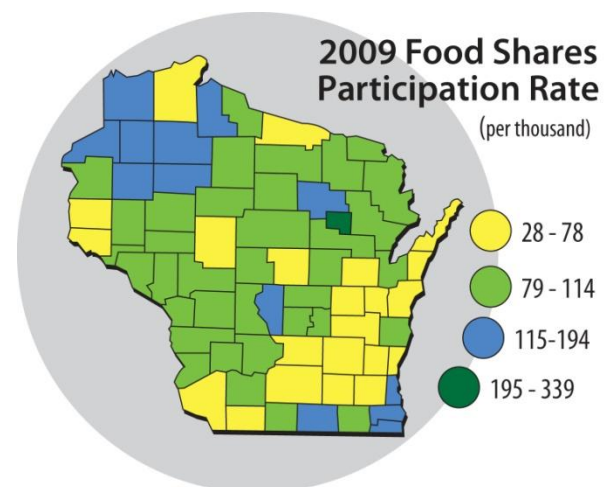
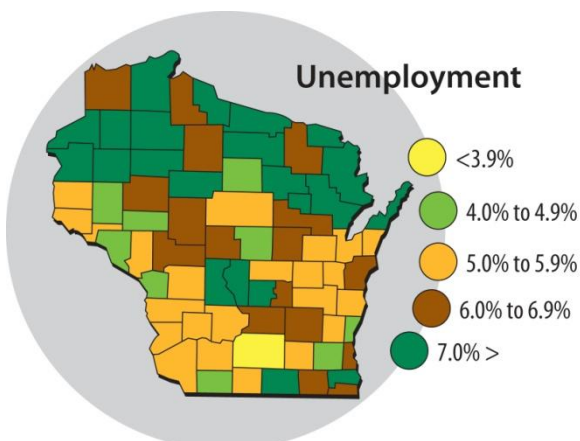
- Rural counties have some of the highest unemployment rates in the state. Much of the northern tier of the state has unemployment rates of over 7%.

- Parts of rural Wisconsin have some of the most severe shortages of mental health services in the country. 1.6 million Wisconsinites live in areas—primarily rural areas—

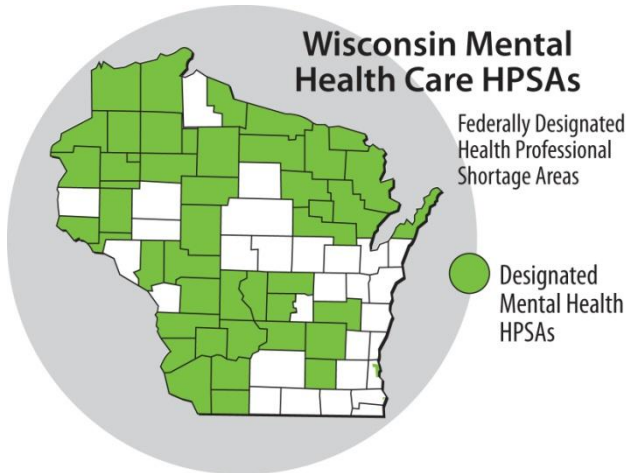
without sufficient mental health services.

- Because of how funding formulas are structured, rural communities and schools are often shortchanged in the allocation of state resources.

The first brief in the series provides an overview of the well-being of children and families in rural Wisconsin. According to the report, rural Wisconsin was hit hard by the recent recession, resulting in jumps in child poverty, unemployment,



and participation in support programs like Food Shares, the state’s nutritional assistance program. The northern tier of the state, in particular, has some of the highest unemployment rates in Wisconsin (see map). These problems are exacerbated by severe shortages of health care providers and affordable housing in many rural parts of the state.



The second issue brief focuses on the challenges faced by English language learners (ELLs) in rural Wisconsin schools. When Wisconsin’s Bilingual-Bicultural Statute was enacted in the 1970s, the state’s ELLs were largely concentrated in a handful of urban school districts in southeastern Wisconsin. That is no longer the case; more than two-thirds of Wisconsin’s 472 school districts now have ELL students. However, only 56 districts have enough students speaking the same first language to meet the threshold for state aid. So while the other districts are still obligated to provide equal

educational opportunities for ELL students, they lack the resources to truly serve these students adequately.

The third brief in the series examines the gap in health care access that exists in many rural areas of Wisconsin. Parts of Wisconsin have provider shortages among the worst in the country; shortages of mental health and oral health providers are particularly acute.

“Far too often, policy makers assume that Milwaukee and the other bigger cities are the only places where families are having a tough time,” said Ken Taylor, executive director of the Wisconsin Council on Children and Families. “That assumption is just wrong.”

“We need to make sure that policies and resources related to education, health care, and other critical family needs are allocated equitably across the state,” Taylor said. “Our mission is to make Wisconsin a place where EVERY kid has the opportunity to grow up, learn, and thrive in a safe, healthy environment, wherever they live in our great state.”

The three new briefs are available on the WCCF website at [http://www.wccf.org/proj\\_kidcount.php](http://www.wccf.org/proj_kidcount.php). Additional data by county is available at the KIDSCOUNT Data Center, <http://datacenter.kidscount.org>.

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