

Westchester Children

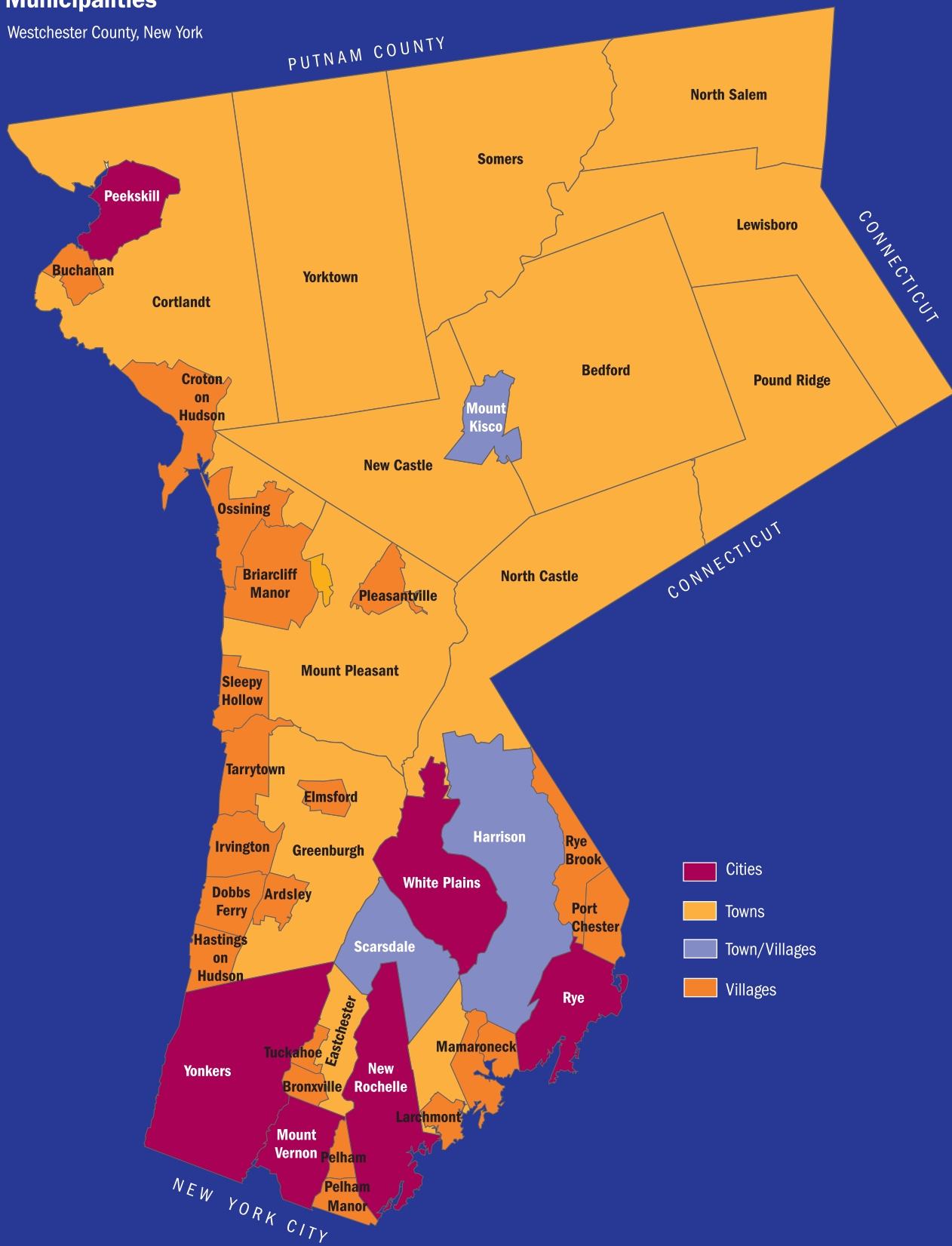
By the Numbers

2008



Municipalities

Westchester County, New York



- Cities
- Towns
- Town/Villages
- Villages

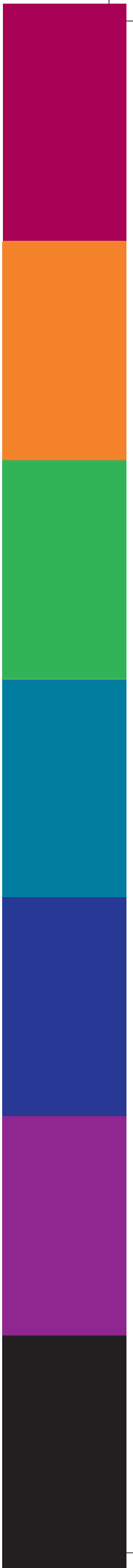
Westchester Children

By the Numbers 2008

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Introduction

By the Numbers, Westchester Children's Association's data resource, has been created to present a comprehensive statistical picture of the children and youth in our County. These numbers about children provide a compelling portrait of the present and future Westchester County. They illuminate current and emerging issues that demand action or further analysis. These same numbers are crucial in measuring the success of public and private programs, and in assessing the long range impact of public policies. Government, non-profit and community leaders need to know the historical and current state of the county and its children in order to effectively address their short and long-term needs.

Various government departments and private agencies collect and publish a large amount of data relevant to children's issues. The sheer breadth and depth of available data can be overwhelming, even to experienced policy makers and advocates. *By the Numbers* consolidates this available data into a single resource. The data can be used by service providers, government officials, policy makers and advocates to understand the status of children and youth and to identify unmet needs. It can also be used by parents and young people to understand their own communities, an understanding that will support their active civic engagement.

WCA has chosen to present the data collected in *By the Numbers* with minimal editorial comment and without extensive interpretation. We believe this resource will be most useful to its intended audiences as a dispassionate presentation that can form the basis for future inquiry, analysis and discussion among the various entities who share responsibility for children's wellbeing.

Of course, numbers by themselves cannot tell the complex story of a child's life. But taken together, the numbers presented in this resource do paint a rich picture of the county's children. Among other things, they show us that:

- Most of Westchester's children live comfortably and are well educated, but a significant number of children do not live or learn under the same fortunate circumstances.
- Public programs that provide cash and medical assistance to families are important supports for the County's children.
- The ethnic and linguistic landscape of Westchester is changing dramatically, creating challenges for programs and agencies serving children and their families. For example, growing numbers of public school students with Limited English Proficiency may require schools to modify instructional programs and staffing patterns.
- Great disparities exist for children based on race and ethnicity, as well as on the marital status and employment status of their parents.

We hope that each user of *By the Numbers* will find helpful information in the pages of this book. Moreover, we hope the data we present will be a catalyst for frank and informed discussion, and vigorous action on behalf of Westchester's children.

Background and Purpose

According to the 2006 American Community Survey, there are 234,666 children under 18 living in Westchester County, representing nearly a quarter of the total population. Understanding the lives of these children can tell us much about the civic health of our communities. Indicators of child wellbeing can show us how well we adults are shouldering the responsibility of caring for our youngest residents, but also about how well they will be prepared to be the productive workers, voters, parents and leaders of tomorrow.

The Westchester Children's Association (WCA), founded in 1914, is an independent, multi-issue child advocacy organization working to ensure that every child is healthy, safe and prepared for life's challenges. Throughout our history, we have based our analysis of children's needs and our advocacy on the most reliable data available. Other advocates, service providers and elected officials have turned to WCA over the years for unbiased information on the status of Westchester's children.

Our experience convinced us that a single comprehensive data resource, integrating information from a wide variety of sources, would be invaluable to anyone concerned with understanding, planning for or serving the needs of Westchester's children.

Our approach to creating this resource has been guided by several core ideas:

- **All children need the same basic supports and opportunities to grow up healthy and strong, but some children live in families and communities that are resource-poor.**

The responsibility of providing those supports and opportunities must be assumed by the wider community. Promoting children's well being is a shared responsibility.

- **Children's well-being is affected by disparate but interdependent factors.**

Even if one part of a child's life experience is optimal, it can be negatively affected by deficits in other areas. Similarly, children can overcome even serious deficits in some areas if other aspects of their life are going well.

For example, in a recent report by the Educational Testing Service, *The Family: America's Smallest School*, ETS researchers Paul E. Barton and Richard J. Coley outline the family and home conditions affecting children's cognitive development and school achievement and how gaps beginning early persist throughout life. The report calls on leaders and policymakers to improve not only schools, but also home and family conditions, to help all students succeed. Critical factors examined in the report include child care quality, parental involvement in schools, parent/pupil ratio, family finances, literacy development, student absences and physical home environments.¹

- **Children's well-being depends on the decisions and actions of adults.**

Families, neighbors, schools, religious leaders, elected officials, service providers, businesses, community and civic leaders—all of these individuals play important roles in meeting children's needs. Children benefit or suffer from public policy decisions in areas such as in education, health, recreation and environmental protection.

¹ Paul E. Barton and Richard J. Coley, *The Family: America's Smallest School*, Educational Testing Service, 2007

- **Good decisions require accurate, timely information about a wide range of related indicators.**

Ideally, planners, advocates and policy makers would have access to data on a wide variety of social indicators and program outcomes, collected at regular intervals, organized according to consistent categories of age, race/ethnicity, municipality, etc.

By compiling and presenting accurate and timely information, *By the Numbers* represents a first step toward understanding and addressing the needs of Westchester's children and youth.

How *By the Numbers* Is Organized

The data in *By the Numbers* is presented in seven major sections, each with its own brief introduction:

- **Demographics**
- **Economic Security**
- **Health**
- **Child Care and Education**
- **Child Welfare**
- **Juvenile Justice**

These are followed by a section of Snapshots that present data aggregated by Age, Race/Ethnicity and Municipality. Finally, a Glossary defines terms used in the charts, graphs and tables.

About the Data

The data published in this book comes from a myriad of sources. WCA only included data from credible and reliable sources, including public (government) sources or non-governmental agencies that are charged with compiling and publishing selected data. WCA has made a particular effort to present data disaggregated by community and by race or ethnicity. Because Westchester is such a diverse county, county-wide data is often less informative than local data and gives a false sense of the actual status of many children who live here.

WCA made every effort to procure the most current and accurate data available in fall 2007. We were grateful to have the cooperation of many individuals in County and State government in compiling data. In particular, we appreciate the support of County Executive Andrew J. Spano and the Commissioners and staff of Westchester County Departments of Planning, Health, Social Services, Community Mental Health, and Corrections/Probation, as well as the District Attorney's office.

A few notes on terminology and presentation

- The terms “children” and “youth” are generally used interchangeably and refer to individuals below the age of 18. In some instances, the term may refer to a different age range relevant to the particular data being presented, and this is noted in the chart, graph or table.
- The data in this book comes from a variety of different sources. As a result, there can be conflicting information between charts and tables, even if they address the same topic, geographic area, and time period.
- Commonly, in data sources such as the U.S. Census Bureau that categorize data by race and/or ethnicity, a distinction is made between races (White, Black/African American, Asian, etc.) and Hispanic/Latino ethnicity. However, some other sources treat Hispanic/ Latino as a group equivalent to White or Black/African American. Again, we have tried to specify how these categories are used in each relevant chart, graph or table.
- The boundaries for towns and villages in Westchester that are used by the US Census to calculate data are not an exact match for the actual political boundaries of these municipalities. Therefore, WCA uses a system developed by the Westchester County Department of Planning to produce accurate information pertaining to Westchester municipalities.

Additional Information about US Census Data

Westchester Children By the Numbers utilized information derived from three US Census data sources (Summary File 1, Summary File 3, and the American Community Survey) to compile many of the tables and charts published in this book.

Summary File 1 presents population counts and basic demographic information collected from ALL people and housing units.

Summary File 3 presents in-depth population and housing data collected on a sample basis (generally 1 in 6 households) from the Census 2000 long form questionnaire. Since not every household received a long form, the responses from the sample of households reporting on long forms must be weighted to reflect the entire population.

Because the numbers from SF3 are derived from a sample, there will be instances, particularly in smaller geographic areas, where the estimates of characteristics tracked by SF3 will not match the counts reported in SF1. However, SF3 is still an effective tool for measuring demographic changes and population counts.

The American Community Survey (ACS) collects and produces population and housing information every year instead of every ten years. About three million households are surveyed each year, from across every county in the nation. Although the American Community Survey has more up-to-date information, the sample surveyed is smaller than the sample for Summary File 3. As a result, *Westchester Children By the Numbers* can only derive ACS information for the county and a limited number of municipalities within the county.

Further Opportunities for Improvement

In the process of finding and compiling the data presented in *By the Numbers*, we have noted a number of factors that currently hamper the accessibility and usefulness of the data that is disseminated by public and private entities. We offer the following suggestions for improvement:

■ Category Standardization

As noted earlier, there is a lack of consistency in the way various agencies categorize data. For example, agencies often are not in agreement over what constitutes a certain race or ethnicity. In some cases, the Hispanic population is treated as a separate race, while in other cases, the Hispanic population is not a racial category. The definition of who is a child or youth is similarly inconsistent. This lack of consistency makes it difficult to analyze or even notice relationships between various indicators, a serious drawback in understanding their meaning and import.

Lack of consistency is not a problem unique to Westchester County or New York State. We believe the recent creation of the New York State Children's Cabinet, charged with coordinating the child-centered efforts of all government departments, presents an opportunity to standardize data categories, as well as create standard timetables for publishing new data.

■ Public Availability of Data

Making the information that government collects more available increases opportunities for public understanding and engagement in civic issues, and supports better collaboration within government and between government and the non-profit or private sectors. A number of New York State departments present extensive data on the internet, as do the Westchester County Department of Planning and the Department of Health. The internet is an ideal way for data to be shared with the public; it can be easily updated and is available to anyone with access to a computer.

There are formidable barriers to making more data readily available. Most departments collect only data required for internal or external reporting purposes. In some cases special computer systems have been developed by which local data is transmitted to the State but cannot be easily retrieved. If systems are not already in place, the initial cost of collecting data can be prohibitive.

We strongly believe that despite these obstacles, there are compelling benefits to be gained by publishing data more frequently and in clearer formats. We urge Westchester County and New York State to make concerted efforts to toward increasing public accountability and fostering public trust by making agency information more easily accessible and available.

