THE CHILD WELL-BEING INDEX®

2026 METHODOLOGY AND TECHNICAL NOTES

The Child Well-Being Index® is United Way of Greater Atlanta's shared measure of child well-being across the region. Since 2017, the Index has helped drive investments and partnerships that create more opportunities for children and families to reach their full potential.

United Way of Greater Atlanta and key community partners custom-developed the Child Well-Being Index® to focus on factors tied to the most pressing community needs across Greater Atlanta.

Using 16 indicators across education, health, family stability, and economic well-being, the Index provides a neighborhood-level view of the factors shaping a child's ability to build a better future.

More than data, it helps communities identify where opportunities are expanding, where barriers remain, and where focused action can create lasting change.

Content

This document provides context on the Child Well-Being Index® and describes the indicators and methodological notes for further understanding. This document includes:

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Why it Matters

Every child deserves the opportunity to reach their full potential, regardless of their circumstance.

The Child Well-Being Index® gives communities, leaders, and funders a shared understanding of where support is needed most and how to best take action, together.

- Identify needs and opportunities: Reveal disparities and the factors shaping child well-being across neighborhoods.
- Guide action and investment: Help partners align resources, strategies, and solutions where they can have the greatest impact.
- Mobilize collective action: Build a shared case for action and bring communities together to expand opportunity for children and families.

Brief History of the Index

2017 - The first Child Well-Being Index®

Introduced a first-of-its-kind, shared way to understand how children are doing across Greater Atlanta and where support was needed most.

2019 - Looking beyond the numbers

Our second Index release helped communities better understand how access to opportunity can influence outcomes for children and families.

2023 - Connecting well-being & economic mobility

Updated Index data revealed that in 79 local neighborhoods, child well-being was not only low but declining, underscoring the critical link between well-being and long-term economic mobility.

2026 - Child Well-Being Index® 4.0

The next evolution of the Index. Bringing together data, community perspective, and action to help even more of our neighbors thrive across Greater Atlanta.

METHODOLOGY AND TECHNICAL NOTES

A child's future is shaped by more than one factor. The Child Well-Being Index® incorporates data from multiple sources, bringing together 16 socioeconomic indicators of child, family, and community well-being to provide a fuller picture of what our neighbors need most. The Index is updated triennially since it includes measures that are calculated in five-year aggregates of data.

This way, the Index helps communities better understand the building blocks of opportunity and what it takes to create a stronger Greater Atlanta for everyone.

Neighborhood Nexus is the primary data partner for the United Way of Greater Atlanta Child Well-Being Index®. In this role, they gather and maintain the data from various sources (GA Department of Education, Public Health Department, U.S. Census). This information is collected at the census-tract level. From there, the calculations are performed to create the categories.

List of Indicators

Child Measures

- **% Low Weight Births**
    - Definition: Percentage of babies born weighing less than 2,500 grams or 5 lbs. 8oz.
    - Source: Georgia Department of Health, Office of Health Indicators for Planning
    - Year(s): 2020-24
    - Notes: Data come from vital records geocoded by DPH.
- **% Students Exceeding 3rd Grade Reading Standards**
    - Definition: Percentage of 3rd graders scoring proficient or above in English language arts state standards.
    - Source: Student Records, Georgia Department of Education
    - Year(s): SY2025

    - Notes: Data come from student records geocoded by GaDOE; base year is SY2016 because the GA Milestones replaced which replaced the CRCT scores used in the original CWB.
- **% Students Exceeding 8th Grade Math Standards**
    - Definition: Percentage of 8th graders scoring proficient or above in math state standards.
    - Source: Student Records, Georgia Department of Education
    - Year(s): SY2025
    - Notes: Data come from student records geocoded by GaDOE; base year is SY2016 because the GA Milestones replaced which replaced the CRCT scores used in the original CWB.
- **Student Mobility Score**
    - Definition: Percentage of students withdrawing for any reason more than one month after the beginning of the school year or one month before the end of the school year.
    - Source: Student Records, Georgia Department of Education
    - Year(s): SY2025
    - Notes: This indicator was added to the CWB in 2022 as a measure of family stability. Data come from student records geocoded by GaDOE. Base year is SY2016 because that is the earliest year for which this indicator is available.
- **High School Graduation Rate**
    - Definition: Percent of students graduating from high school in four years.
    - Source: Graduation Rate, 4 Year Cohort, Governor's Office of Student Achievement; Student Records, Georgia Department of Education
    - Year(s): SY2025
    - Notes: The data for this indicator are not available in GaDOE student records, so this indicator is estimated as an attendance-weighted average of schools serving students residing in Tract/ZCTA using enrollment data found in student records.

- **% Opportunity Youth**
    - Definition: Percentage of youth ages 16-19 who are either in school or in the labor force.
    - Source: American Community Survey, Table B14005
    - Year(s): 2020-24
    - Notes: This indicator was added to the CWB in 2022 as a measure of career readiness, in conjunction with the removal of GaDOE's College and Career Ready Performance Index (CCRPI). CCRPI was dropped because it is not consistently measured over time.
- **% Children without Health Insurance**
    - Definition: Percentage of the population ages 0-18 without health insurance.
    - Source: American Community Survey, Table B18135
    - Year(s): 2020-24
    - Notes: In keeping with State Children's Health Insurance Program (SCHIP) eligibility rules, the ACS health insurance tables break at ages 0-18 instead of 0-17.

Family Measures

- **% Families Not Financially Stable**
    - Definition: Percentage of families earning less than 200% of the poverty line threshold.
    - Source: American Community Survey, Table B17026
    - Year(s): 2020-24
    - Notes: This measure is dependent on the size of the family.
- **Families with Housing Cost Burden**
    - Definition: Percentage of households paying 30% or more of their income on housing costs (measured as Gross Rent or Selected Monthly Owner Costs).
    - Source: American Community Survey, Tables B25091 (owners), B25070 (renters)
    - Year(s): 2020-24

- Notes: Under HUD guidelines, households paying 30% or more of their income on housing costs (measured as Gross Rent or Selected Monthly Owner Costs) are considered "Cost Burdened."

- **% Births to Mothers without a High School Diploma**
  - Definition: Percentage of all births to mothers with less than 12th grade education by place of residence.
  - Source: Georgia Department of Health, Office of Health Indicators for Planning
  - Year(s): 2020-24
  - Notes: Data come from vital records geocoded by DPH.

Community Measures

- **% Enrolled in Post-Secondary Education**
  - Definition: Percent of students enrolled in a post-secondary institution within 16 months of graduation.
  - Source: C11 Report, Governor's Office of Student Achievement; Student Records, Georgia Department of Education
  - Year(s): SY2025
  - Notes: This indicator is not available in GaDOE student records, so it is estimated as an attendance-weighted average of schools serving students residing in a Tract/ZCTA, using enrollment data from student records. SY2025 Release is for SY2023 graduates; there is a 2-year lag in the measure since students have 16 months from graduation to enroll in order to be counted.
- **% Adults without a High School Diploma**
  - Definition: Percentage of population 25 years and over without a High School Diploma.
  - Source: American Community Survey, Table B15003
  - Year(s): 2020-24
  - Notes: A GED is considered a High School diploma for the purposes of this measure.

- **% Adults without Health Insurance**
    - Definition: Percentage of population 19 and above without health insurance.
    - Source: American Community Survey, Table B18135
    - Year(s): 2020-24
    - Notes: In keeping with State Children's Health Insurance Program (SCHIP) eligibility rules, the health insurance tables break at ages 0-18 instead of ages 0-17. However, the breakpoint was 17 for the original CWB.
- **Unemployment Rate**
    - Definition: Percentage of the Civilian Labor Force without employment.
    - Source: American Community Survey, Table B23025
    - Year(s): 2020-24
    - Notes: Unemployment rate is measured as a percentage of the Civilian Labor Force.
- **% Access to Broadband Internet**
    - Definition: Percentage of households with access to broadband internet.
    - Source: American Community Survey, Table B28002
    - Year(s): 2020-24
    - Notes: This indicator was added to the CWB in 2022 as a measure of access to education and jobs. This indicator did not exist in the original CWB because it was added to the ACS survey instrument in 2013. The base for this indicator is the 2017 5-year release (data collected over 2013-17), because that is the first year the data table was available in the 5-year ACS.
- **Food Accessibility Score**
    - Definition: Percentage of population residing within an accessible distance to a SNAP-authorized grocery store.
    - Source: Neighborhood Nexus
    - Year(s): 2025
    - Notes: This indicator replaced a measure from USDA's Food Access Research Atlas, which has not been updated since 2019.

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ)

How often are the Child Well-Being Index® and its underlying data updated?

The Child Well-Being Index® is updated every three years. Because it draws from multiple public data sources, some indicators may reflect different reporting years. We use the most recent data available for each measure to provide the clearest picture of child well-being across Greater Atlanta.

Is the Child Well-Being Index® comparable to other indexes or datasets?

The Child Well-Being Index® was created specifically for Greater Atlanta and reflects local priorities identified through community input. While some measures may overlap with other indexes, the methodology and scoring are unique. The Index is best used to compare communities across the region and track progress over time.

Can I download the Index data for my own analysis?

Yes, you can download selected data from the platform for research, planning, and analysis. Available datasets may vary by geography and indicator, so be sure to review the data use information included with each download.

What was refined in the latest update of the Index?

The 2026 update includes improvements based on feedback from community members, researchers, practitioners, and local leaders. Updates include enhancements to data quality, indicator calculations, scoring methods, and platform features to make the Index more accurate, relevant, and actionable.

Where can I ask questions, report bugs, or share feedback about the Index platform?

We'd love to hear from you. If you have questions, encounter a technical issue, or want to share feedback, please contact the Child Well-Being Index® team. Your input helps us improve the platform and better serve the community.