

# Kid-Friendly Cities Report Card 2001

Our  
Children,  
Our  
Cities,  
Our  
Future

*Our children are our future.*

As often as that phrase is bandied about, it never loses its significance. The way we raise our children today will have a huge impact on the future of this planet and the human race.

It is in our best interest to ensure that children are growing up in good health and with the education and

no cities of that size, we included its largest city. (If the largest two cities were very close in size we included both.)

Cities were divided into three categories: Major Cities, which have metropolitan areas with populations of at least two million; Component Cities, which are suburbs of Major Cities; and Independent Cities, which are central cities of metropolitan areas of less than two million.

We graded and ranked these cities based on seven categories: Population Change, Health, Economics, Public Safety, Education, Environment, and Community Life.

One of our most important findings is that most cities in the United States are showing improvements in the area of health (*see box on back*). However, this does not mean that there is no room for further improvement.

In fact, even the cities that received an A+ in our study have their problems. For example, Portland has ample park space, healthy children, and clean air. However, less than a third of its housing is affordable for a median-income family. This means that average-to-poor families, who deserve a good life for their

children as much as anyone else, cannot take advantage of Portland's kid-friendliness as easily as other families.

Why did Portland get an A+ then? In order to compare cities, each grade and rank is relative; that is, we took into account all the other cities in Portland's category during the grading process. Therefore, Portland got an A+ in comparison to the rest of the Major Cities. This is not the same thing as having a perfect score on a test.

Most of our data was gathered from national agencies, both governmental and private, that are respected and reliable sources. These include the U.S. Census Bureau, the Environmental Protection Agency, the Bureau of Labor Statistics, the National Center for Education Statistics, the National Center for Health Statistics (part of the Centers for Disease Control), and the Federal Bureau of Investigation, as well as others. (Park information was obtained directly from cities' departments of parks and recreation.)

Our goal is always to present the best, most current data available

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## Top-ranked Cities:

Portland, OR (major)  
Burlington, VT (independent)  
Overland Park, KS (component)

## Bottom-ranked Cities:

Atlanta, GA (major)  
San Bernardino, CA (independent)  
Moreno Valley, CA (component)

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social support they need to grow into confident, intelligent leaders of tomorrow.

This is why every two years, ZPG publishes a report called the *Kid-Friendly Cities Report Card*. This is our attempt to make the nation's cities better for the 20 million children who live in them.

## The Details

The report looks at the country's 239 largest cities to assess how kid-friendly they are. Every city with a population of 100,000 or more was included in the study. If a state had

## Attention All Teachers!

Now you can use the data in the Report Card to teach innovative classroom lessons, as presented in *Living a Quality Future*. This teaching companion provides creative ways to evaluate the data and conclusions, explore community sustainability, and spark discussions on important issues. The teaching unit is available for \$10, plus shipping and handling. Call Publications at 1-800-POP-1956.

from sources that collect city-level data with the same standards and methods across the board. Otherwise, comparisons between cities will be meaningless.

### Limitations of Data

We are always working to improve our *Report Card*, attempting to locate more data sources, rethinking our grading process, and making sure the comparisons and analyses we offer are meaningful and helpful. However, our report should not be seen as the final word on the 'kid-friendliness' of a city. Since we cannot collect our own raw data, we have to rely on other agencies. This often limits our research.

For example, the Census is only conducted every ten years—most recently in 2000. However, most of the 2000 Census data had not

been released by the time we completed our 2001 report. This meant that we were faced with tough choices. Should we use ten-year-old, outdated city-level education statistics, or should we use the most current data available, which was state-level? We chose the latter, because ten years is a long time, and we did not think it was fair to rate current city schools on their performances ten years ago.

In addition, we made the difficult decision to leave out one of the most important indicators of children's well-being: the percentage of children in poverty. That statistic is only collected at the city level during the Census. Since the national children-in-poverty level has improved so

much since the early 1990s, we did not think it would be accurate to use 1990 city-level data in this report.

What is even more distressing than the fact that we could not use these indicators in our report is that this is the only data available for policymakers as well. This means that current education and poverty policies are often based on old city-level data, or more current state or national data.

### In Summary

We believe that our *Report Card* provides a good outline, which can be filled in with more data as well as with stories and anecdotes by and about the people who live in our cities. We high-

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### Criteria for "Kid-Friendliness"

- ✓ Low crime rates
- ✓ Economic & population stability
- ✓ Healthy births
- ✓ Fewer teen births
- ✓ Clean air
- ✓ Park space
- ✓ Library programs
- ✓ Small class sizes
- ✓ College preparedness

See the complete report at [www.KidFriendlyCities.org](http://www.KidFriendlyCities.org)

lighted a community project from each city as "extra-credit" to begin this filling-in process. These projects are all working on behalf of the children in their communities in different ways, from after-school homework help to teen pregnancy prevention. For every program we listed, there are hundreds more, full of individuals committed to making kids' lives better.

We hope that policymakers, city officials, and parents who read our report will be inspired to take action in the areas of their cities that need improvement, and to look at other cities in our report for ideas.

This year, we introduced a new, unranked category to our report: **Health Improvement**. Due to data availability, the cities we study and some of the criteria we use to grade and rank them change with each issue of the report. Therefore, our studies are not comparable over time. However, our new category offers a way to compare the health data for cities for the years 1990 and 1998. The result? We found that more than 70 percent of the cities in our study have improved in health since 1990.

The fact that a vast majority of our cities are improving is very good news in itself. However, we found out that there was even more cause for cheer—some of the cities that ranked the lowest in our study, such as Atlanta and Washington, D.C., have improved the *most* in the area of health.

However, this good news should be tempered by the reality that we still have a long way to go in the United States before we can pat ourselves unreservedly on the back. Our teen birth rate is more than five times higher than the average rate in Western Europe. And nationally, the percent of low birthweight births is on the rise.

**Prepared Fall 2001 by Erin Carmany, Communications Fellow.** Copies of the report are available from ZPG at 1-800-POP-1956. Publication list available upon request. ZPG is a national organization working to slow population growth and achieve a sustainable balance between the Earth's people and its resources.