

## Profile of Children and Families by Extension District

James Pease, Karen Mundy, and George McDowell

Over 1.7 million Virginians were under 18 years of age in 2000, an increase of 15.5 percent from the 1990 Census. As these young Virginians pass through the school system and enter the workforce, their parents and the public at large are concerned about issues such as the quality of their education, their health care, and their civic behavior. Programs for Virginia's youth and their families must be based on accurate profiles and critical needs assessment. Location, demographic and socio-economic characteristics, and educational opportunities and attainment are important factors that indicate program needs.

### Residence of Virginia Youth

Virginia's youth population is concentrated in the northern and eastern regions of the Commonwealth. More than 600,000 young Virginians (35 percent) live in the Northern Extension District (Figure 1). The youth population in this extension district has grown by more than 30 percent since 1990 (Figure 2). More than three-quarters of the population under 18 live in the North, Northeast, and Southeast Extension Districts. This burgeoning population poses major challenges for a wide-ranging set of issues such as daycare, education, and juvenile behavior. Will schools and daycare facilities have the capacity to support families needing their services at reasonable costs? Will unsocial juvenile behavior grow as an issue of public concern? The Central, Southwest, and Northwest Extension Districts have a much smaller population under 18, raising additional concerns of migration and workforce replacement. Will the regional economy generate sufficient jobs to support young people as they enter the workforce? Will their communities promise a quality of life that will entice young people to remain in the region?

Figure 1. Virginia Cooperative Extension Districts

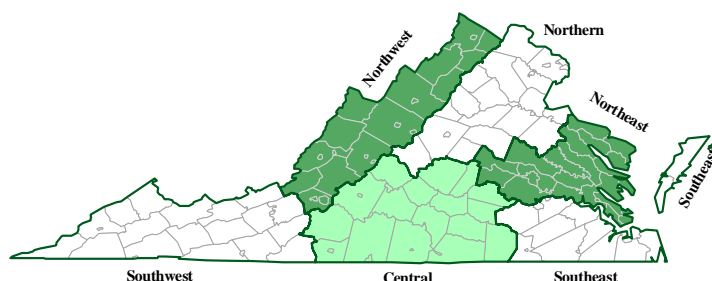
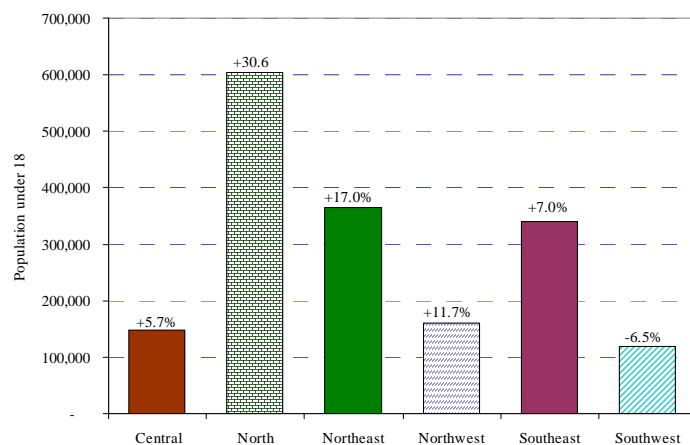


Figure 2. Growth in population under 18 years by Extension District, 1990 - 2000



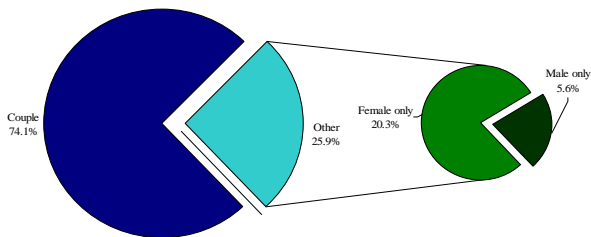
Source: US Census Bureau. P8, Sex by Age, SF 3. 2000 Census. And P013, Age, STF 3. 1990 Census. Online at <http://www.census.gov/>. Last accessed 1 Mar. 05.

James Pease is Associate Professor, Karen Mundy is REAP Communications Coordinator, and George McDowell is retired Professor, Department of Agricultural and Applied Economics.

## Family Structure

Family structure in Virginia and the U.S. is far less traditional than in past decades. Over one-quarter of Virginia heads of households with their own children under 18 are not married couples (Figure 3). Most such non-traditional households are headed by single mothers (19.1 percent), but more than one in twenty Virginia households with children under 18 is now headed by a single father. Childrearing by grandparents is a growing issue in Virginia. In 2000, grandparents were responsible for children under 18 in 56,428 households. Issues of daycare and parenting support are critical for these non-traditional families.

**Figure 3. Virginia heads of households with children under 18, 2000**



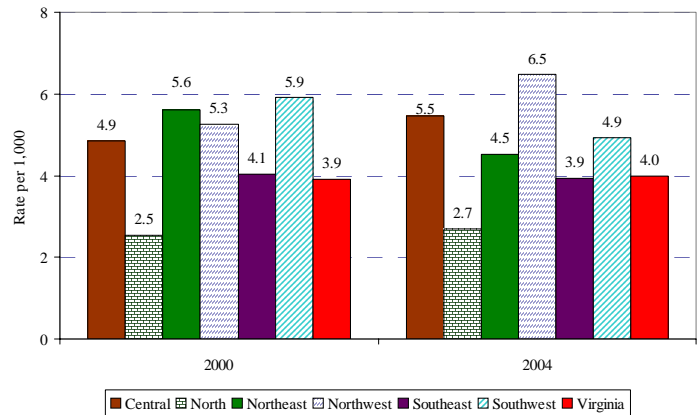
Source: US Census Bureau. "Data Set: Census 2000 Summary File 1 (SF 1) 100-Percent Data." On line at <http://www.census.gov>. Last accessed 1 Mar. 05.

## Foster Care

Children living in foster care are usually at risk. They may be children who have run away from home, who were abused or neglected, whose parents are absent, ill, or disabled, or who exhibit delinquent behavior.<sup>1</sup> The state incidence of foster care has remained relatively constant over the past few years at 4 children in foster care per 1,000 in the population (Figure 4). Among extension districts, the Northwest Extension District had the highest rate of children in foster care in 2004, and the Northern Extension District had the lowest rate. Foster care rates rose in four of the six extension districts, most significantly in the Northwest Extension District, but rates fell equally as much in the Northeast Extension District. Further study is required to determine which localities exhibit longer term trends in foster care rates. Are changes in family structure responsible or have private and public social programs affected foster care rates?

<sup>1</sup> Sue Badeau and Sarah Gesiriech, "A Child's Journey through the Child Welfare System," Pew Commission on Children in Foster Care. Online at <http://pewfostercare.org/>. Last accessed 19 Apr. 05.

**Figure 4. Children in foster care by Extension District, 2000 and 2004**

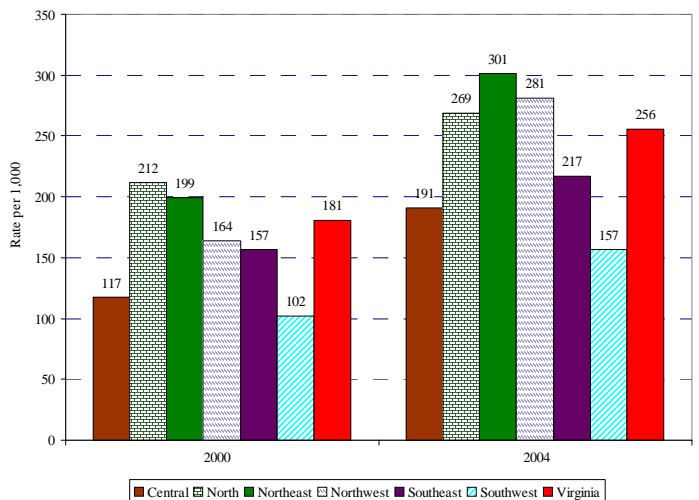


Source: The Annie E. Casey Foundation. Kids Count Data Book, online at <http://www.aecf.org/kidscount/databook>. Last accessed 1 Mar. 05.

## Availability of Childcare

Access to reliable and affordable childcare improves the well being of children, contributes to stability of families striving to earn incomes sufficient to meet family obligations, provides greater access of potential workers to the labor force, and contributes to economic development. Economic growth may also stimulate development of more childcare facilities. Virginia childcare slots per 1,000 children increased by 41 percent between 2000 and 2004. The Southwest, Central, Northwest, and Northeast Extension Districts increased childcare slots by more than 50 percent in only four years. But large disparities in childcare availability continue among extension districts (Figure 5). The Southwest and Central

**Figure 5. Childcare slots per 1,000 children by Extension District, 2000 and 2004**



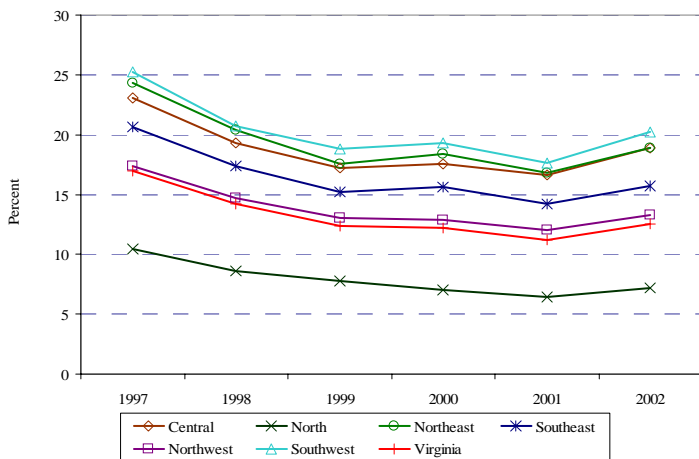
Source: The Annie E. Casey Foundation. Kids Count Data Book. <http://www.aecf.org/kidscount/databook>. Last accessed 1 Mar. 05.

Extension Districts have only 61 and 75 percent, respectively, of the state average childcare slots per thousand children.

## Poverty

The proportion of the population under 18 years living below the poverty level has decreased by 16.2 percent across the U.S. since the late 1990s, while in Virginia, this decline was 26.5 percent. Across extension districts, poverty rates for children declined through 2001, but rose in 2002 (Figure 6). The Northern District has much lower youth poverty rates than any other extension district, while approximately one child in five in the Central, Southwest, and Northeast Extension Districts lives in poverty. Generally good economic conditions during the period are related to decreased poverty rates through 2001; the stock market drop in 2001 is most likely related to increased rates. Moving children out of poverty requires rising family incomes, and improved incomes depend on well-paying jobs.

**Figure 6 Population under 18 living in or below poverty level by Extension District, 1997 – 2002**



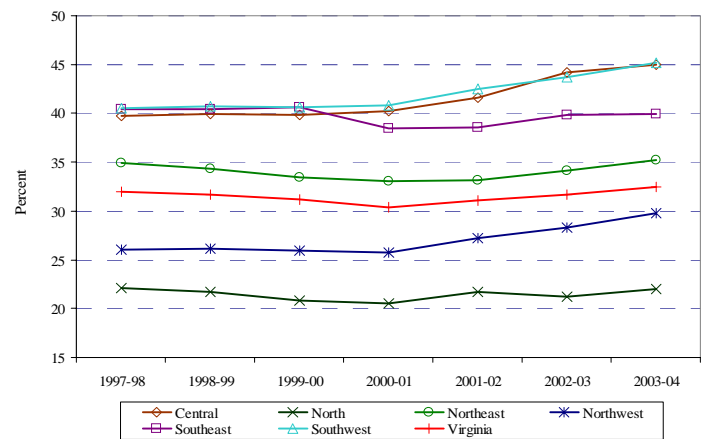
Source: US Census Bureau. Small Area Income & Poverty Estimates Annual Estimates for States, Counties & School Districts, online at [www.census.gov/hhes/www/saie/country.html](http://www.census.gov/hhes/www/saie/country.html). Last accessed 7 Feb 2005

## Free and Reduced Price Lunch

Children are eligible for free lunches if their family's income is less than 130 percent of the government-established poverty level or reduced price lunches if the family's income is between 130 and 185 percent of that level. While the situation of children living in poverty seems to have improved, the proportion of school children qualifying for free or subsidized school lunches has increased (Figure 7). If the poverty income level has remained unchanged, the school lunch statistics suggest that incomes of many families remain dangerously close to the poverty income level. In the Southwest and Central Extension Districts, 45 percent of

children qualified for free or subsidized school lunches in 2003-04. In the same school year, the proportion of children in the Northern Extension District who qualified was only half as many as that of the Southwest and Central Extension Districts. The proportion of qualifying children has tended to rise since 2000-01 in all extension districts except the Southeast Extension District. The Central, Southwest, and Northwest Extension Districts showed increases of approximately 5 percent of all school children qualifying for free or reduced price lunches since 2000-01.

**Figure 7. School children receiving free or reduced priced meals by Extension District, 1997-2004.**



Source: Virginia Department of Education. Data and Publications, School Nutrition. Various years. Online at <http://www.pen.k12.va.us/VDOE/Finance/Nutrition/statistics.html>. Last accessed 1 Mar. 05.

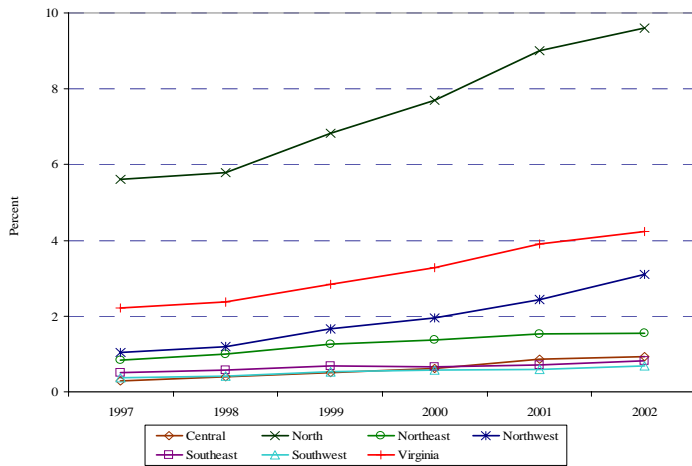
## Limited English Language

Children of new immigrants and children with limited English ability face considerable obstacles to success in the school system. In the Southwest, Southeast, and Central Extension Districts, less than 1 percent of students have limited English (Figure 8). In extension districts with abundant economic opportunities and hence more in-migration from across the U.S. and foreign countries, larger numbers of school children have limited English. The proportion of students in the Northern Extension District with limited English ability is climbing rapidly. In 2002, it reached nearly 10 percent of the school population (over 39,000 students). The Northwest Extension District has also seen an increase in students with limited English, albeit on a smaller scale than the Northern Extension District.

## School Dropouts

Besides academic programs, other programs or activities that keep youth in school may make significant differences in

**Figure 8. School students with limited English proficiency by Extension District, 1997 - 2002**

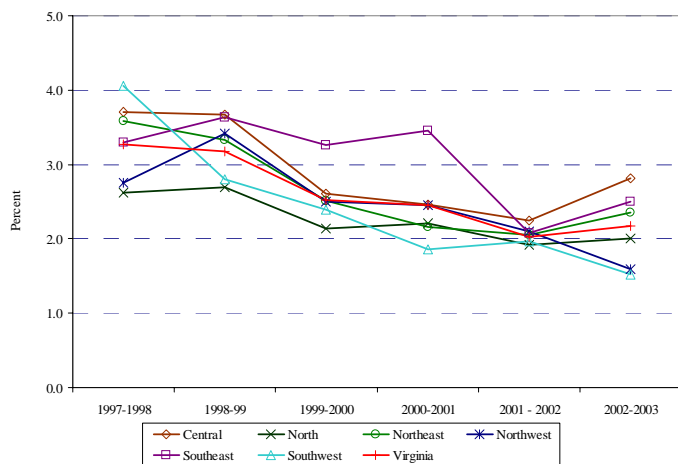


Source: Virginia Department of Education Data and Publications. Limited English Proficiency September 30. Various years. Online at [http://www.pen.k12.va.us/VDOE/Publications/rep\\_page.htm](http://www.pen.k12.va.us/VDOE/Publications/rep_page.htm). Accessed 2 Mar. 05.

their lives. An important indicator of the success of such efforts is the school dropout rate. Two measures are presented which give contradictory implications, apparently because of differences in the definition of “school dropout.”

Under the state government definition, the dropout rate declined from the 1997-98 through the 2001-02 school years and increased only slightly in 2002-03 (Figure 9). Improvements in the dropout rate were quite consistent across extension districts, although the dropout rate increased in all districts except the Southwest and Northwest during 2002-03. Only the Central Extension District rate was above

**Figure 9. School Drop-out Rates, 1997-98 to 2002-03 school years by Extension District**



Source: Virginia Department of Education Data and Publications. Annual Report of the Superintendent. Various years. Online at [http://www.pen.k12.va.us/VDOE/Publications/rep\\_page.htm](http://www.pen.k12.va.us/VDOE/Publications/rep_page.htm). Last accessed 2 Mar. 05.

2.5 percent in 2002-03. Improvements were most dramatic in Southwest Extension District, which saw its dropout rate plummet from over 4.0 percent in 1997-98 to only 1.5 percent in 2002-03. The implication is that new efforts to reduce dropout rates are in action in many schools across the Commonwealth.

Different conclusions would be drawn from the Annie E. Casey Foundation comparing state dropout rates defined as the proportion of the 16 to 19 age population that are not in school and have not graduated.<sup>2</sup> Under this definition, Virginia’s dropout rate averaged 8 percent in 1995-97, and remained at 8 percent in 2000-02, when Virginia tied for 5<sup>th</sup> lowest dropout rate in the U.S. Since this definition is cumulative over the 16 to 19 age population, it can be expected to be higher than the Virginia Department of Education’s indicators, but the puzzling element is the improvement shown in the state data, but not in the national data.

### Virginia Children, Youth, and Families in Perspective

This profile highlights some important issues affecting youth and families. Many other critical issues should be examined, but little data are available, especially over time, to determine if public perception of these issues is in accord with the facts. One such issue for which little analytical data are available, but that is an overriding public concern, is drug use among youth. Another issue is the impact of nontraditional family structures, with heads of households such as single-parents or grandparents, on children’s behavior, school performance, and other areas of their lives. Issues such as teen pregnancies and youth health care have not been addressed because of limited data. Improved data collection and analysis could contribute to more effective and more informed discussions of youth issues.

<sup>2</sup> The Annie E. Casey Foundation. The Kids Count Data Book. Online at [www.aecf.org/kidscount/databook/rawdata/auxiliary1.pdf](http://www.aecf.org/kidscount/databook/rawdata/auxiliary1.pdf). Last accessed Feb. 28, 2005

## Notices

**\*\*Please** notify the REAP office if your address changes or if you know of anyone who would like to be added to our mailing list.

**\*\*How to reach us:** REAP, Department of Agricultural and Applied Economics 0401, Virginia Tech, Blacksburg, VA 24061; by phone: (540) 231-9443; by email: [reap01@vt.edu](mailto:reap01@vt.edu); or on the web at <http://www.reap.vt.edu/>

Printed on recycled paper  
VT/001/0405/3/5/252590



Address Service Requested

Virginia Polytechnic Institute  
and State University  
Department of Agricultural and  
Applied Economics 0401  
Blacksburg, VA 24061

**HORIZONS**

Non-Profit Org.  
U.S. Postage  
PAID  
Blacksburg, VA 24060  
Permit No. 28