

Council on Children & Families

A Research Brief on Child Well-being

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PUTTING IT ALL TOGETHER —

HIGH NEED COMMUNITIES, NEW YORK STATE SCHOOL DISTRICTS & QUALITYSTARSNY

It is well-established that children's well-being can be compromised by a range of risk factors that may be associated with children, their families, the quality of schools they attend and the communities in which they live (1-15). Identifying communities where children are disproportionately exposed to factors that can compromise their development allows us to align and mobilize resources available through various service systems that promote the well-being of young children. What follows is a description of the method used to identify high need school districts in New York state, with particular emphasis on risk factors that influence children from birth to age 5.

Approach Used to Identify High Need Communities

The approach described here is an adaptation of an earlier Council brief that used 20 indicators to examine risks at the town and city level. This brief uses 12 indicators and examines risk at the school district level. The original 20 indicators were reviewed and assessed for duplications. Indicators that tended to measure similar concepts (e.g., poverty) were excluded.

This work is based on the method developed for the needs assessment of the New York State Affordable Care Act Maternal, Infant and Early Childhood Home Visiting Program (HVP). The HVP needs assessment method has many advantages and direct applications for early learning initiatives. For instance, the HVP method used a comprehensive view of child development, identifying primarily risk factors that spanned from prenatal development through age five. These factors were used since it is well-established that this developmental period is instrumental in promoting the physical, social, emotional and cognitive skills essential for children to be able to thrive in school and beyond. Second, the approach was driven by a public health perspective that recognizes the role multiple service systems play in promoting healthy child development. As a result of this approach, the identification of high need areas was informed by data from the fields of health, education, child welfare, and labor. Last, the approach was sensitive to the diverse urban and rural communities across New York state. This was achieved by examining risk factors in terms of their severity (i.e., prevalence) and burden (i.e., number of individuals impacted).

Step 1: Identification of risk factors

A total of 12 risk factors empirically associated with healthy child development and school readiness were compiled. Healthy child development occurs within the broad parameters of a

“neighborhood” so the indicators selected incorporated risk factors at the child, family, school and community level. Whenever possible, data were geocoded to the school district level. Table 1 depicts the data used.

FOCUS	INDICATOR	DATA SOURCE	LEVEL OF DATA
Child	Premature births	NYS Dept. of Health NYC DOH	School District
	Percent of women without prenatal care	NYS DOH & NYC DOH	School District
	Teen pregnancy rate	NYS DOH & NYC DOH	School District
	Students in 4410 programs	SED	School District
Family	Free and reduced price lunch	SED	School District
	Homeless children 0-5	Estimate of population ¹	School District
	Children 0-5 in CPS cases	OCFS	School District
	Children 0-5 in migrant programs	Migrant Statewide Support Services Program	County
School	Fourth grade students not scoring at proficient level	SED	School District
	Children in LEP programs	SED	School District
	Non-graduating students	SED	School District
Community	Unemployment rate	DOL	County

¹ Used method recommended by the National Center of Family Homelessness

Step 2: Define “community”

The next step was to define what constituted a community. Much of the data are easily accessible at the county or school district level. It was decided that all data would be presented at the school district level since data at this level:

- offered a closer look than data at the county level;
- were more stable than lower levels of data; and,
- had a direct application for planning and service delivery.

It was also noted that “community” would refer to the school districts within specific regions of the state. Rather than look at all school districts across the entire state, we decided to look at school districts within each of the QualitystarsNY regions. This was done to assist with planning.

Step 3: Convert data to a common geographic level

Most data were collected at the individual level but typically the information is reported at the county and zip code level. In order to get all data to the school district level, individual level data were geocoded and aggregated by school district. When data were not available at the individual level and unable to be geocoded, they were deconstructed into U.S. Census block areas then reconstructed to reflect school districts.

Step 4: Calculate an overall risk measure for each community

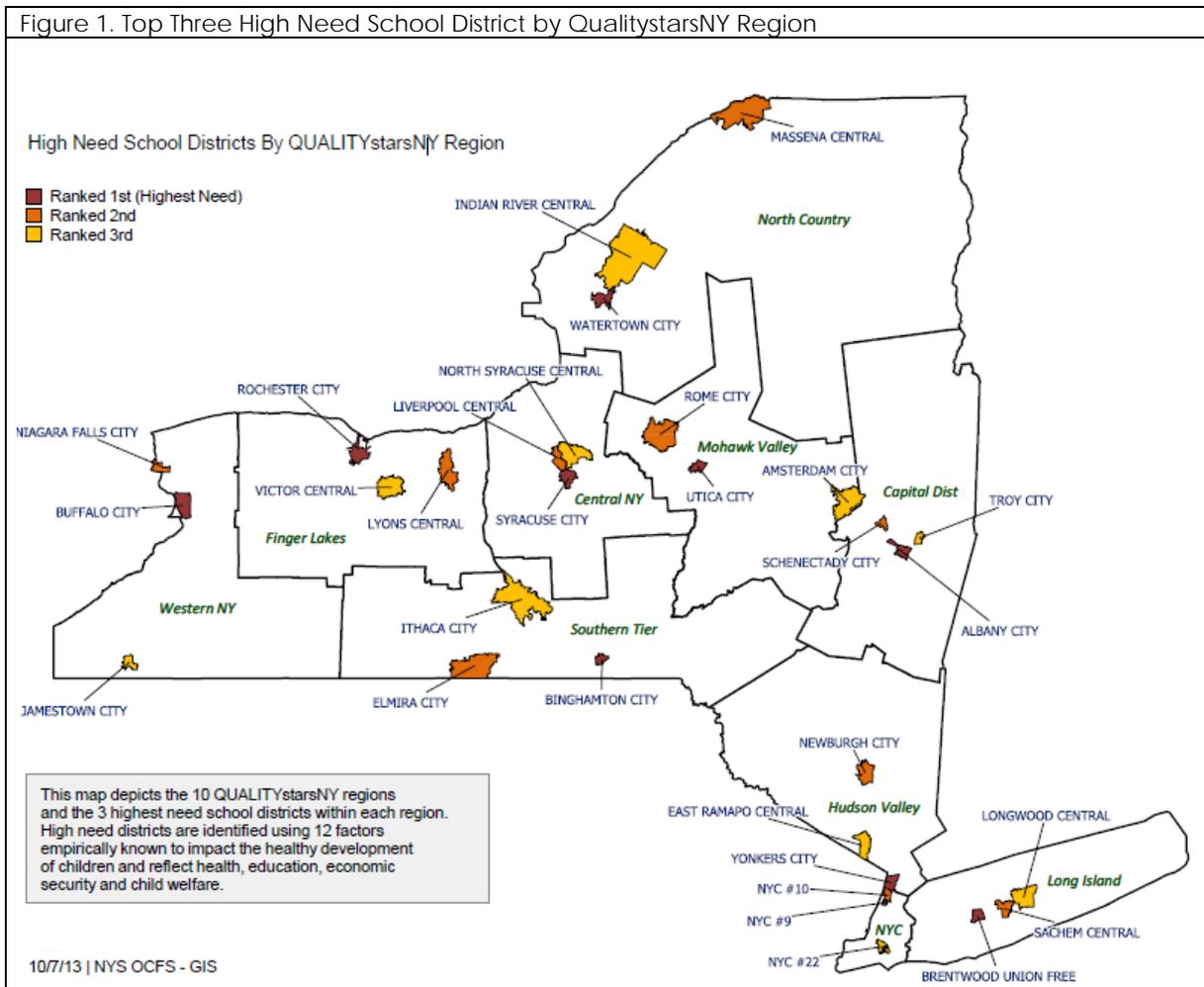
The 12 indicators were measured using various scales. Additionally, data were represented in terms of numbers and rates. Therefore, each indicator was converted to a common metric (i.e., Z-score). Since some geographic areas had low numbers, a weighted standard deviation was calculated for each of the indicators and used to develop the Z-scores. The Z-scores (12 burden and 12 severity

scores for each school district) were averaged and the result was a single risk measure for each district. This risk measure reflected the *collective cross-system risk* the school districts within a QualitystarsNY region. Communities with Z-scores above the mean (i.e., a value greater than 0) were considered high need.

Mapping High Need Communities with Community Assets

The three school districts from each QualitystarsNY region that had the high needs score were mapped. The result is presented in Figure 1. A mapping approach is helpful since it allows planners to add layers of community assets (e.g., early learning programs, home visiting programs, migrant outreach centers, and Early Intervention providers) as points to the map. This could provide a view of high need communities but also instruct planners regarding the potential resources and assets within a given geographic area that could support early childhood development.

Figure 1. Top Three High Need School District by QualitystarsNY Region



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