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Montgomery ranks low on child well-being report

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By some indicators, black children in Montgomery County face a steeper climb to a good life than almost anywhere else in Alabama.

While Autauga and Elmore counties each rank in the upper third of the state's counties on overall child welfare, Montgomery ranks 56th in the 2008 Alabama Kids Count Data Book. The annual report, which profiles the well-being of children in each of the state's 67 counties, is being released today by VOICES for Alabama's Children.

The report comprises an evaluation of health, safety, education and economic security for all Alabama children, comparing data from 2000 and 2006.

Linda Tilly, executive director of VOICES for Alabama's Children, said Wednesday, "The information provided by the Kids Count Data Book is a tremendous resource for communities and policy makers."

The report, Tilly said, was revised after the passage of the Alabama Juvenile Justice Act of 2008, which was intended to explore alternatives to incarceration of youth offenders.

"For the first time we are publishing information comparing the numbers and percent of youth committed to (Department of Youth Services) for violent, nonviolent and weapons related offenses," Tilly said. According to the report, the largest proportion of youth in each county who are committed to DYS are nonviolent offenders.

Another first for the report is dissection of poverty numbers by race. Black children are four times more likely than white children to live in poverty in the state.

"Since 1985, racial and ethnic differences among African-American, white and Hispanic children have been narrowing overall, but still persist. If we seek to close the gaps we must understand the problem and who is most affected," the report states.

The national Kids Count Data Book, which was released in June by the Annie E. Casey Foundation, ranked Alabama 47th in the nation in overall child well-being.
