

Black Belt region risky for children

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The map of risks for children in Alabama, released today by Voices for Alabama's Children, shows a swath of misery across the lower third of the state that defines the Black Belt region.

These historically disadvantaged counties have higher rates of poverty, single-parent families and infant mortality, lower high school graduation rates and less access to adequate health care and more violent juvenile crime.

The deeper you dig into the numbers, the bleaker the picture looks. The trends are not all bad, however. The number of births to unmarried teens is declining and the rate of infant mortality is dropping.

Making real headway, however, will require some dramatic changes that break the web of poverty, underachievement and despair.

The annual Kids Count assessment is important because it provides a fact-based portrait of the challenges that face not only the Black Belt and West Alabama, but all of the state.

Improving education and graduation rates may offer our best opportunity to paint a brighter picture for the future.