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## Welcome

Welcome to the latest quarterly issue of Bringing Work to Life. We are glad that our new book, *How to Build a Nontraditional Career Path: Embracing Economic Disruption*, was recently published by Praeger. Our book describes when and how to create an inspiring and practical nontraditional career path from more than one source of income: <http://www.abc-clio.com/product.aspx?isbn=9781440831584>

It complements our three existing books:

*Business Behaving Well: Social Responsibility, from Learning to Doing*, (Potomac Books, Inc., 2013) that provides a rationale and roadmap for organizations to incorporate socially responsible practices, building on principles of social justice:

<http://www.potomacbooksinc.com/Books/BookDetail.aspx?productID=293765>

*Building Workforce Strength: Creating Value through Workforce and Career Development* (Praeger, 2010) that describes the application of workforce and career development principles and practices to strengthen organizations:

<http://www.abc-clio.com/ABC-CLIOCorporate/product.aspx?pc=C3236C>

and *Affiliation in the Workplace: Value Creation in the New Organization* (Praeger, 2003) that describes leadership approaches to integrate the needs of the individual with the needs of the organization for the benefit of both:

<http://www.abc-clio.com/product.aspx?isbn=9781567204360>

This newsletter contains two articles: Differentiation in a Nontraditional Career, and Children's Well-Being.

## Differentiation in a Nontraditional Career

It seemed like a daunting prospect. Respond to a request for a proposal to provide



Ron Elsdon, Ph.D., is founder of *Elsdon Organizational Renewal*, which focuses on supporting organizations enhance effectiveness through revitalized workforce relationships and leadership practices. Prior to establishing his practice, Ron held senior leadership positions at diverse organizations. Ron is also co-founder of New Beginnings Career and College Guidance, which provides caring and personalized help to individuals and families in career guidance, coaching and college planning.

Ron is author of *How to Build a Nontraditional Career Path: Embracing Economic Disruption*, which describes when and how to create an inspiring and practical nontraditional career path from more than one source of income; editor of *Business Behaving Well: Social Responsibility, from Learning to Doing*, which provides a rationale and roadmap for organizations to incorporate

career services at multiple locations around the country for a large organization with many thousands of employees and the resources to purchase such services from any provider, including sophisticated, multinational corporations. How could we, small and emerging, possibly be considered for such a contract, given the likely competition? As it turned out, after a competitive evaluation process, we were awarded the contract. I am so thankful for this, and for being able to deliver services for many years. We were buoyed as a team by the knowledge that we were helping people make better lives each day. How did this fledgling operation of ours take on giants successfully? Why were we selected? We learned afterwards that our proposal best met our customer's service needs and was more cost effective. We were able to differentiate our offering.

Success in a nontraditional career is based on creating a differentiated approach with specialized, distinctive products or services. This is central both to an effective initial career launch and for ongoing sustainability. It is a major reason why a customer will make a purchase and it is the basis for a viable financial position. Moreover, sustainable differentiation means that a customer would incur significant switching costs moving away from your product or service. Differentiation is grounded in the concept of abundance, since a differentiated offering creates its own market space rather than operating in an arena of scarcity, where an increase in demand for one person's offering leads to a decrease in demand for others. This also reframes the concept of competition from a tug-of-war over finite opportunities to the creation of new opportunities. It doesn't mean that competing products or services are absent; it just means that offerings are distinct in customers' eyes. An understanding of competition is necessary to create and sustain differentiation. Competition can come from other organizations or individuals with similar offerings, it can come from customers considering backward integration, it can come from new developments that might render products or services obsolete, and it can come from new geographic regions with, for example, a lower cost structure.

Sometimes differentiation is subtle. An analogy is our perception and communication of our own skills. Sometimes individual clients I work with are unaware of their special and distinct capabilities, the uniqueness that they bring and that we all possess. This realization of distinctiveness can surface with a process of exploration and discussion. An analogy on an organizational level is organizational culture, which may seem easy to replicate but is actually difficult to copy. Southwest Airlines, for example, has a culture focused on integrity and on valuing employees and customers, built on many small reinforcing actions each day. Specialized and distinctive organizational presence is hard to duplicate, as are the subtle and special attributes we each bring to a nontraditional career.

When components in a nontraditional career are linked by a common thread, we can seek differentiation through this core connecting thread. In addition, differentiation is accessible through the specific attributes of individual career components. When there is little or no linkage among the career components, differentiation needs to be considered separately for each component, since each competes in a separate arena. Knowing that sources of differentiation may be addressed differently according to whether components in our nontraditional career are linked or not, we can identify a number of potential sources. We examine the following ten sources of differentiation in *How to Build a Nontraditional Career Path*:

socially responsible practices, building on real-world examples from contributing authors, and principles of social justice; editor of *Building Workforce Strength: Creating Value through Workforce and Career Development*, a book that describes the application of workforce and career development principles and practices to strengthen organizations; and author of *Affiliation in the Workplace: Value Creation in the New Organization*, a book describing leadership approaches to integrate the needs of the individual with the needs of the organization for the benefit of both. Ron holds a Ph.D. from Cambridge University in chemical engineering, an M.A. from John F. Kennedy University in career development and a first class honors degree from Leeds University in chemical engineering. With his co-author he was awarded the Walker Prize by the Human Resource Planning Society for the paper that best advances state-of-the-art thinking or practices in human resources.

- Distinct product or service offering
- Operational excellence
- Focused, passionate engagement and commitment
- Team capability
- Nature, depth, and longevity of customer relationships
- Ability to tailor to customer needs
- Flexibility
- Speed
- Cost
- Component linkages

How can we protect and sustain such differentiation? Let me suggest the following:

- Establish and integrate more than one source of differentiation.
  - The more sources of differentiation, and the more complex their interaction, the more difficult it will be for others to imitate. Combining distinctive product or service offerings with cost advantages, speed of response, and deep customer relationships will be stronger and longer lasting than any one of these separately.
- Emphasize continuous development and innovation as a means of revitalizing sources of differentiation.
  - Invest time and resources into continuously identifying new areas of client interest and into creating new content with offerings tailored accordingly.
- Use measurement to inform and refine service or product delivery.
  - Gather and aggregate regular feedback from clients receiving services or products about their experiences and their resulting actions. This provides ongoing learning and a basis for strengthening and refining service or product delivery.
- Emphasize frequent communication of value contribution to customers to underline the nature, extent, and attributes of differentiated products or services.
  - Create a reporting framework for customers that offers insights into the reception of delivered services or products and their value contribution.

Taking such steps helps ensure that differentiation isn't a fleeting concept, rather that it becomes embedded in a nontraditional career, constantly revitalizing both the career path and the client and customer relationships that help sustain its vitality.

Parts of this article are extracted from *How to Build a Nontraditional Career Path: Embracing Economic Disruption*, by Ron Elsdon (Praeger, 2014).

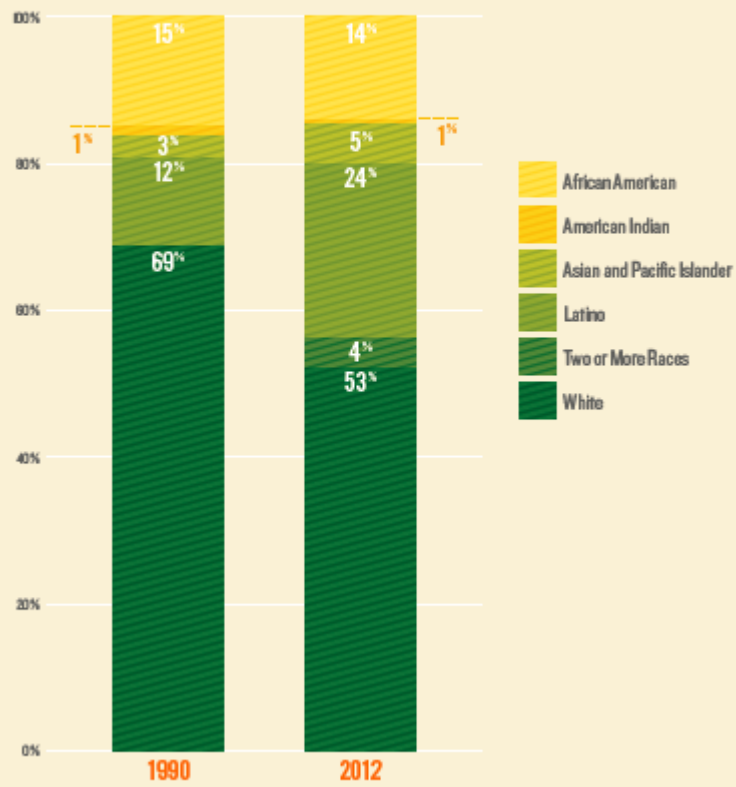
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## Children's Well-Being

With one indicator of a society's health being how it treats its most vulnerable members, we will look at some measures that show how we are treating a particularly vulnerable and important group, our children. The next figure shows momentous changes in the ethnic diversity of our children in the United States:

FIGURE I

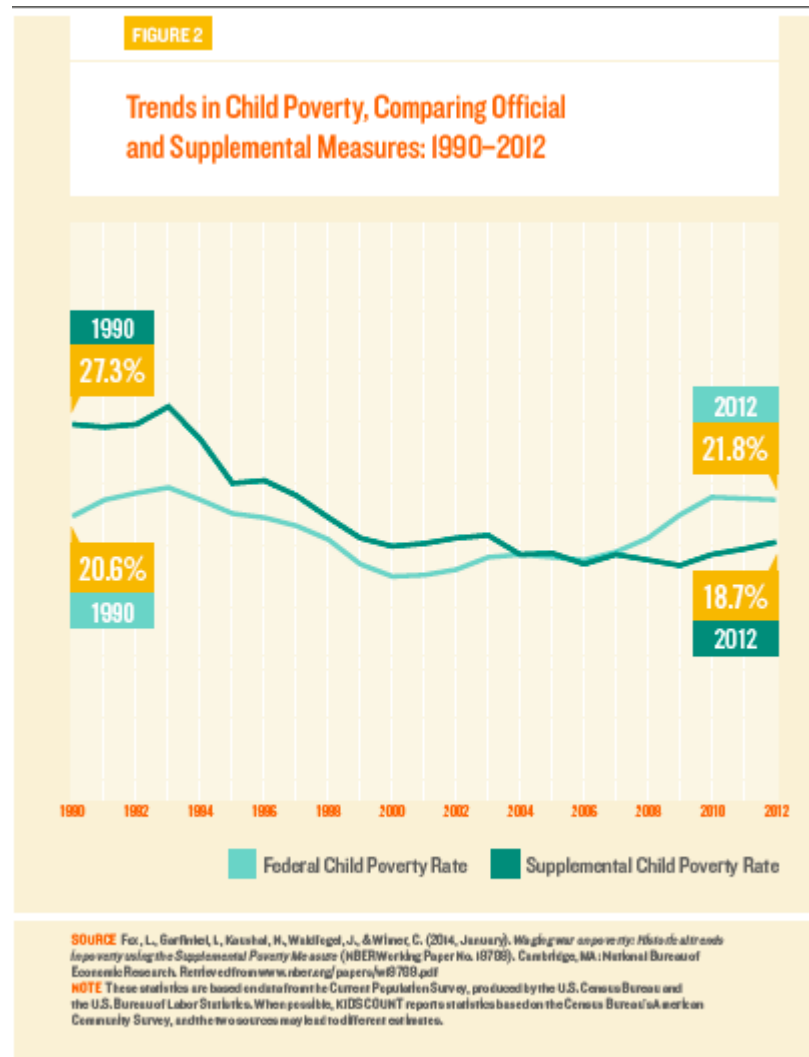
### Child Population by Race and Ethnicity: 1990 and 2012



SOURCE: Population Reference Bureau's analysis of U.S. Census Bureau, National Population Estimates.

Source: Kids Count Data Book, 2014, State Trends in Child Well-Being, The Annie E. Casey Foundation.

It is greatly concerning that still today about one in five of our children live in poverty as shown in the next figure:

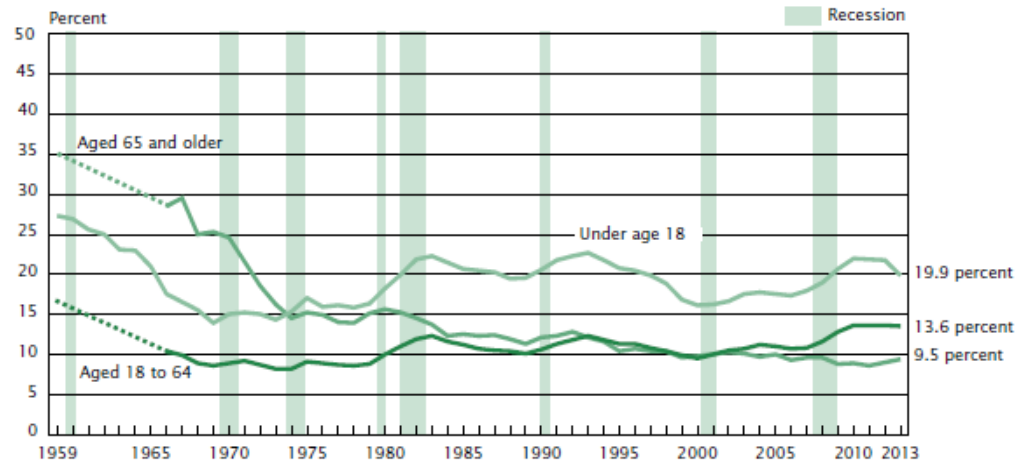


Source: Kids Count Data Book, 2014, State Trends in Child Well-Being, The Annie E. Casey Foundation.

We can also see the significant contribution of anti-poverty initiatives. The supplemental measure of poverty trends down over time. This supplemental measure incorporates expenses and in-kind income more broadly than the traditional federal measure.

Now considering recent changes, it is good to see in the next figure that the federal child poverty rate fell in 2013, though this is from a high peak during the recent recession. The federal child poverty rate of 19.9% in 2013 is still of great concern. It significantly exceeds the poverty rate of other age groups:

Figure 5.  
Poverty Rates by Age: 1959 to 2013

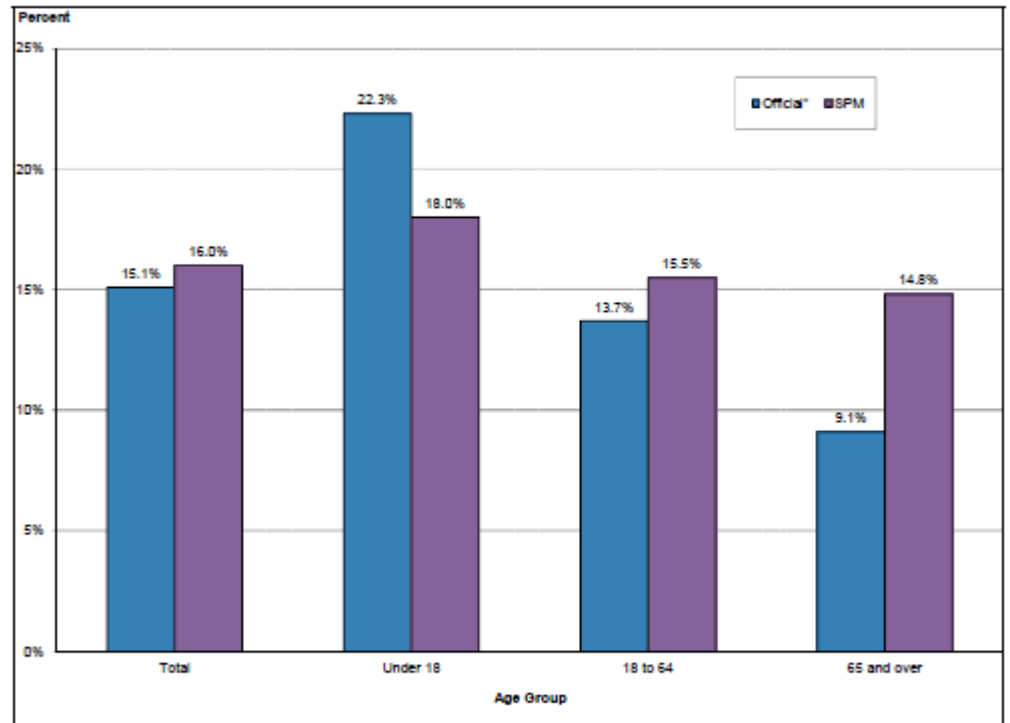


Note: The data points are placed at the midpoints of the respective years. Data for people aged 18 to 64 and 65 and older are not available from 1960 to 1965. For information on recessions, see Appendix A. For information on confidentiality protection, sampling error, nonsampling error, and definitions, see <[ftp://ftp2.census.gov/programs-surveys/cps/techdocs/cpsmar14.pdf](http://ftp2.census.gov/programs-surveys/cps/techdocs/cpsmar14.pdf)>.  
Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Current Population Survey, 1960 to 2014 Annual Social and Economic Supplements.

Source: Income and Poverty in the United States: 2013, U.S. Census Bureau, September 2014.

A notable success shown in this figure is the on-going reduction in federal poverty rates for those aged 65 and older to 9.5% in 2013, largely due to Medicare and social security. This is in contrast to child federal poverty rates, which increased significantly in the 1980s, declined in the 1990s, and then increased again to prior high levels in the 2000s. The disparity in poverty levels between children and those aged 65 and over is less marked when the supplemental poverty measure (SPM) is used. Among other factors the SPM incorporates medical costs (higher for the older group), and in-kind benefits such as supplemental nutrition assistance which favor children. The effect of using the SPM rather than the official poverty measure is shown in the following figure:

**Figure 9. Poverty Rates Under the "Official"\* and Research Supplemental Poverty Measures, by Age: 2012**  
(Percent poor)



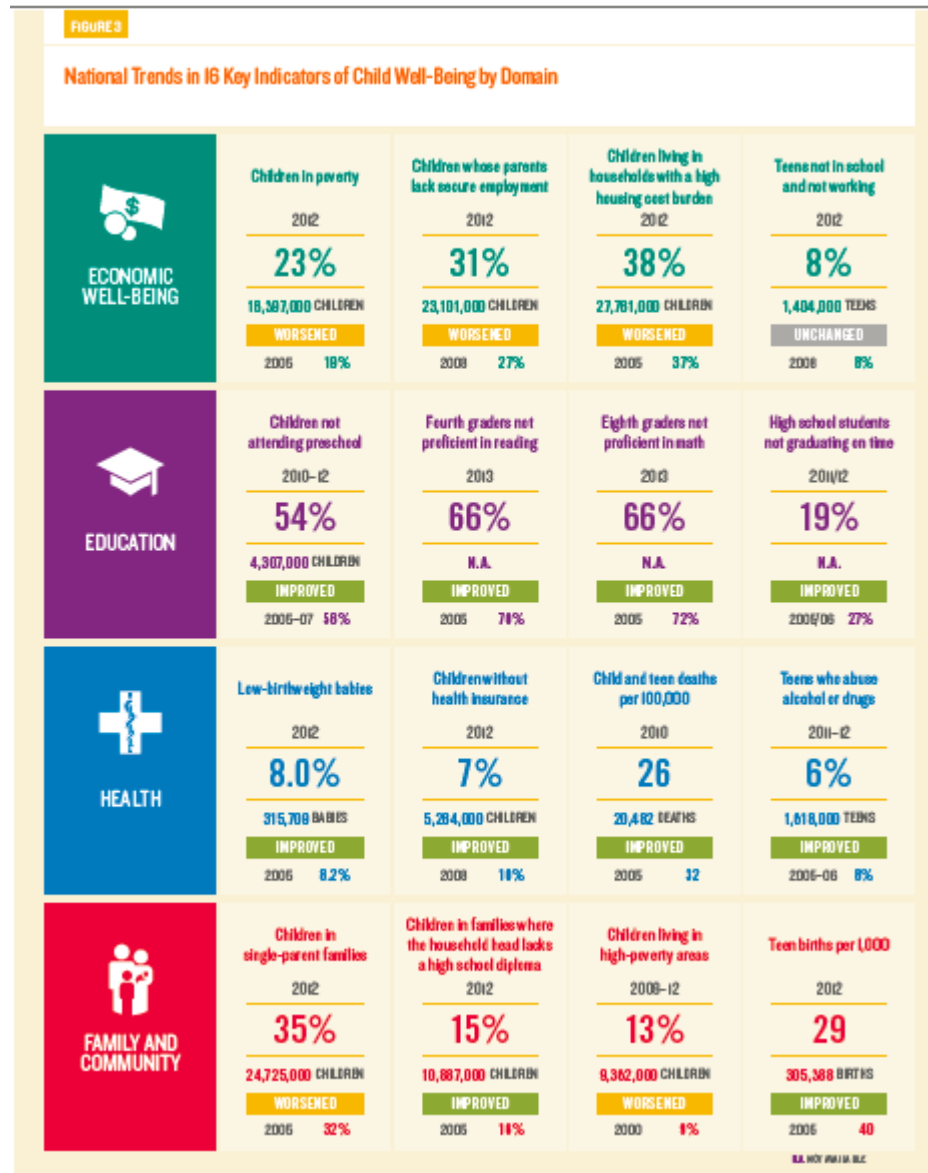
Source: Figure prepared by the Congressional Research Service (CRS), based on Kathleen Short, *The Research SUPPLEMENTAL POVERTY MEASURE: 2012*, U.S. Census Bureau, P60-247, Washington, DC, November 2013 <http://www.census.gov/prod/2013pubs/p60-247.pdf>.

\* Differs from published "official" poverty rates as unrelated individuals under age 15 are included in the universe.

Source: Congressional Research Service Report for Congress, *Poverty in the United States: 2013*, September 25, 2014.

Sixteen key indicators of child well-being confirm that we have been losing ground on the economic front, though it is good to see progress on the education and healthcare fronts as shown in the next figure:

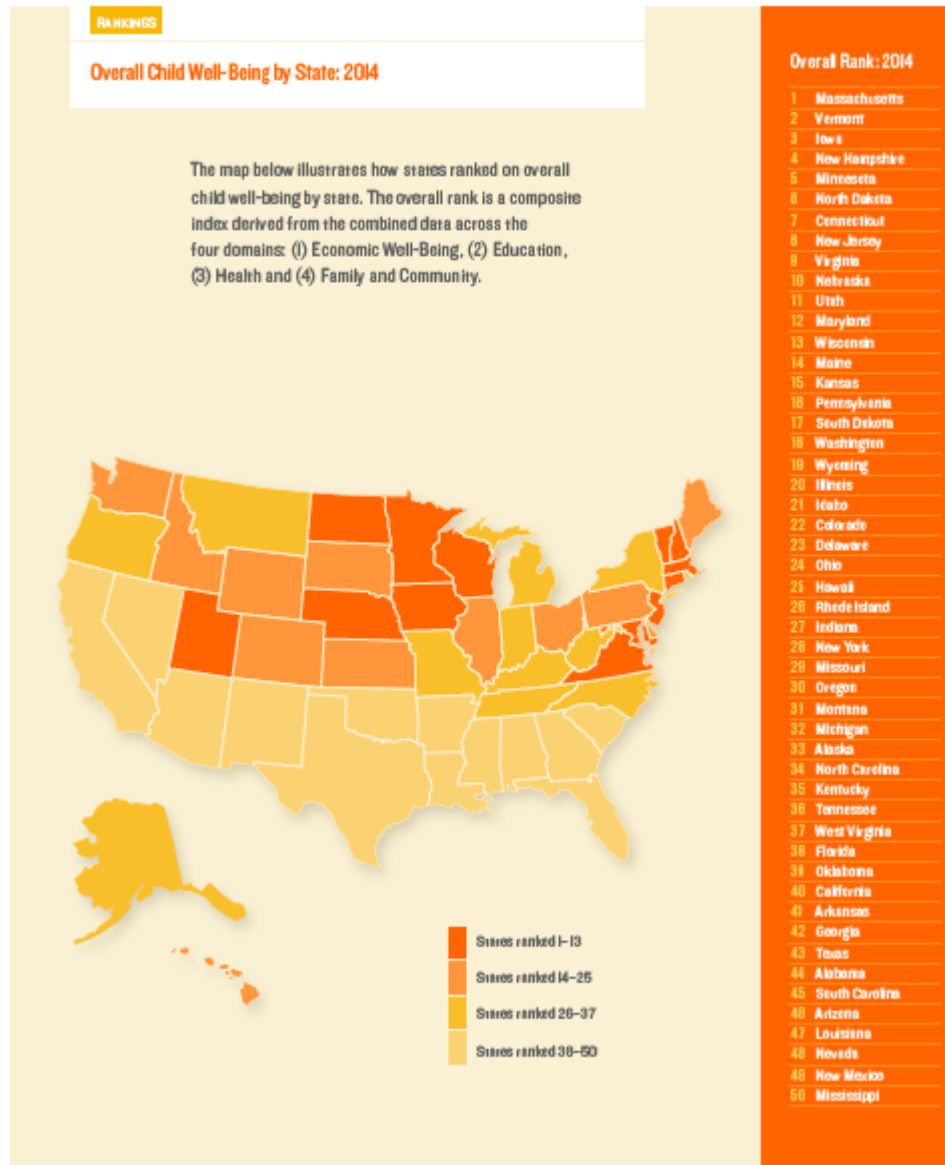




Source: Kids Count Data Book, 2014, State Trends in Child Well-Being, The Annie E. Casey Foundation.

Not surprisingly there are wide variations by state, from Massachusetts with the greatest child well-being, to Mississippi with the lowest child well-being as shown in the next figure:

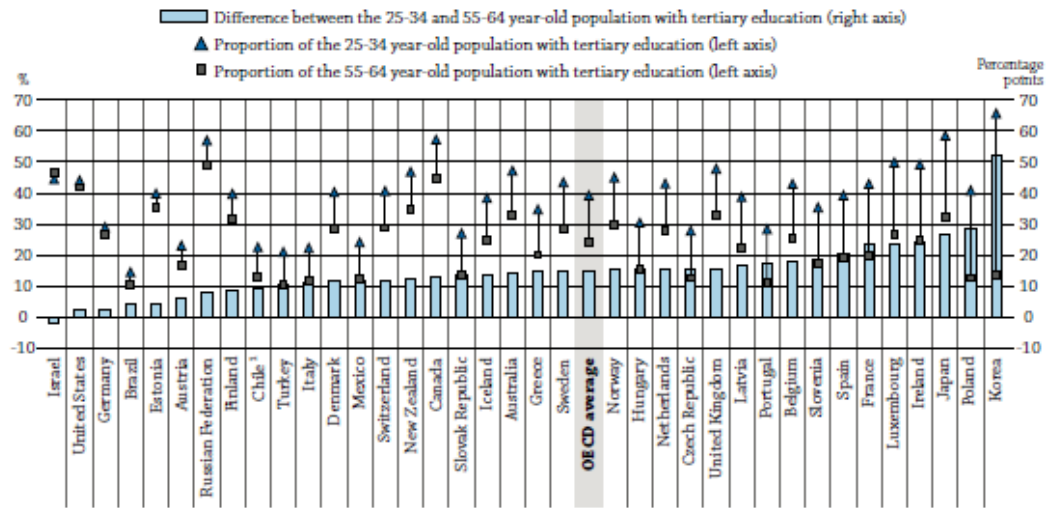




Source: Kids Count Data Book, 2014, State Trends in Child Well-Being, The Annie E. Casey Foundation.

Of concern also is the slowing pace of tertiary educational attainment (this refers to education after high school), with the United States second lowest among a group of countries in rate of improvement as shown by the bars in the next figure:

**Chart A1.3. Percentage of younger and older tertiary-educated adults (2012)**  
 25-34 and 55-64 year-olds, and percentage-point difference between these two groups



1. Year of reference 2011.  
 Countries are ranked in ascending order of the percentage-point difference between the 25-34 and 55-64 year-old population with tertiary education.  
 Source: OECD, Table A1.3a. See Annex 3 for notes ([www.oecd.org/edu/aag.htm](http://www.oecd.org/edu/aag.htm)).  
 StatLink <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/888933114989>

Source: Education at a Glance 2014, OECD Indicators, OECD.

We have much opportunity to strengthen the circumstances and prospects of our next generation with almost one in five children currently living in poverty. This goes to the heart of our commitment to community. One important step is to reduce the chasm of inequality in our country through public policy that addresses: educational inequities, needed progressive taxation levels, an increased minimum wage, and corporate governance to curb excessive senior level compensation.

### Quote

“We do not inherit the land from our forefathers, we borrow it from our children.”

*Gary Hamel in Leading the Revolution (2000) attributes this quote to Antoine de Saint-Exupery.*