

FOREWORD

The National Center for Education Statistics and the Office of Educational Research and Improvement broke new ground with the first edition of *Youth Indicators* (in 1989) by investigating the lives of students beyond school-house doors. Students learn in many settings. Early childhood experiences, family relationships, and home environments affect school performance from kindergarten to college. And, in turn, success at school has pervasive effects on each person's aspirations for the future and success in the job market. Policymakers now rely on this report for information on factors outside of school that influence learning.

Information about children's lives across varied settings better prepares policymakers who seek lasting and effective educational change. To understand when, where, and how changes can be made in the educational process, we must examine the larger context in which children live and learn. *Youth Indicators* is a statistical compilation of data on family structure, economic factors, jobs, extra-

curricular activities, and several dozen other elements that comprise the world of young people. These data present a composite of the youth experience, highlighting connections that might otherwise be missed between experiences inside and outside of school.

Much of the data in this publication is central to long-term policy debates on education issues. Where possible, trend data are provided as an historical context for interpretation. It is hoped that policymakers and analysts who use these data will send comments to the National Center for Education Statistics, identifying the areas where further information is needed or the data are lacking. Good statistical reporting typically provides precise, though limited, information related to policy issues; good statistical reporting usually leads to many new questions.

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