



It's The Most Wonderful Time of the Year, Except For the 30 Percent of Dallas County Children Living Below the Poverty Line

ROBERT WILONSKY | NOVEMBER 28, 2011 | 8:11AM



Shortly before Thanksgiving 2007, Timothy Bray and co-author Nathan Berg of the University of Texas at Dallas issued a report that hasn't aged a day since its initial publication: *Access to Grocery Stores and Food Security in Dallas*, which began the ongoing conversation concerning the so-called "food desert" that exists in the southern Dallas. Four years later, Bray -- now director of UTD's Institute for Urban Policy Research -- helped oversee data collection for another sobering paper: *Beyond ABC 2011: Assessing Children's*

Health in Dallas County, which runs 92 pages and is perhaps best summed up by this paragraph:

In Dallas County, 29.4 percent of our children live in poverty, defined in 2011 as an income of less than \$22,350 for a family of two adults and two children. That means that about 192,502 children live below the poverty line -- enough to fill Cowboys Stadium more than twice over. Tens of thousands more Dallas County children live just above poverty level, in families that can be best classified as "the working poor."

The study was released earlier this month during a symposium at Children's Medical Center, which reports seeing 135,000 visits from kids each year -- all to the Emergency Department, most for non-emergencies. That, says Children's, is "the reality of serving as the safety-net pediatric hospital for Dallas County without receiving any county tax dollars." Says the study: There's been a 39-percent increase in child-abuse and neglect cases in Dallas County since 2000 (officials confirmed 5,591 last year alone); kids are growing "more overweight and more malnourished"; and "Dallas County's poor children

attend public schools that too often are in disrepair, overcrowded and chronically underfunded."

The report came and went a few weeks ago with **little fanfare**; hence, perhaps, the reason **UTD sends this reminder of its existence** on this Monday after Thanksgiving. Says Bray: "One of three children lives in poverty in Dallas County. One in three children has lived in poverty in Dallas County for a number of years. And the biggest question that we now have to face is: What are we going to do about it?"

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