

INTRODUCTION

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By most measurable accounts, the overall well-being of Georgetown's children and families ranks high, especially in comparison to the rest of Texas. One reason for this achievement has been the historically strong commitment and investment by Georgetown's citizens to support children and youth activities and programs.

But, as this report shows, the conditions in which many Georgetown children and families live, as elsewhere in the state and country, are changing rapidly. The number of young people at risk for negative consequences is increasing. Further, while a majority of Georgetown's children currently enjoy a high standard of living and quality of life, many do not.

Local school counselors, concerned parents, and youth themselves share stories of numerous Georgetown young people who:

- leave home because of abuse or who are locked out or "pushed out" by parents or family members who cannot cope with the youth's behavior, leaving the youth with nowhere to go.
- cope daily with abuse of alcohol or illicit drugs by family members.
- regularly face severe family conflict which can range from a shouting match to violence.
- simply feel there is absolutely no one who cares about them.

The answers and solutions to the problems facing our children exist within our community.

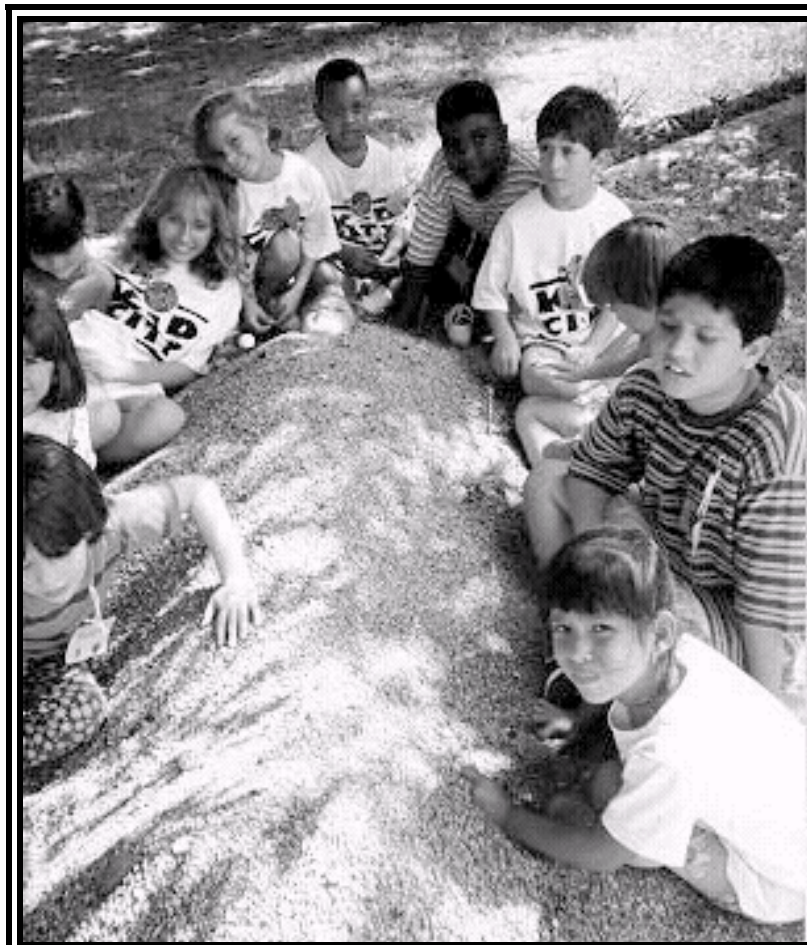


National statistics document the downward trend in the conditions of millions of American children, confirming a sense that things are not moving in the right direction: more children reported as the victims of violence; more youth who are the perpetrators of violence; more children unsupervised at young ages, and more out-of-wedlock births; more serious illness among children, and more teenage suicides. In 1996, the Georgetown Project conducted a survey of Georgetown parents, businesses,

and health and social service agencies. The results identified parenting skills, substance abuse, and domestic violence as the most pressing issues of concern. This report documents the extent of many trends and conditions in Georgetown, concluding that many children and families are under great stress.

In communities everywhere, people are looking for solutions. The answers to the problems facing our children exist within our community. A generation ago parents could limit their efforts to their own children, instilling them with solid values and providing them with a good education. Today, our concern must be broader, because our children's future is affected by the future of all children. We know that too many of them are poor, hungry or go without proper health care. Many are abused or neglected—or simply don't get the attention and care they need to succeed.

Children present unique patterns of growth and development shaped by their genetic backgrounds, their family structure, and the social environments in which they live. Adolescence is clearly a time of change-- biologically, emotionally, and cognitively. However, a sizable portion of young people suffer from socially induced problems of violence, stress, depression, and neglect. The quality of parenting and the ability of the child to cope are crucial in allowing early adolescents to go about their challenging and important developmental tasks. Equally important are the climate of the school and the environment in the community.



DEMOGRAPHICS OF GEORGETOWN

GEORGETOWN

Georgetown, Texas, is a community of over 24,000 people making the transition from a small town to a suburban community. It is located along IH-35, with fertile farmland to the east and rugged hill country to the west. Known for its commitment to historic preservation, Georgetown boasts an eclectic blend of restored historic homes and Victorian buildings which surround the town square. Rapid growth is occurring through new residential and commercial development in all sectors of the community, including a 5,000 acre Sun City retirement community which will grow to 17,000 residents over the next 15 years. While the growth of Sun City will not directly impact the youth population of Georgetown, the growth in commercial and service sectors of the community in response to this development will bring younger families with children to the area.

Twenty-seven miles south, the Austin metropolitan area is experiencing economic expansion, thus ensuring the continued growth of Georgetown as people seek smaller communities nearby in which to raise their children. Migration patterns indicate that many families moving to Georgetown are from large metropolitan areas of Texas, California, New York, and Florida. Fostering a sense of community during this period of rapid growth with many families working outside of the city creates a challenge for all community institutions. The absence of any type of public transportation system also creates barriers for families in a community split north and south by an interstate highway and east and west by the San Gabriel Rivers.

While many affluent subdivisions exist in the community, there are also pockets of poverty. Over 45 percent of the children attending two of seven Georgetown elementary schools are eligible for free and reduced lunch programs.

Georgetown's annual growth rate averages 6.8%, while statewide the annual growth rate averages less than 2%.

Community focus groups indicate that health and social service agencies, schools, and police are seeing increasing numbers of families with complex problems and distress. Such families require a broad array of services. Because changes have come so quickly, Georgetown is not yet prepared to address these issues in any sort of coordinated and comprehensive way. Many needed services are not yet available in our community. It is difficult enough for families with transportation and

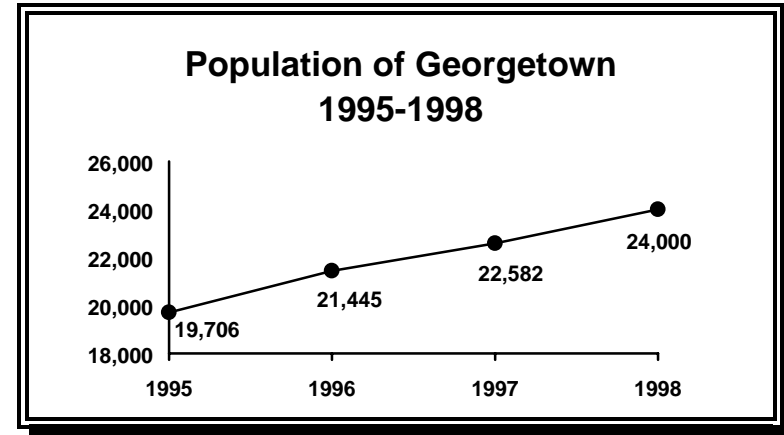
financial resources to negotiate and procure services in nearby Austin--it is impossible for Georgetown families with no transportation and few financial resources.

DEMOGRAPHICS OF GEORGETOWN

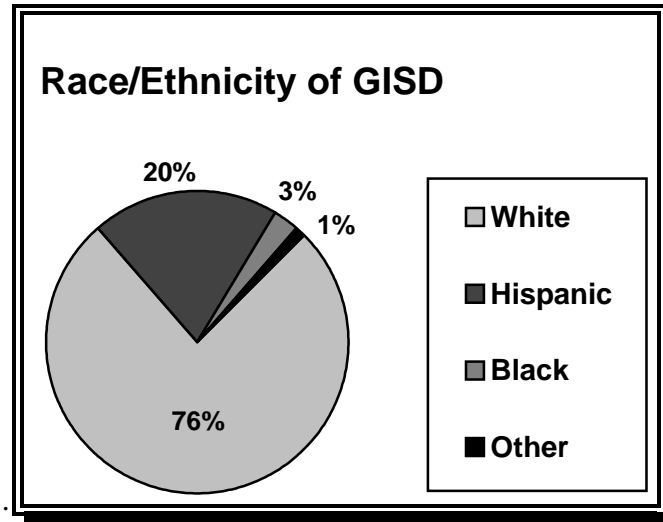
DEMOGRAPHICS OF GEORGETOWN

To the right is a graph showing the growth in Georgetown's population from 1995 to 1998, culminating in an average annual growth rate of 6.8 percent. In comparison, the Georgetown Independent School District (GISD) showed a 5.7 percent annual growth rate in student enrollment for the same time period, increasing from 5,878 in 1995 to 6,939 in 1998. In startling comparison, the growth rate for the entire state is less than 2 percent annually.

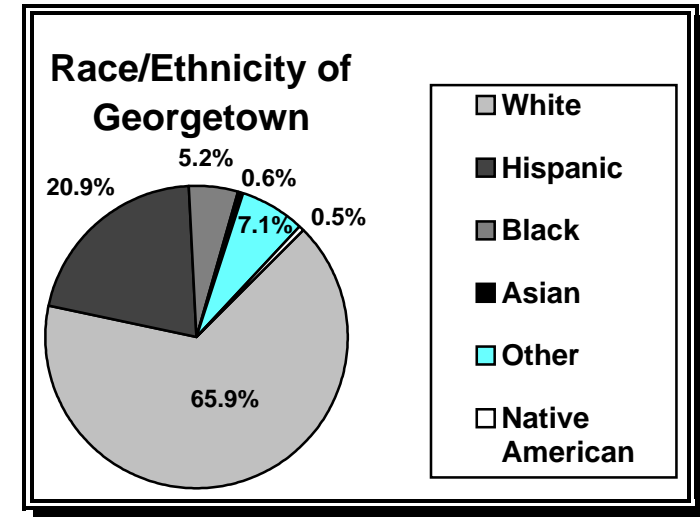
The last available population statistics for Georgetown are figures from the 1990 Census, which reported a population of 14,842 people. Below is a breakdown of racial and ethnic background for the 1990 Census figures, showing that 34.1 percent of the population were racial and ethnic minorities.



Source: Capital Area Planning Council, "Population Change for Counties and Places in the Capital State Planning Region: 1980-1998."



Source: Georgetown Independent School District



Source: 1990 Census data for Georgetown

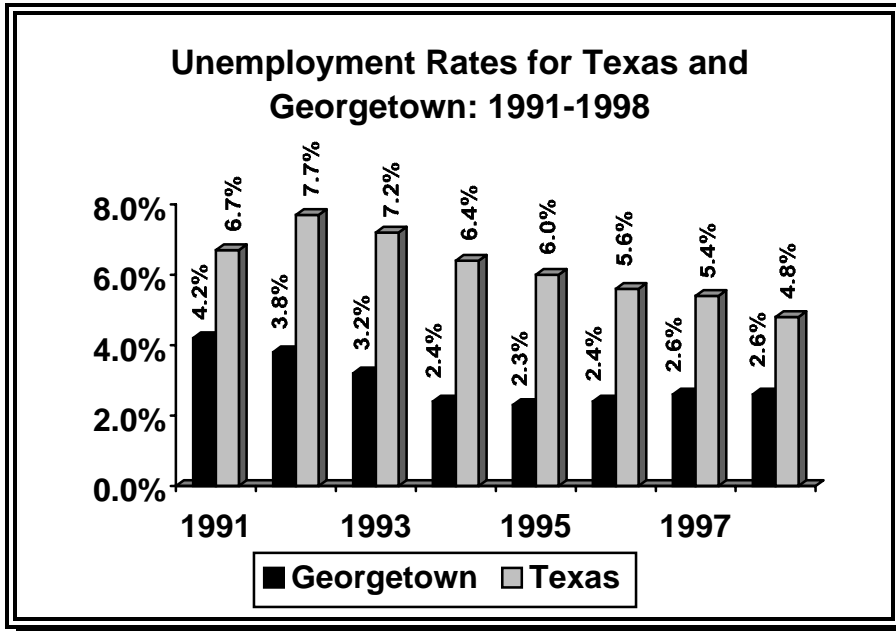
Of those living in Georgetown during the 1990 Census, 9.6 percent were under age six, 17.5 percent were between the ages of six and eighteen. Those eighteen and older comprised 72.9 percent of the population.

In 1990, the median family income was \$31,201.00. Currently the percentage of students living in low income

Percentage of GISD Students Living in Low-Income Households							
1991	1992	1993	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998
22%	25%	25%	23%	25%	26%	24%	24%

Source: Texas Education Agency, Division of Performance Reporting Office of Policy Planning & Research, "Snapshot: School District Profiles," 1991-1997. Data was gathered in the spring of the year indicated.

households is 24 percent, with an eight year average (1991-1998) of 24.5 percent. While this indicator does not directly measure the child poverty rate in Georgetown, it may give a fairly good portrayal of the poverty situation. In 1990, the most recent year for which this measure is available, the percentage of Georgetown children living below the poverty line was 22 percent, according to census bureau data. During the 1990-1991 school year, the percentage of GISD students living in low-income households was also 22 percent.



Source: Texas Workforce Commission

In its most severe forms, poverty means a lack of basic needs being met, such as food, clothing, housing, and health care. While government assistance may help mitigate the direct problems created by an inadequate income level, poverty may create both real and self-imposed social obstacles potentially damaging a child's perception of self-worth.

In Texas, the rate of unemployment through April 1998 was 4.3 percent. In Georgetown, for the same time period, the unemployment rate was only 2.6 percent. The graph to the left shows recent trends of unemployment both statewide and in Georgetown.

DEMOGRAPHICS OF GEORGETOWN

From 1950 to 1994, the percentage of American children growing up in single-parent homes has increased from seven to twenty-five percent.¹ The 1990 census places the percentage of Georgetown children living in single-parent households at seventeen percent, and recent surveys suggest that this figure is still fairly accurate. Of the 17 percent of Georgetown children living in single-parent households in 1990, 47 percent were living below the poverty line.

SAFETY



DARE Officer, Sergeant Todd Terbush, talks with children in Georgetown.