

SCR

19

ALASKA STATE LEGISLATURE

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SENATOR BILL WIELECHOWSKI

SPONSOR STATEMENT

SS for SCR 19: Support for Alaska's Early Learners

Recent studies indicate that nearly half of Alaska children enter school unprepared to be successful learners, setting them up for failure before they even start kindergarten.

Experts attribute this in large part to the lack of preschool education available in Alaska. Alaska is one of only 10 states without a state-funded, statewide early childhood system. Nationally the trend is towards voluntary pre-kindergarten for all children.

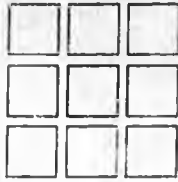
Study after study documents the benefits of quality preschool education, including significantly less grade repetition; major reductions in special education placements; substantially higher rates of high school graduation; dramatic increases in college attendance; substantially fewer arrests; much less reliance on public assistance; and higher rates of employment.

In addition, key workforce skills (e.g., motivation, persistence and self-control) are developed most cost-effectively and efficiently in preschool children. All of these factors combine to make returns from investments in preschool far greater than those from most public economic development projects.

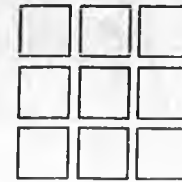
In 2007, Alaska was one of ten states awarded a prestigious grant from the National Governors Association to hold a Governor's Summit on Early Learning. More than 150 legislators, other policymakers and statewide leaders participated in the summit to ensure Alaska's future economy will be supported by an educated, productive workforce.

Attendees at the Summit drafted recommendations to ensure that all children, especially those most in need, have access to quality early learning opportunities.

SCR 19 calls on Governor Palin to thoroughly consider the recommendations of the Summit on Early Education and work closely with the legislature to implement its recommendations as appropriate.



Alaska
GOVERNOR'S SUMMIT
ON EARLY LEARNING
2007



Best Beginnings Recommendations

The Alaska Governor's Summit on Early Learning brought together over 150 Alaskans from a wide variety of sectors across the state to develop recommendations for Governor Sarah Palin's early learning policy agenda. Participants were asked to address these goals:

- Goal A** All children, especially those most in need, have access to early literacy and learning opportunities in their home or in out-of-home settings;
- Goal B** These services are coordinated; and
- Goal C** Parents, grandparents, and extended family are engaged in young children's learning with needed support, resources, and incentives.

After hearing from national speakers on early learning and economic development, brain research and early learning, and early learning public policy, and from Alaskan leaders, participants broke into small groups. Participants discussed how to create a **System Infrastructure** for early learning in Alaska and how to provide early learning opportunities to children **In the Home** and to children in **Programs Outside the Home**. Their top recommendations include the following:

- **Implement a voluntary Quality Rating and Improvement System (QRIS)** which is a method to assess, improve, and communicate the level of quality in early care and education settings (addresses all three goals, and is a priority in the areas of both "System Infrastructure" and "Programs Outside the Home")
- **Conduct a comprehensive public engagement campaign** to inform parents, extended families, community members, and business about the economic and social "return on investment" in the early years and what they can do to support early learning (addresses Goal C, and is a priority in the area of "In the Home")
- **Increase funding for Head Start** to enable more low-income children to participate (addresses Goal A, and is a priority in the area of "Programs Outside the Home")
- **Increase the child care assistance reimbursement rates** (addresses Goal A, and is a priority in the area of "Programs Outside the Home")

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BEST BEGINNINGS
Alaska's Early Childhood Investment

- **Increase the eligibility guidelines for child care assistance** so more families can participate in the workforce (addresses Goal A, and is a priority in the area of "Programs Outside the Home")

Other Recommendations

System Infrastructure

- **Provide sustainable state resources** to support early learning (examples are an early learning endowment, a formula for funding, trust fund, or savings account)
- **Develop a public-private entity** to oversee and coordinate early learning activities (examples are the Denali Commission, cabinet level structure, new department, or single coordinating office with multiple departmental linkages)
- **Develop community-level database & coordinated system** to identify services and organizations that provide early learning services across Alaska
- **Conduct community needs assessments** to develop system of support for families and children (multi-agency system and strong community buy-in)

In the Home

- **Encourage employer flexibility and financial assistance** for parents of young children, (examples are tax credits, paid parental leave, parenting resources, flexible schedules, and other family-friendly policies)
- **Provide all parents with access to home-based education and support** (examples are expansion of home visiting, parenting classes, and financial supports)
- **Develop culturally relevant materials** (listening to groups, using technology, have incentives and mechanisms to share, template to produce own materials)

Programs Outside the Home

- **Create a statewide professional development plan** that ensures there are adequate supports to build an early care and education workforce (examples are wage incentive programs and financial supports for education and training)
- **Create a liability insurance pool for child care centers and a health insurance pool for child care workers, with financial support**
- **Provide incentives to businesses** to support the creation and maintenance of quality early care and education programs

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BEST BEGINNINGS
Alaska's Early Childhood Investment



The High/Scope
Perry Preschool
Study to Age 40

Larry Schweinhart

High/Scope Educational Research Foundation

www.highscope.org



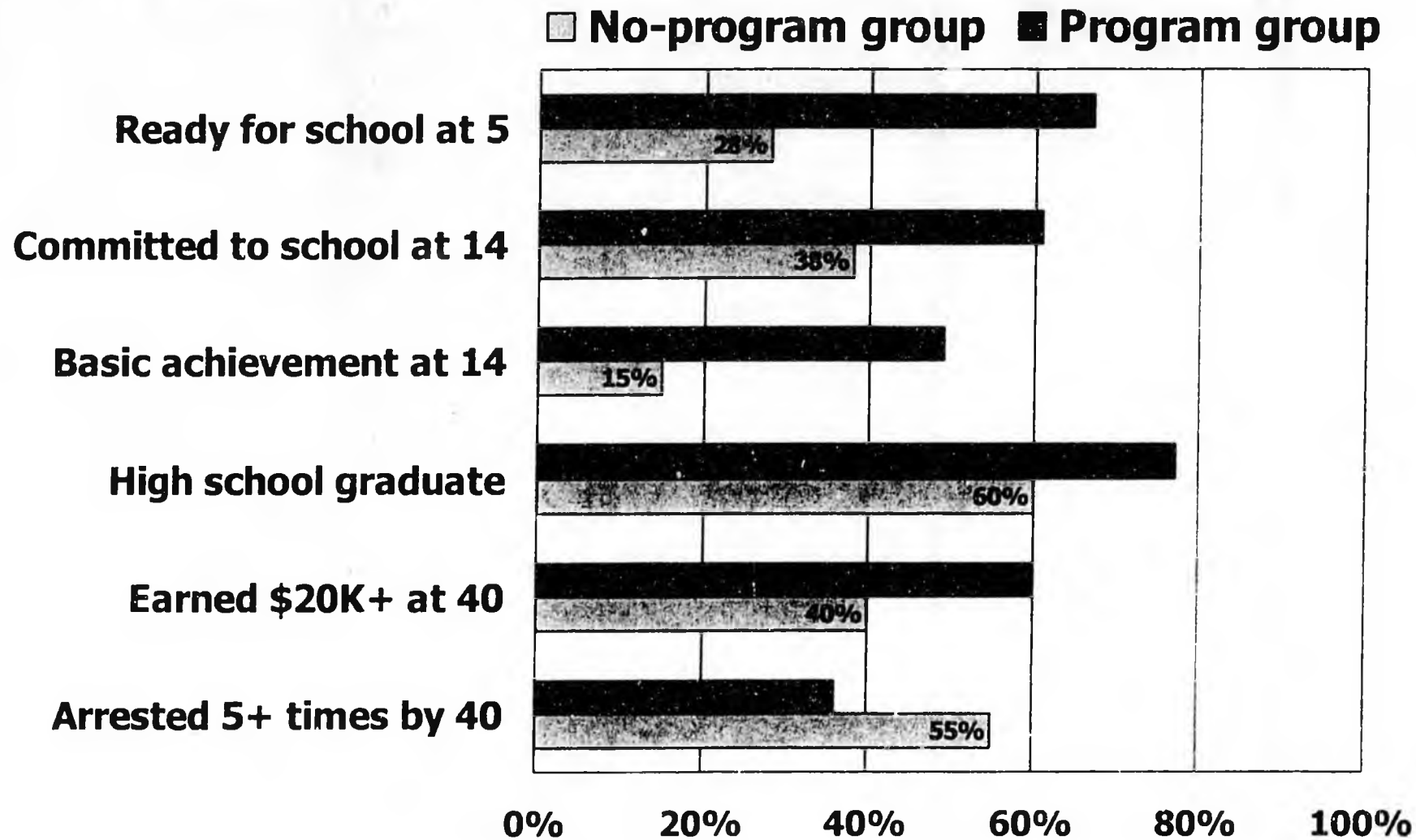
The High/Scope Perry Preschool Study to Age 40

Larry Schweinhart

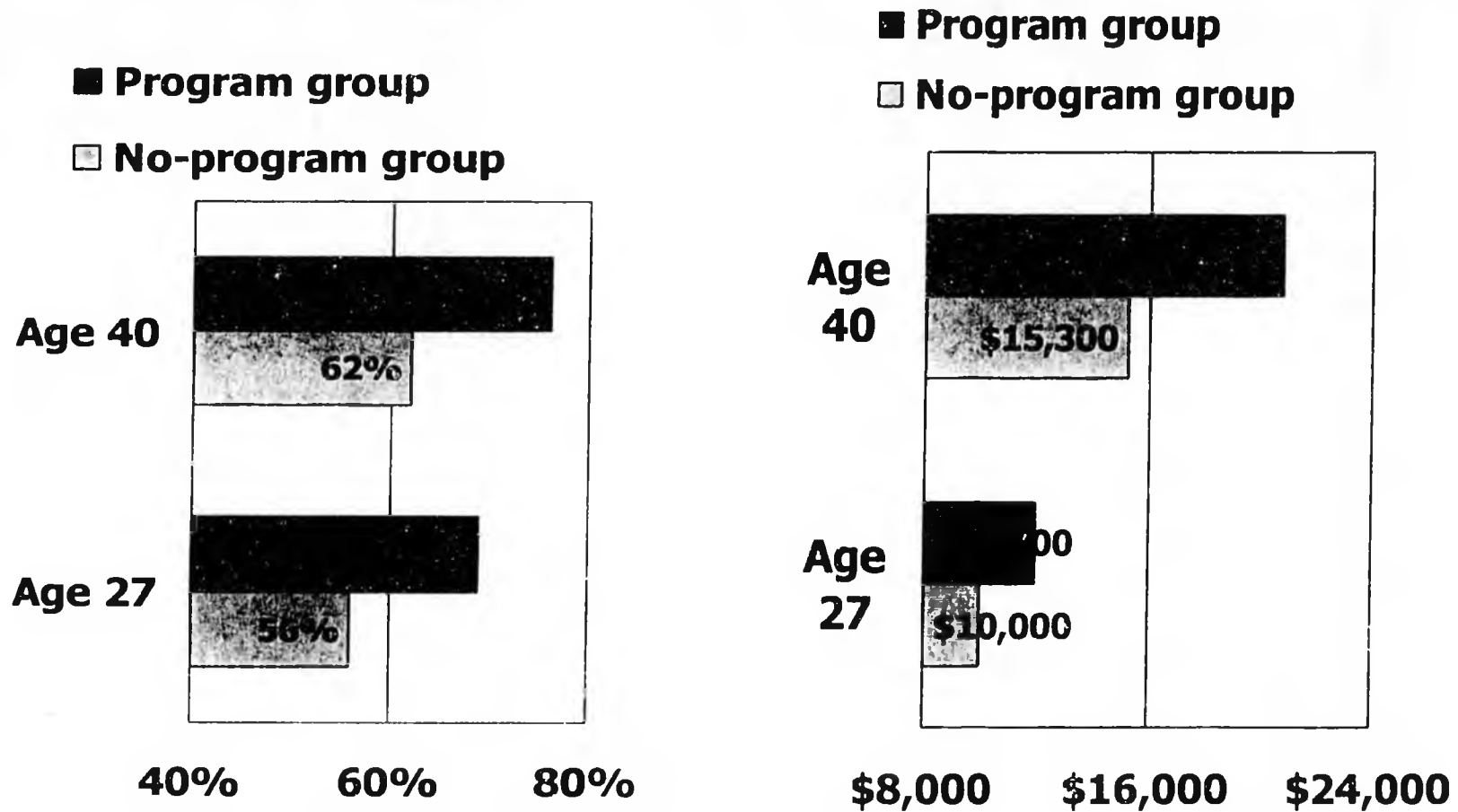
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Major findings over time



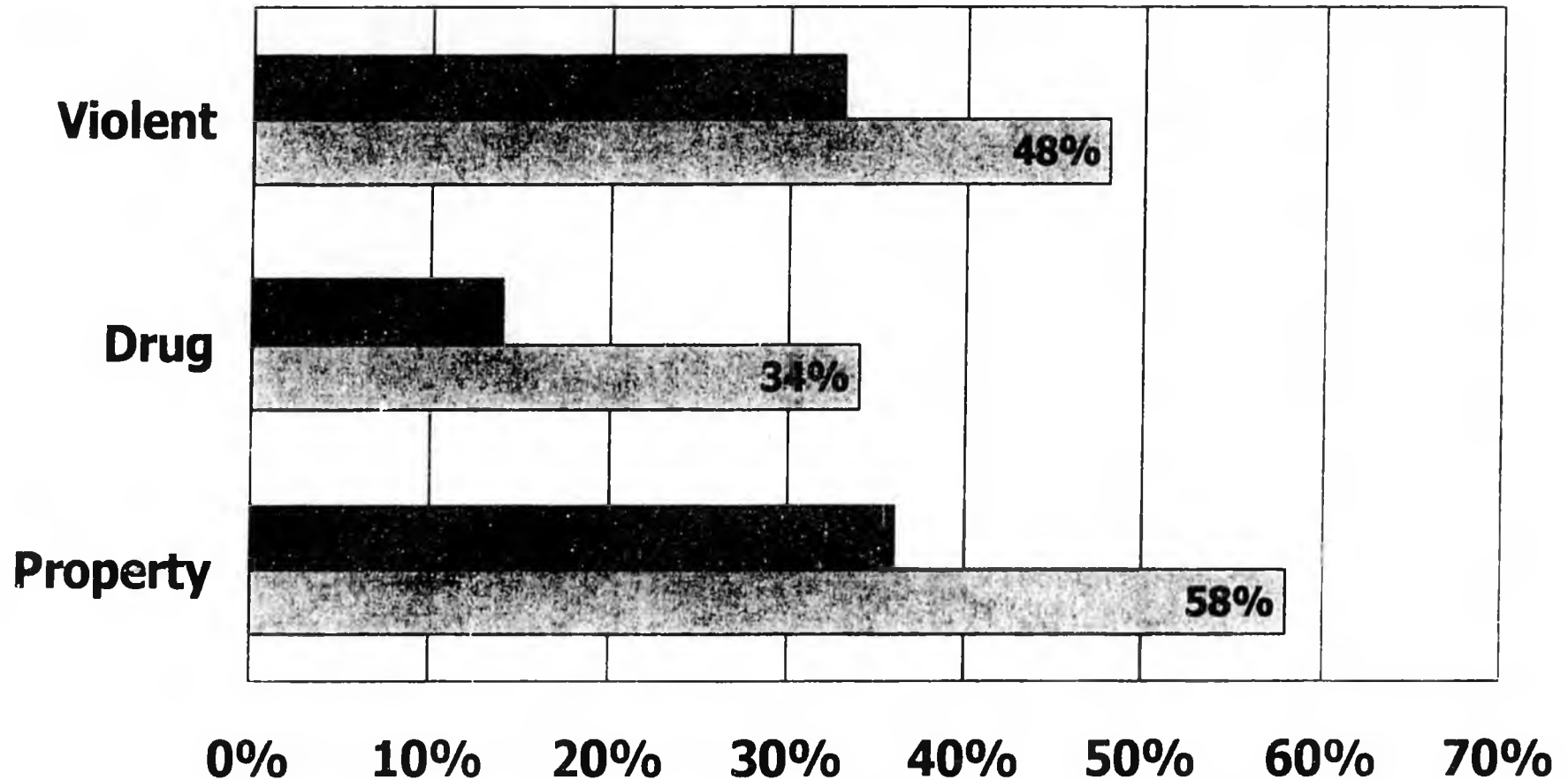
More employed, higher earnings



Fewer arrested for various types of crimes

■ Program group

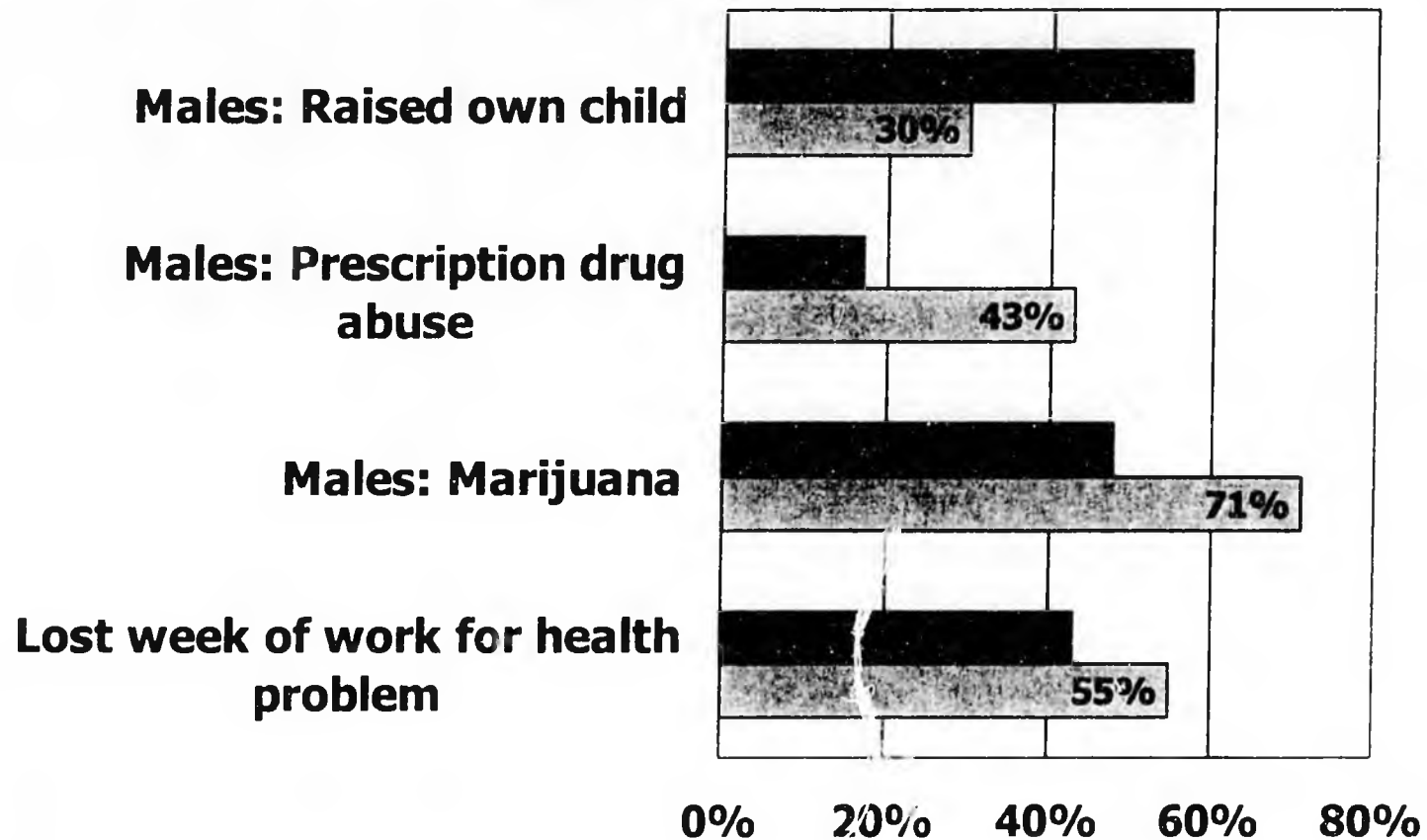
□ No-program group



Better health and family relations

■ Program group

□ No-program group



Large return on investment

(Per participant in 2000 constant dollars discounted 3% annually)

■ Welfare ■ Education ■ Earnings ■ Taxes paid □ Crime

