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# KIDS COUNT in the SECA States

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Southern Early Childhood Association



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**Southern Early Childhood Association  
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# Background

The *Kids Count Data Book* is a signature resource created by the Annie E. Casey Foundation each year. The report tracks the well-being of children over time and multiple states to provide unbiased data to inspire advocacy and incite action on behalf of children and families. The *Kids Count Data Book* and its associated resource, the Kids Count Data Center, can be found on the foundation's website at [www.aecf.org](http://www.aecf.org).

This brief is a compilation of information from the *2018 Kids Count Data Book* and associated press releases specific to the 14 states in SECA's territory. It is designed as a resource to help our members inform their advocacy and programming efforts in the Southern region of the United States.

***“Providing state legislators, public officials and child advocates with the reliable data, policy recommendations and tools needed to advance solid policies that benefit children and families.” – KIDS COUNT***

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# Introduction

It is important that our advocacy efforts are supported by robust data. Policy makers and other public officials depend on our members as important sources of information to inform their decision-making processes. The data presented in this report provide an overview of the progress some of our SECA states have made to improve outcomes for children and families, but also highlights continued challenges. A central theme in this year's report is the threat an inaccurate 2020 census could have on federal funding levels that currently undergird much needed supports for families.

*“The Southern Early Childhood Association (SECA) is committed to improving the quality of care and education for young children and families through advocacy and professional development.”*

Early childhood professionals in the South have important work to do to combat the negative impacts on children and families such as generational poverty. The Southern Early Childhood Association stands behind you in your efforts to see families in the South thrive.

Each of our SECA states and their associated reports are provided on the following pages in alphabetical order.

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# Alabama

## **Child Well-Being in Alabama Receives Highest Ranking in Report's History: Children faring better than ever before, but still lagging behind the rest of the country**

While opportunities for Alabama's children still lag behind the country in many areas, the state has made significant improvements in child well-being over the last few years, according to a new report released by the Annie E. Casey Foundation.

The *2018 KIDS COUNT® Data Book*, which was first published in 1990, uses 16 indicators to rank each state across four domains: health, education, economic well-being and family and community. **Alabama is ranked 42nd nationally for overall child well-being**, the highest ranking the state has ever received.

"Alabama has made great strides over the last few years, however, we still have a great deal of work to do," said Rhonda Mann, interim executive director of VOICES for Alabama's Children, which is the Annie E. Casey Foundation's KIDS COUNT grantee in Alabama. "With the Alabama legislature set to embark on a new quadrennium, we encourage candidates and lawmakers to study this year's KIDS COUNT Data Book and ask, what would it take for us to make gains next year in the areas that need it the most and prioritize policies to make sure all children have an opportunity to succeed. If we are not implementing new policies to move the needle then child well-being isn't improving regardless of the state's ranking."

**This year's Data Book reveals that Alabama ranks among the best nationally in two of the report's health indicators.** Alabama leads the country with the fewest number of teenagers (aged 12 to 17) who abused alcohol or drugs in the past year (4 percent). Alabama ranks second nationally with only 2 percent of all children lacking access to health insurance. The state ranks in the bottom nationally for the health domain's remaining indicators, low-birthweight babies and child- and teen-deaths.

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In addition, this year's Data Book reports:

- Since 2010, Alabama has reduced the percentage of children living in poverty by 11 percent. However, 25 percent of children continue to live in poverty. Significantly more than the national average (19 percent).
- Compared to 2010, Alabama has 80,000 fewer children living in households where no parent has full-time, year-round employment – a decrease of nearly 19 percent.
- While more Alabama children are proficient in fourth-grade reading and eighth-grade math than they were in 2009, the state continues to struggle – 79 percent of students are not proficient in eighth-grade math and 69 percent are not proficient in fourth grade reading.
- The rate of teen births for 10- to 19-year-olds is down to 28 per 1,000 – a decrease of 39 percent compared to 2010 when the rate was 44 per 1,000.

“The *KIDS COUNT Data Book* is an important tool, not only because it highlights how Alabama is doing compared to other states nationally, but because it provides policymakers with a benchmark to measure how far our state has come and prioritize where we need to do more. In a sense it is a roadmap for lawmakers,” said Rhonda Mann. “The KIDS COUNT findings are only as good as the data it relies upon for accuracy. If state lawmakers are to make educated decisions on how to improve child well-being in our state, their work begins with ensuring a complete count of children in the next census that begins in 2020.”

“Alabama has made great strides over the last few years, however, we still have a great deal of work to do,” said Rhonda Mann, interim executive director of VOICES for Alabama’s Children

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# Arkansas

## **Fewer Arkansas Children Living in Poverty, Yet State Still Lags Behind in Child Well-Being**

The number of Arkansas children in poverty has decreased by 28,000 since 2010, according to data in the *2018 KIDS COUNT® Data Book* released by the Annie E. Casey Foundation. Despite this progress, 24 percent of the state’s kids still live in poverty (almost one in four), and Arkansas lags the national average of 19 percent. Arkansas kids who live in poverty face more obstacles and a tougher climb to success than their more affluent peers in the state and nation.

The data indicate that 165,000 Arkansas children lived in poverty in 2016, the latest year for which information is available, down from 193,000 in 2010. Arkansas is in 43rd place for this indicator. For overall child well-being, Arkansas is ranked in the bottom 10 states, at 41st.

It is important to note that children of color in Arkansas disproportionately live in poverty; 40 percent of black children and 34 percent of Hispanic or Latino children in Arkansas are in poverty. This is compared to only 17 percent of white children.

“The decrease in the number of children living in poverty is good news, but we have to do more to improve life for our kids of all races,” said Rich Huddleston, executive director of Arkansas Advocates for Children and Families. “Public policy has a huge impact on the well-being of our children. If Arkansas lawmakers passed more pro-child development policies like a state-level Earned Income Tax Credit, we could help even more families permanently move out of poverty. Families of all races could climb the economic ladder, kids would have more resources to help them succeed during their formative years, and we would strengthen the state’s economy.”

Another key to ensuring Arkansas children get the resources they need to thrive is an accurate 2020 U.S. Census count. When kids aren’t counted, state and local

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infrastructures face losing billions of federal dollars for supports — like education, school lunches, Head Start, Medicaid, SNAP, and CHIP — that give kids the opportunity of a healthy start in life.

The undercount of young children has gotten worse with every Census since 1980. Without intervention, the Annie E. Casey Foundation estimates that the 2020 U.S. Census will likely undercount about 1 million children under age 5, posing a threat to child well-being.

“If we don’t count children, we render their needs invisible and their futures uncertain,” said Casey Foundation President and CEO Patrick McCarthy. “A major Census undercount will result in overcrowded classrooms, shuttered Head Start programs, understaffed hospital emergency rooms and more kids without health care.”

Children living in rural or hard-to-count areas are at even greater risk of being undercounted and losing their existing share of political representation and supportive services and programs. In Arkansas, 22 percent of children under age 5 live in hard-to-count Census tracts.

For nearly 30 years, the *2018 KIDS COUNT® Data Book* has provided a comprehensive look at child well-being in the United States. The more accurate the count, the better they can track and understand how children in the nation and in Arkansas are faring.

The annual *Data Book* uses 16 indicators to rank each state across four domains — health, education, economic well-being, and family and community — that represent what children need most to thrive. Arkansas ranks:

- **30th in health.** Ninety-six percent of the state’s kids now have health insurance, an all-time high for Arkansas that is on par with the national average.
- **33rd in education.** With a rank of 13 in pre-K attendance, Arkansas lags behind Mississippi and Louisiana, which rank 7 and 8, respectively. Moreover, 69 percent of Arkansas’ fourth-graders are not reading at grade level and 75 percent of eighth-graders

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score below proficient in math. Both of these indicators have seen little or no progress since 2009.

● **44th in economic well-being.** In addition to a lower poverty rate, more parents are employed, and almost 50,000 fewer children are living in homes with a high housing cost compared to 2010. However, the state is ranked 46th for teens not in school and not working. Our overall economic well-being ranking shows that kids in other states may be benefiting more from gains in economic well-being.

● **45th in family and community.** Fourteen percent of Arkansas kids live in homes where the household head lacks a high school diploma, and 38 percent of our kids live in single-parent households. Both of these indicators reflect slight progress since 2010, when the rates were 16 and 39 percent, respectively. Unfortunately, the state still ranks 50th for number of teen births, with 35 teen births per 1,000 females ages 15 to 19.

“Our progress in some areas and our stagnation in others reflects where we’ve put our resources and the policies lawmakers have prioritized over the years,” said Huddleston, who uplifts bipartisan policies like ARKids First — a health insurance program for low-income kids that was established in 1997 by former Gov. Mike Huckabee.

“In contrast, our lack of continued investment in education has stalled results and let our kids down. And the decision by lawmakers to diminish state revenue with repeated tax cuts has caused our children and lower-income families to suffer, as the programs that serve them [LK8] have struggled. The state is considering another tax cut in 2019, this one for high-income earners. In light of this important data, the state should reconsider such a cut. It’s time for lawmakers to make our children a greater priority than tax cuts for the wealthy.”

**Almost one in four Arkansas kids continue to face obstacles created by poverty.**

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# Florida

## **2018 KIDS COUNT® Data Book Reveals Improved Outcomes for Florida’s Children: Report warns of decade of damage from inaccurate census**

Florida showed improvement in children living in high-poverty areas, teen births and proficiencies in reading and math, according to the *2018 KIDS COUNT® Data Book*, released from the Annie E. Casey Foundation. **The state earned an overall ranking of 34 in child well-being.**

“Our rankings in each of the four domains of economic well-being, education, health, and family and community are slowly moving in the right direction,” said Florida KIDS COUNT Director Dr. Norín Dollard. “Following statewide expansions of health insurance programs, more kids than ever have access to the health care they need to thrive. But further investments are needed to reach the Florida children who lack coverage.”

And the *Data Book* warns that a potential undercount in the 2020 Census could put the state’s children at risk.

“If we don’t count children, we render their needs invisible and their futures uncertain,” said Casey Foundation President and CEO Patrick McCarthy. “A major census undercount will result in overcrowded classrooms, shuttered Head Start programs, understaffed hospital emergency rooms and more kids without health care.”

Troubling disparities persist among children of color and those from low-income and immigrant families.

If missed in the national count, children of color, low-income children and children in immigrant families stand to suffer the most if vital programs face reductions in funding. Research shows that by 2020 the majority of children in the United States will be children of color.

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The annual *Data Book* uses 16 indicators to rank each state across four domains — health, education, economic well-being and family and community — as an assessment of child well-being. According to the rankings, Florida:

- **42 in Economic Well-Being.** For the first time in several years, there have been some significant inroads into reducing child poverty and improvements in parents’ ability to get full employment. However, many families struggle to make ends meet, and 39 percent of children live in households that spend roughly a third or more of their monthly incomes on housing, which reduces discretionary spending on children and the amount of time available to parents to spend with their children.

- **24 in Education.** Florida is also above the national average for preschool enrollment, and notable gains have been achieved in third-grade reading, an important predictor of academic success. The Florida Department of Education recently announced that when the Nation’s Report Card (National Assessment of Educational Progress) was released in April, Florida was the only state to have improved significantly on three of the four NAEP education measures in 2017. The largest improvement was found in High School Students graduating on time.

- **34 in Health.** The observed improvements in getting Florida’s children covered is substantial and efforts to continue to expand access to healthcare is much needed. Florida lags behind the national average in three of the four indicators of the health domain. More investments in programs are needed to reduce the number of low birth-weight babies, child and teen deaths, and teens who abuse alcohol or drugs.

- **34 in Family and Community.** There were improvements in two of the four indicators in this domain. Florida’s teen birth rate continues to fall and resources that support evidence-based pregnancy prevention programs need to continue. Although the number of children living in poverty statewide has started to decrease, the number of children living in concentrated poverty was unchanged over the five-year window. To address these issues, continued emphasis is needed to expand educational and vocational supports for Florida’s parents so families can thrive.

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Florida KIDS COUNT is part of a nationwide KIDS COUNT Network, a project of the Annie E. Casey Foundation. Florida KIDS COUNT is in the Department of Child & Family Studies at the College of Behavioral and Community Sciences, University of South Florida. The objective of Florida KIDS COUNT is to inform Floridians and their policy makers about the quality of life for Florida's children, and to build leadership and accountability for action on behalf of our children. Using selected key well-being indicators and general demographic profiles, Florida KIDS COUNT provides a consistent and reliable source of information that is adaptable to a variety of uses such as policy analysis, grant and proposal writing, needs assessments and public education.

“Our rankings in each of the four domains of economic well-being, education, health, and family and community are slowly moving in the right direction,” said Florida KIDS COUNT Directors Dr. Norin Dollard.

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# Georgia

## **Georgia Ranks 39th in the Nation for Child and Family Well-being, Shows Improvement Across Education and Economic Domains**

Georgia ranks 39th in the nation for overall child and family well-being in the latest *KIDS COUNT® Data Book*, released by the Annie E. Casey Foundation. This is the first time that Georgia has been ranked better than 40th since 2012.

While this ranking cannot be directly compared to previous years' ranks because methodology has changed over time, the report shows that more students in Georgia are proficient in reading and math, fewer children are living in poverty, and more children are living in families where the head of the household has a high school diploma. And though Georgia's children and families still face challenges, there are some promising trends for the state.

The investments Georgia has made in its children and families over the past decade are poised to pay dividends. The state's commitment to increasing high-quality early care and learning through the Quality Rated Campaign, and its emphasis on wanting to create a Georgia where all children can read on grade level by the end of third grade, are examples of these investments. A continued commitment to serving children and families will position the state to improve further, both in rank and in the opportunities for our children to become successful Georgians.

"Georgia has made some key investments in areas such as early care and learning, child welfare, and K – 12 education over the last several years, and it's already paying off for our families, communities, and economy," said Gaye Smith, executive director of Georgia Family Connection Partnership. "This is good news for all of us, and we can't stop. If we stay the course with these types of strategic investments, all Georgians will benefit from the resulting progress and positive community outcomes."

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The annual *KIDS COUNT Data Book* uses 16 indicators to rank each state across four domains—health, education, economic well-being, and family and community—as an assessment of child well-being. The report uses data from 2016, the most recent available

- **37th in Economic Well-being.** Georgia’s families and children are experiencing more economic stability than in previous years, with Georgia’s economic domain rank improving by seven spots over last year, and all four indicators showing progress both year over year and compared to 2010. Georgia’s child poverty rate continued to drop, decreasing to 23 percent, down from 24 percent in 2015, and 25 percent in 2010. (The national average is 19 percent.) Georgia’s percentage of teens not in school and not working also improved to 8 percent, down from 9 percent in 2015 and 12 percent in 2010. Finally, the percentages of children whose parents lack secure employment and children living in households with a high housing cost burden, both dropped one percentage point from last year, and several percentage points from 2010.

- **34th in education.** Mostly positive education trends continue, with fewer eighth-graders scoring below proficient in math, and fewer fourth-graders scoring below proficient in reading. The 2015 data showed that 72 percent of eighth-graders were below proficient in math, and in 2016, that percentage fell to 69 percent, compared with a national average of 67 percent. The percentage of high school students not graduating on time remained the same as in the previous report at 21 percent, but that number represents a significant improvement from 2010, when 33 percent of Georgia high school students failed to graduate on time. A strong educational pipeline, from birth through early adulthood, is key to ensuring that Georgia builds a capable, robust workforce and continues to be a place people want to call home.

- **Georgia ranks 40th in the family and community domain,** improving in that domain by one spot over last year’s rank, based on improvements in teen births, children living in high-poverty areas, and adult educational attainment. At 13 percent, this is the lowest ever percentage of Georgia children growing up in a family where the head of the household lacks a high school diploma. Georgia’s teen birth rate continues to fall,

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reaching an all-time low at 24 per 1,000, compared to the national average of 20 per 1,000.

- **Georgia ranks 39th in health this year**, but the domain rank cannot be compared to previous years because the methodology for calculating drug and alcohol abuse changed. This domain saw mixed results that included an increase in low birthweight babies and child and teen deaths. After improving its low birthweight rate between 2010 and last year's data, Georgia's rate rose to tie its highest rate in the Data Book's 29-year history at 9.8 percent. The national low birthweight rate rose as well between 2015 and 2016, but remains significantly lower than Georgia's rate at 8.2 percent. Georgia did improve on the percentage of children without health insurance, going from 7 percent last year to 6 percent this year, and down from 10 percent in 2010.

"Georgia's economic vitality depends upon our ability to improve the quality of life for all Georgians," said Chris Clark, president and CEO of the Georgia Chamber of Commerce. "With over 29 percent of rural children living in poverty we must be proactive in our efforts to provide adequate healthcare, transportation, education, and employment to end the cycle of generational poverty. As we seek to invest in our next generation, it is critical that we create solutions that advance sustainable economic mobility for Georgia's most vulnerable citizens."

**Georgia continues to lag in some areas, but investments in children are poised to pay dividends.**

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# Kentucky

## **2018 KIDS COUNT Data Book Reveals Improved Child Outcomes and Continued Areas of Need in Kentucky: Accurate count in 2020 census critical to sustaining progress**

Kentucky ranks 37th in the nation in overall child well-being, according to the *2018 KIDS COUNT® Data Book*, released by the Annie E. Casey Foundation. Kentucky's standing is due in part to progress in family economic well-being, child health coverage, teen births, and parental education.

However, an accurate 2020 census count of the commonwealth's kids and families is vital in protecting gains and continuing progress in child well-being in Kentucky.

"The *Data Book* tells us some good news for Kentucky kids, as most of the data trends in health, economic well-being, education, and family and community show continued progress," said Dr. Terry Brooks, executive director of Kentucky Youth Advocates. "But, without an accurate count of all Kentucky kids in 2020, we risk leaving money on the table that could be used for health care, education, and other vital programs many young children in low-income families count on for a healthy and strong start in life."

An accurate decennial census is essential for obtaining a reliable picture of child, family, and community wellbeing across the nation and the commonwealth.

Children under age five have repeatedly been the most undercounted age group in the decennial census of everyone living in the nation. According to census expert Bill O'Hare, in the estimated net undercount of the 2010 census, 8,000 Kentucky children ages zero to four were missed. It is also estimated that 11 percent of Kentucky children under age five live in hard-to-count areas, including parts of eastern Kentucky and west Louisville. Low-income children and children of color are disproportionately impacted by the census undercount.

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“If our youngest kids aren’t getting counted, they won’t get the resources they need to grow, learn, and succeed. I urge our local leaders in Louisville and across Kentucky to prioritize our hardest to count kids by prioritizing the 2020 census. We must take advantage of all available funds—our kids deserve it,” said Sadiqa Reynolds, president and CEO of the Louisville Urban League.

The Hazard Community and Technical College recently hosted a Census Matters event to begin organizing census efforts in their community. “The event brought together county and city officials, first responders, library and K-12 staff, and many more community members to collaboratively discuss the benefits of the upcoming count and what it means to our local areas as far as future funding for our children. The event gave our community the opportunity to have a voice in brainstorming the best ways to reach pockets of those otherwise underrepresented. I encourage other rural areas to immediately begin engaging local leaders and educating its residents on the importance of the census,” said Dr. Jennifer Lindon, president and CEO of Hazard Community and Technical College.

State trends in child well-being include:

- **40th in economic well-being.** Despite Kentucky’s improvement in economic well-being since 2010, other states are improving at a faster pace. One in four children live in poverty. Thirty-three percent of children live in families where no parent has full-time, year-round employment, though the indicator improved by 11 percent from 2010 to 2016. Now at eight percent, the percent of teens ages 16 to 19 not attending school and not working has also improved since 2010.
- **28th in health.** Kids’ health coverage remains a bright spot for Kentucky with 97 percent of children covered— putting the commonwealth at a slightly higher rate than the nation (96 percent). Two areas of child health that have moved in the wrong direction since 2010 are the percent of low birth-weight babies (at 9.1 percent) and the child and teen death rate (at 34 per 100,000 youth ages 1 to 19).

“Health care discussions are filled with challenges, but Kentucky kids have significantly benefited from investments in health coverage over the years, including the Children’s

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Health Insurance Program and the expansion of Medicaid coverage for their parents. An accurate census count in Kentucky will ensure the commonwealth gets the funds needed to keep kids covered so they can grow up healthy,” said Dr. Brooks.

- **29th in education.** The good news is that nearly nine in ten Kentucky high school students (89 percent) are graduating on time—ranking the commonwealth fourth in the nation on this indicator. The bad news is that there was no significant progress from 2009 to 2017 in fourth grade reading and eighth grade math proficiency. Currently, 62 percent of fourth graders are below proficient in reading and 71 percent of eighth graders are below proficient in math. Additionally, 59 percent of children ages three to four are not attending school in Kentucky, a continued area of need for the commonwealth.

“An accurate census count in Kentucky will also ensure the proper amount of Title I funds are allocated to Kentucky schools, providing resources to support students from low-income families in meeting academic achievement standards, including reading and math proficiency,” said Dr. Brooks.

- **39th in family and community.** Between 2010 and 2016, the teen birth rate in Kentucky fell by 33 percent to 31 births per 1,000 females ages 15 to 19. The percent of children in families where the household head lacks a high school diploma also decreased during that time, down to 11 percent. The percent of children living in high-poverty areas remains at 16 percent.

“This is not just an urban or a rural issue. This is not a one community issue. This is a statewide, community-by community opportunity to ensure each child is counted and therefore planned for in local, state, and federal budgets...” said Dr. Terry Brooks, executive director of Kentucky Youth Advocates.

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# Louisiana

## **2018 KIDS COUNT® Data Book shows Louisiana kids have seen progress in teen birth rates and high school graduation rates, but continue to struggle with poverty**

With 36 percent of Louisiana young children at risk of not being counted in the upcoming 2020 census, federally-funded support critical to children's success are in jeopardy, according to the *2018 KIDS COUNT® Data Book*, released by the Annie E. Casey Foundation.

The latest *Data Book* ranked Louisiana **49th in overall child well-being**, despite improvements since 2010 in nine of the 16 measures tracked in the annual report. Louisiana's advancements in child well-being have been relatively modest in recent years, and have not kept pace with most other states. In addition to examining data across a range of indicators of child well-being, this year's *Data Book* highlights the troubling consequences for the nation's kids with the likely undercount of about one million children under five in the 2020 census. Louisiana's children are particularly vulnerable to being undercounted, with 36 percent of children under the age of five living in "hard-to-count" census tracts compared to the national average of 23 percent of children in the same age range. Only six states have a greater percentage of kids at risk of being missed in the count.

"Federal funding for programs such as Medicaid, Head Start and K-12 education is essential for the healthy development of our children," said Dr. Anthony Recasner, CEO of Agenda for Children. "We need to make sure that every child is counted in the 2020 census so that Louisiana can maximize federal investments in its children over the next decade. With the right investments, we can build a more prosperous Louisiana where all children can thrive."

Louisiana children benefit from more than \$2.8 billion in federal funds that are directly tied to census data. This includes more than \$1.1 billion in funding for Medicaid and LaCHIP, almost \$206 million in funding for the Child Care and Development Fund and

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Early Head Start/Head Start, nearly \$35 million in funding for foster care and \$950 million in funding for nutrition programs (school lunch, SNAP and the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants and Children (WIC)).

The annual *KIDS COUNT Data Book* from the Annie E. Casey Foundation uses 16 indicators to rank each state across four domains — health, education, economic well-being and family and community — as an assessment of child well-being. Louisiana ranks:

- **50th in economic well-being.** Louisiana was one of just three states where the child poverty rate was higher in 2016 than in 2010. In Louisiana, 29 percent of children (314,000) lived in families with incomes below the poverty line in 2016, up from 27 percent (300,000) in 2010. Louisiana’s biggest improvement on an economic indicator 2 was seen in the 3 percent drop in the percentage of teens who are neither in school nor working, from 14 percent in 2010 to 11 percent in 2016.
- **47th in education.** The percentage of Louisiana high school students who don’t graduate on time fell by 28 percent, from 29 percent in 2010-2011 to 21 percent in 2015-2016, making it a bright spot for the state’s education indicators. Despite this improvement, Louisiana ranked 43rd on this measure, reflecting the need to accelerate progress in this area.
- **48th in the family and community domain.** The percentage of Louisiana children living in high-poverty neighborhoods increased from 18 percent in 2008-2012 to 21 percent in 2012-2016.
- **44th in health.** Consistent with national trends, Louisiana continues to make steady progress in connecting children to health insurance. Between 2010 and 2016, the percentage of children who are uninsured in Louisiana fell by half, from 6 percent to 3 percent.

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The *2018 Data Book* shows that federal investments, when combined with state funding and commitment from state policymakers, can create significant improvements in the well-being of Louisiana’s children. Louisiana outperformed the national average on two measures that are heavily impacted by federal and state funding — the percentage of young children not in school and the percentage of children without health insurance. While 49 percent of Louisiana’s three and four-year-olds still lack access to an early care and education program, the number would be far higher without federal funds and the state’s commitment to expanding preschool through programs such as LA4 and NSECD. Likewise, historically low rates of uninsured children are a direct result of federal and state support for LaCHIP and Medicaid.

“The latest KIDS COUNT data show that some of our greatest successes for children are the result of federal investments and innovations at the state and local levels,” said Teresa Falgoust, KIDS COUNT manager at Agenda for Children. “A census undercount of young children endangers those gains by reducing the amount of funding Louisiana has available for essential programs.”

The Annie E. Casey Foundation offered the following recommendations to achieve a more accurate census:

- **Maximize the Census Bureau’s capacity:** Federal legislators need to fully fund the census outreach effort, and the Trump administration needs to appoint a qualified and permanent director to lead the agency to provide support for a more accurate census than in 2010.
- **Fund state and local outreach:** State and local governments and community organizations need to invest in educational outreach around the census to ensure that the most vulnerable communities are counted.
- **Expand the pool of trusted messengers:** Broaden the circle of people (from child care providers to members of the clergy) and organizations (from public schools to libraries) who can provide outreach in their communities to reach hard-to-count households and encourage participation among people most likely to be missed.
- **Address the digital divide:** Provide online access for all families to participate in the census, either in local libraries or school.

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# Mississippi

## Mississippi Ranks 48th in Children’s Well-being, the Highest in More than a Quarter Century

For the first time in nearly 30 years, Mississippi has improved its ranking for overall child wellbeing, according to new data released in the Annie E. Casey Foundation’s annual *KIDS COUNT® Data Book*. Thirteen of the 16 *Data Book* indicators used to rank states in the areas of economic well-being, education, health, and family and community show slight improvements, moving the state into the 48th position for the first time since 1991.

“The gains in each of the four domains reflect the continued benefit to children from federally funded programs and increasing parental employment,” said Mississippi KIDS COUNT Co-Director Dr. Linda H. Southward.

However, Southward provided an additional caution. “At the same time, we know that many children, particularly children of color, continue to live in poverty and suffer from a lack of resources. The research is clear that when states enact an earned income tax credit, the percentage of children and families living in poverty decreases. This policy, coupled with investments in high-quality early care and education programs, would set the stage for Mississippi to continue to improve its overall rankings on child well-being.”

The annual *KIDS COUNT Data Book* uses 16 indicators to review the progress made by each state and rank them across four areas of well-being — economic, education, health, and family and community.

- Benefitting from the stronger national economy, Mississippi experienced the greatest improvements in **economic well-being, ranking 48th**. Since 2010, children whose parents lack secure employment improved from 39 percent to 34 percent. There was also improvement seen in the number of children living in households with a high

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housing cost burden. However, the child poverty rate of 30 percent, or 211,000 children, still shows that Mississippi's children have one of the worst poverty outcomes in the nation.

- **In education, Mississippi ranked 44th.** High school students not graduating on time showed the greatest improvement, dropping from 25 percent to 18 percent in the past year. Fourth-graders not proficient in reading and eighth-graders not proficient in math revealed slight positive changes.
- **Mississippi ranked 47th in health.** The percent of Mississippi children without health insurance rose from 4 percent in 2015 to 5 percent in 2016.
- Mississippi continues to rank at the bottom of the nation in the **family and community domain at 50th.** There were slight improvements seen in the number of teen births (from 55 per 1,000 females ages 15 to 19 in 2010 to 33 per 1,000 females in 2016) and children living in high poverty areas. Still, during 2012-2016, 26% of children in Mississippi lived in a high poverty area, which can greatly impact future outcomes through a lack of exposure to resources that promote early childhood development.

### **Potential Threat Posed by 2020 Census Undercount**

The *2018 Data Book* also warns policymakers and child advocates of troubling consequences for the nation's kids with the likely undercount, nationwide, of about one million children under five in the 2020 Census. The 2010 survey had the worst undercount since 1950, with nearly five percent of children under five not counted.

Children of color, low-income children and children in immigrant families are the least likely to be counted and stand to suffer the most if vital programs face reductions in funding. Roughly 300 federal programs use census-derived data to allocate more than \$800 billion a year.

“All people—including children—have the right to be counted and be represented in our democracy. But with no real political or economic power, young children rely on adults

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to protect and advocate for them,” said Casey Foundation president and CEO Patrick McCarthy. “A major Census undercount will result in overcrowded classrooms, shuttered Head Start programs, understaffed hospital emergency rooms and more kids without health care.”

With the highest percentage population of African-Americans and one of the highest percentages of child poverty in the nation, Mississippi is at great risk of significant undercount of children and to losing substantial funding for program support. Based on Census counts, more than \$2 billion is allocated annually to Mississippi through federal programs to benefit children.

“All stakeholders must come together to make fully counting young children a priority issue as planning time for the census 2020 is rapidly fleeting,” said Dr. Heather Hanna, Mississippi KIDS COUNT Co-Director. “It’s not too late to ensure we conduct a Census that leads to proper funding, representation and programs for the continued healthy development of kids.”

Despite gains, progress is threatened by potential U.S. Census undercount, and work must continue to secure a brighter future for Mississippi’s children.

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# North Carolina

## **Expected 2020 Census Undercount Puts 73,000 NC Children at Risk: Decade of damage could be ahead for families and state programs**

With 73,000 North Carolina children at risk of not being counted in the upcoming 2020 census, federally-funded support that has driven child and youth success are in jeopardy, according to the *2018 KIDS COUNT® Data Book*, released by the Annie E. Casey Foundation.

**North Carolina ranks 32nd for child well-being nationally**, and the state has shown improvement in many indicators over the past year. However, the potential undercount of young children, particularly children of color, could threaten hundreds of millions in federal funding for children’s health, education, and safety. More than \$5 billion of North Carolina’s federal funding for children’s services is at stake, so it’s critical to get the count right.

“Nearly 50 percent of North Carolina’s children are living in poor or low-income households. It’s critical that we get an accurate count because we can’t afford to lose a single cent of the funds that come to the state to promote their well-being. When kids aren’t counted, state and local infrastructures face losing billions of federal dollars for supports—like education, school lunches, Head Start, Medicaid, SNAP, and CHIP—that give kids the opportunity for a healthy start at life,” said Whitney Tucker, research director at NC Child.

Estimates indicate that by 2050 the majority of children in North Carolina will be children of color. Previous census results have shown kids of color, low-income children and children in immigrant families to be at high risk of being undercounted. If missed in the count, these children also stand to suffer the most if vital programs face reductions in funding.

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In North Carolina, the undercount of children in the 2000 census led to inadequate funding for the Children’s Health Insurance Program (CHIP). As a result, eligible children were put on a waiting list and went uninsured until additional funding was secured.

“We will count on children of all races and ethnicities to build America’s future, so the country must count all children in this upcoming census, so we can direct funding to meet their needs,” said Casey Foundation President and CEO Patrick McCarthy. “It’s not too late to ensure we conduct a census that leads to proper funding, representation and programs for the continued healthy development of kids. But it’s up to policymakers, communities and the nation to make sure that every kid is counted and matters.”

The annual *KIDS COUNT Data Book* uses 16 indicators to rank each state across four domains — health, education, economic well-being and family and community — as an assessment of child well-being. North Carolina ranks:

- **32nd in economic well-being.** While family economic security remains a challenge in North Carolina, families have experienced significant progress with a 12 percent decrease in the percentage of children living in poverty compared to 2010, which is slightly less than the 14 percent decrease nationally.
- **22nd in education.** Education is an area where North Carolina scores above the national average for eighth-grade math (22nd) and fourth-grade reading proficiency (14th).
- **36th in the family and community domain.** Teen birth rates are at an all-time low nationwide, and North Carolina’s teen birth rate has dropped by 42 percent between 2010 and 2016 with only 22 births per 1,000 females ages 15 to 19. Unfortunately, North Carolina continues to struggle with other indicators in this realm, including:
  - o percent of children in families where the household head lacks a high school diploma (13 percent; state ranking: 39th);
  - o percent of single-parent households (36 percent; state ranking: 33rd) and
  - o percent of children living in high-poverty areas (13 percent; state ranking: 34th).

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- **29th in health.** North Carolina continues to struggle in promoting healthy birth outcomes, ranking 43rd in the country in the percentage of low-birth weight babies (9.2 percent). On a positive note, only 4 percent of children lacked health insurance in 2016, a 50 percent decrease since 2010.

The *2018 Data Book* shows that a stronger economy is producing better outcomes for parents and their kids, but this improvement is not without important caveats. The percentage of North Carolina children living in poverty has dropped from a high of 26 percent in 2011 to 22 percent in 2016. Nonetheless, in 2016, 13 percent of kids lived in a high-poverty neighborhood, a slight increase since 2012.

These data points suggest that the economic recovery has not made its way to areas of concentrated poverty where North Carolina children are at highest risk of negative outcomes. Unfortunately, it is precisely these areas that stand to lose the most in the event of a census undercount.

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# Oklahoma

## **New KIDS COUNT Data Book ranks Oklahoma in the bottom ten states for education, child health, and family and community supports**

A new report shows the youngest generation of Oklahomans faces far reaching challenges. The state ranks near the bottom in the nation for most measures of child well-being, according to the *2018 KIDS COUNT® Data Book*, released by the Annie E. Casey Foundation.

Overall, **the report ranks Oklahoma 44th out of all 50 states for child well-being**. While Oklahoma made significant gains in reducing teen births and reducing the number of children without health insurance in recent years, the state still ranks among the lowest in the nation on those measures.

“Even in those areas where Oklahoma has seen the most improvement recently, we still have a lot of work to do to set up our kids for success,” said Gene Perry, director of strategy and communications for Oklahoma Policy Institute. “We have a high rate of teen births, hundreds of thousands of kids living in poverty, tens of thousands without health insurance, and high numbers of children who aren’t getting what they need to become proficient in reading and math.”

The report also shows Oklahoma ranks sixth highest in the nation for the percentage of children living in “hard-to-count” U.S. Census tracts, putting almost 100,000 kids at risk of being undercounted. The 2020 Census will determine how much federal funding states and localities receive each year for the next decade. When kids aren’t counted, communities don’t get their fair share of federal dollars for Head Start, school lunches, and many other services that help young children get a healthy start in life.

“If we don’t count children, we render their needs invisible and their futures uncertain,” said Casey Foundation President and CEO Patrick McCarthy. “A major census

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undercount will result in overcrowded classrooms, shuttered Head Start programs, understaffed hospital emergency rooms, and more kids without health care.”

The annual *KIDS COUNT Data Book* uses 16 indicators to rank each state across four domains — health, education, economic well-being, and family and community — as an assessment of child well-being. Oklahoma ranks:

- **36th in economic well-being.** The economic security of Oklahoma kids has improved significantly in recent years, as the state and national economy emerged from recession. Compared to 2010, fewer families faced burdensome housing costs, fewer children lived in poverty, and more parents were employed full-time. However, the percentage of teens (16-19) not attending school and not working continues to be one of the highest in the nation at 9 percent.

- **46th in education.** Oklahoma’s ranking for education was lowest among all areas covered in the report. While Oklahoma had seen progress in improving fourth-grade reading proficiency, that progress was reversed in 2017 with 71 percent of fourth graders scoring below proficient — ranking the state 44th in the nation. Oklahoma students ranked even lower (45th) for eighth-grade math proficiency, with 76 percent scoring below proficient compared to a national average of 67 percent.

- **44th in the family and community domain.** Teen birth rates are at an all-time low nationwide and in Oklahoma, where they have dropped 34 percent since 2010. Despite this improvement, Oklahoma’s 2016 rate of 33 births per 1,000 females age 15 to 19 is tied with Mississippi for second-highest in the nation. Oklahoma also ranked among the highest for children in families where the head of household lacks a high school diploma (141,000 children, or 15 percent of all kids in the state).

- **40th in health.** Oklahoma was a national leader for one measure of child health in the Data Book — the state is tied for the lowest percentage of children ages 12-17 who abused alcohol in the past year (4 percent). Oklahoma also achieved a reduction in the percentage of low birthweight babies by 7 percent since 2010 and now ranks 19th in the U.S. on this measure. However, the state continues to struggle with a relatively high

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child uninsured rate (7 percent, fourth-highest in the U.S.) and a high rate of child and teen deaths (35 deaths per 1,000, sixth-highest in the U.S.).

“For too long, Oklahoma has under-invested in children and put too many barriers in the way of young families who are struggling to get by,” said Perry. “The commitments made this year to fund education and teacher pay will help, but we also took some steps in the wrong direction.”

“For example, the push by Governor Fallin and the state Legislature to deny health care to very low-income parents who don’t meet strict work and reporting requirements threatens health-care access for both these parents and their children,” said Perry. “We must do better to become a state where all children have what they need to thrive.”

“Even in those areas where Oklahoma has seen the most improvement recently, we still have a lot of work to do to set up or kids for success,” said Gene Perry, director of strategy and communications for Oklahoma Policy Institute.

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# South Carolina

## South Carolina Achieves Its Highest-Ever Ranking in History of KIDS COUNT Project

South Carolina achieved its highest placement to date in an annual nationwide survey of child well-being. Improvements in measures of strong families and children with health insurance placed South Carolina at 38th in the nation for child well-being, according to the Annie E. Casey Foundation's *2018 KIDS COUNT® Data Book*.

"We are seeing incremental improvements over time, and this shows us that the investments we are making in children, families and communities are adding up," said Children's Trust Chief Executive Officer Sue Williams. "Much of this success is because South Carolina parents, community leaders and state and federal legislators have long advocated for the well-being of kids and implemented programs, like children's health insurance, to ensure that children have opportunities to thrive."

Of the more than one million children in South Carolina, 44,000, or 4 percent, do not have health insurance. This is a 51 percent decrease since 2010. When children have health insurance, they are more likely to receive the preventive care that they need to stay healthy, especially when there are injuries or chronic health issues. Health insurance also helps protect families from financial crisis caused by expensive medical bills. When children are healthy, they are able to learn, and their parents are less likely to miss work to care for a sick child.

Additional indicators reveal where South Carolina is making progress for youth, and where proven prevention work is yielding dividends. More high school students are graduating on time. In the 2015-2016 school year, 17 percent of students did not graduate on time as compared to 26 percent of students in 2010-2011. Additionally, births to teen parents have fallen to 24 births for every 1000 births.

However, South Carolina continues to struggle with education. **The state ranks 41st for education.** It has only made slight gains from 2013-15 to 2014-16 in the percentage of

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three and four-year olds attending preschool. Despite a slight improvement since 2009, 71 percent of fourth graders are not proficient in reading. And 74 percent of eighth-graders are not proficient in math, a 6 percent jump since 2009.

For South Carolina to make improvements and continue its prevention investments, adequate funding and support is critical. However, this support is threatened by the potential undercount in the upcoming 2020 census. State and local programs, such as education, school lunches, children’s health insurance (CHIP) and more, rely upon formula funding based on population numbers set by the census. South Carolina could lose billions if South Carolina children are not accurately counted.

“If South Carolina is to continue to rise in the ranks, we must continue to invest in communities and support families. An accurate census count will be an important step to securing that future,” said Williams.

**Data in annual report show improvements in several areas of child well-being, return on prevention investments.**

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# Tennessee

## Tennessee Solidifies Gains in Child Well-Being

Tennessee is making a marked improvement in several areas of child well-being, ranking 35th in the *2018 KIDS COUNT® Data Book* released by the Annie E. Casey Foundation. The state's overall ranking is composed of four domain ranks: economic well-being, education, health and family and community. Each domain is made up of four measures.

**Tennessee achieved its highest rank, 27th, in the health domain. Other rankings were 33rd in economic well-being, 35th in education and 38th in family and community.** The state improved on one or more measures in all the domains except health.

The *KIDS COUNT Data Book* provides a picture of where Tennessee is and where it needs to focus more attention, and it provides data to inform changes states may want to make for improvements in the future. The Tennessee Commission on Children and Youth is the KIDS COUNT Tennessee state affiliate.

“Tennessee’s early adoption of expanded TennCare and CoverKids for children has contributed to a strong ranking on its health domain over the years,” said Rose Naccarato, Tennessee Commission on Children and Youth (TCCY) KIDS COUNT® director. “As other states have expanded Medicaid under the Affordable Care Act, this advantage has waned. Though most low-income children still have access to TennCare or CoverKids, their parents are often unaware because they themselves are not eligible.”

Outreach to families with qualifying children can reduce the number who are uninsured. Further reductions occur when parents are also eligible for coverage.

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Accepting Medicaid expansion funds would help keep Tennessee among the top states for maintaining children’s access to health care.

**“One of Tennessee’s lowest rankings continues to be for the percentage of babies born at a low birthweight,”** Naccarato said. “Over 9 percent of Tennessee babies are born weighing less than 5 pounds. Many risk factors for low birthweight are known, but they can be difficult to address.” Among these risks is substance abuse during pregnancy.

Like many states, Tennessee is fighting an opioid addiction crisis. Between 2010 and 2015, the incidence of Neonatal Abstinence Syndrome (NAS) among enrollees in TennCare, the state’s Medicaid program, increased from a rate of 11 per 1,000 live births to a rate of 24. NAS babies are more likely to be born prematurely and at a low birthweight. TennCare covers half of births in Tennessee and almost all NAS births. This year, Gov. Bill Haslam rolled out TN Together, a multifaceted approach across state agencies to end the opioid epidemic by focusing on prevention, treatment and law enforcement.

Reduction in the number of babies born at a low birthweight can occur when care is available for chronic physical and mental health and substance abuse conditions for women of childbearing age and outreach is improved to those who may qualify for SNAP, WIC and/or TennCare benefits. Additionally, nutrition programs that provide food for school-age children to take home can contribute to nutritionally sound diets for women in their childbearing years. TCCY leads the Home Visiting Leadership Alliance to support home visiting, an evidence-based program that can reduce instances of low birthweight and improve outcomes for children and families.

**“The state has put particular focus on infant health and on improvements in early education,”** Naccarato said. “Over 60 percent of Tennessee three- and four-year-olds lack access to pre-K, and the programs that are available are inconsistent in terms of quality.”

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Tennesseans for Quality Early Education formed to push for consistent high quality in pre-K classrooms and coordinate with elementary schools so gains will be sustained. Its advocacy helped pass the Pre-K Quality Act in 2016, and the Tennessee Department of Education has followed up with efforts to strengthen early education. As programs improve, Tennessee needs to increase access to these important early educational opportunities. High quality pre-K has a solid \$7 return on investment for every \$1 spent.

**One of Tennessee’s best ranks is for timely high school graduation**, with just 12 percent of students not graduating on time and a rank of 8th in the nation. Success in keeping children in school contributes to improvements in other measures. According to the Data Book, just 7 percent of Tennessee teens are neither working nor attending school, contributing to a higher economic well-being rank. Gov. Haslam’s Drive to 55 initiative has helped support these outcomes by offering access to free community college and technical school to all high school graduates through Tennessee Promise.

These improvements also raised the family and community ranking, with fewer children living in families led by a person without a high school degree. The domain improvements are, however, offset by a lower rank in teen birth rate. Tennessee has enjoyed a 35 percent reduction in teen births since 2010, but other states have advanced more quickly.

**In education, Tennessee’s 4th- and 8th-graders saw improvement in reading and math, respectively, outpacing the national average.** When many states were cutting school funding, Tennessee continued its steady increases through the Basic Education Program (BEP), though the state still ranks in the bottom 10 in per-child spending.

“For Tennessee to continue its progress, it needs to be able to describe its problems and measure the impact of its solutions,” said Rose Naccarato, Tennessee Commission on Children and Youth KIDS COUNT® director.

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# Texas

## Texas Ranks 43rd in Latest National Rankings of Child Well-Being

Texas children cannot afford to have an inaccurate census count, as the data would have major consequences for their health, wellness, education and economic opportunity. Texas ranks 43rd in child well-being – one of the 10 worst states for kids – though there are a few bright spots, including a decrease in the number of uninsured Texas children, according to the *2018 KIDS COUNT® Data Book* released by the Annie E. Casey Foundation. The report confirms challenges for Texas kids and highlights the critical role of the upcoming 2020 census. Billions of dollars in federal aid to states rely on the accuracy of the census, including significant support for children's health care, housing and food programs.

“We have to count all the children and families in Texas, because we can't support people we don't know are here,” said Ann Beeson, CEO of the Center for Public Policy Priorities (CPPP). “The data show us that Texas children have many challenges, and we need an accurate census to advance proven policy solutions that make this the best state for kids.”

Reflecting overall trends in the United States, Texas child poverty and health insurance rates have improved. An estimated 22 percent of Texas children lived in poverty in 2016, down from 23 percent in 2015. Despite these gains, Texas still lags behind other states, ranking 37th in child poverty and 48th in the percent of children without health insurance.

The national *KIDS COUNT Data Book* annually ranks each state in four core areas of child wellbeing: health, education, economic well-being and family and community. Texas lags behind most states in child well-being, and state legislators need to enact policies to improve child outcomes. Texas ranks:

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- **35th in economic well-being.** Although the number of children in poverty has decreased, more than 1.6 million Texas kids still live in poverty. About 27 percent of kids in Texas live in families where no member of the household has full-time, year-round employment.

- **32nd in education.** Data in the report confirm that Texas needs to do more to support education. A majority of Texas kids lack the reading and math skills they need to pursue higher education. Texas has a better on-time graduation rate than the U.S. average. 11 percent of Texas high schoolers did not graduate on time in the 2015-16 school year compared to 16 percent of students nationally. However, challenges in college and career readiness remain. Texas struggles to help its children improve in reading and math. Seventy-one percent of Texas fourth-graders scored below proficient in reading levels, and 67 percent of Texas eighth-graders scored below proficient in math levels.

- **47th in the family and community domain.** The Data Book refers to nurturing families and supportive communities as "family and community." Although the numbers are declining, 17 percent of Texas kids still live in high-poverty areas. An estimated 20 percent (almost 1.5 million) of kids in Texas live with a parent who lacks a high school diploma, down from 23 percent in 2012.

- **41st in health.** Texas child health insurance rates have improved since 2010, but still rank third to last in the United States. Lawmakers at the federal and state levels must protect and expand insurance access. Recent improvements are largely the result of the passage of the Affordable Care Act (ACA), which increased kids' access to critical physical and mental health care and strengthened families' financial security by reducing unexpected medical expenses. Threats to cut the popular Children's Health Insurance Program in 2017 and continued attacks on the ACA are not in line with keeping kids healthy.

CPPP has actively engaged in the Texas Public School Finance Commission, which has been meeting this year, and urges that group to recommend boosted public school investment for Texas children.

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"This report confirms that state leaders need to take more aggressive steps to improve the lives of millions of children and families, and that includes ensuring an accurate census," said Kristie Tingle, a research analyst at the Center for Public Policy Priorities in Austin. "Texas demographics — our large immigrant population and diverse overall population — have long made it a major challenge to get an accurate, full count of residents, and that challenge could be even larger in 2020 because of changes to the census."

Census surveys via internet may also not pick up lower-income populations without internet access. In Texas, 30 percent of young children under the age of five live in hard to count census tracts. These 582,000 children are at risk of being undercounted in the upcoming 2020 census, and federally funded programs that have driven youth success are in jeopardy.

CPPP offers the following recommendations to achieve a more accurate census:

- **Identify the 'hard to count' communities.** Community leaders and elected officials should learn about Texas' "hard to count" communities and begin reaching out to them now. Visit [www.censushardtocountmaps.us](http://www.censushardtocountmaps.us) to find areas of Texas that are the hardest to count. Targeting outreach to these hard-to-count areas and populations could help make a fair and accurate census more likely.
- **Conduct outreach across Texas.** State and local governments and community organizations need to ensure that all communities are counted. Create statewide and local 2020 census "complete count" committees. The Census Bureau regional staff can help with "complete count" committees and questions about the census.
- **Speak to your local officials.** All Texans can encourage their city and county officials to work with library systems, schools or other locations that might be helpful in encouraging residents to participate in the census.
- **Call Congress.** Texans can call their members of Congress and encourage them to maximize the Census Bureau's capacity. Federal lawmakers should fully fund the census outreach effort, and the administration needs to appoint a qualified and permanent director to lead the agency.

**Possible 2020 census undercount could worsen conditions for Texas kids.**

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# Virginia

## **An Anticipated 2020 Census Undercount of Young Children Could Jeopardize Progress**

Virginia continued to rank near the top, achieving 10th place in the nation for overall child well-being, according to the newly released *2018 KIDS COUNT® Data Book*, an annual report from the Annie E. Casey Foundation that measures child well-being in four domains: economic well-being, education, health, and family and community.

Despite this success, the commonwealth stands to lose ground, and billions of dollars along with it, if the 2020 census fails to provide an accurate count of people — especially young children who are often undercounted at a rate twice as high as any other age group. Currently, Virginia receives nearly \$3 billion annually in federal funding to support programs for children and their families. An inaccurate count means fewer federal dollars for state and local programs — like education, school lunches, Head Start, SNAP, and health insurance — that give kids the opportunity for a healthier start in life.

“The 2020 census determines the commonwealth’s funding for the next decade and is only two years away,” said Margaret Nimmo Holland, executive director of Voices for Virginia’s Children. “To sustain our current gains in child well-being and ensure children are fully considered in policy decisions, we need to lay the groundwork for an accurate count now.”

The undercount of young children has gotten worse with every census since 2010. In part, accuracy depends on counting children in neighborhoods or families that are historically harder to count. Kids can go uncounted for reasons such as complex living arrangements, high mobility or homelessness, living in mixed immigrant status families, and — as is the case for many kids in Virginia and nationwide — living in high-poverty neighborhoods. In Virginia, 78,000 (15 percent) of young children (ages 0 to 4) live in hard-to-count census tracts.

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“We must do a better job of counting our kids in the census,” said Beth Nolan, director of KIDS COUNT at Voices for Virginia’s Children. “How else are we to measure and track progress in child well-being if we don’t know where or who the children are? For kids to truly count, they must be accurately counted; all of them.” Knowing what’s at stake, organizations and individuals have come together to make the 2020 census a priority in Virginia. Voices for Virginia’s Children is a member of Virginia Counts, a statewide coalition coordinated by the Virginia Civic Engagement Table. The coalition is currently developing a set of priorities and recommendations to ensure a proper count of all people in the 2020 census. For more than 20 years the KIDS COUNT Data Book has provided a comprehensive look at child well-being in Virginia. This year, Virginia is ranked:

- **13th in economic well-being.** Virginia continues to lag behind the nation at the rate which it is reducing child poverty. While nearby states continue to improve in rank, the commonwealth is facing child poverty at a rate that is on par with 2010 levels: More than 260,000 kids (14 percent) are living below the poverty line.
- **6th in education.** With each year come steady gains in the number of students graduating from high school, putting the commonwealth ahead of the national average with 87 percent of students graduating on time.
- **13th in the family and community domain.** Teen birth rates are at an all-time low nationwide, and Virginia has seen a 41 percent decrease since 2010 in the rate of births to teens ages 15 to 19 (16 births per 1,000 in 2016), ranking 11th.
- **14th in health.** With only 5 percent of children uninsured, health insurance coverage continues to be a bright spot in the commonwealth after experiencing a 29 percent drop since just 2010.

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A potential loss in federal funding could threaten Virginia's rank as 10<sup>th</sup> in nation for child well-being.

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# West Virginia

## West Virginia Ranks 40th Nationally in Well-Being of Children

West Virginia has seen positive gains in education for its children as more high school seniors graduate on time and students make slight advances in math and reading proficiency, according to the *2018 KIDS COUNT® Data Book* released by the Annie E. Casey Foundation.

The improvements reveal the benefits of investing in programs and resources that work to provide children with the supports they need to progress and thrive. However, with a potential undercount of about a quarter of West Virginia's youngest children in the upcoming 2020 census, the same resources that have been able to help children make some progress in West Virginia may be in jeopardy of losing federal funding.

The annual *Data Book* uses 16 indicators to rank each state across four domains — health, education, economic well-being and family and community — as an assessment of child wellbeing. This year's report reveals some important truths about the state of child well-being, some more positive than others. Among the good news is that West Virginia has one of the lowest rates (2 percent) of uninsured children in the country, ranking second in that indicator, along with five other states. Since having insurance provides the foundation for accessing health care and improving health outcomes, this represents an important health policy victory.

Unfortunately, providing children with insurance alone is not enough to improve health outcomes in the state. It's up to policy makers and advocates to ensure that barriers to receiving care are reduced. Health outcomes are strongly connected to other childhood indicators, such as education and economic stability.

**West Virginia ranks 39th in education.** While the state has seen improvements in both reading and math proficiency for students, it is still well below the national averages. Nearly 70 percent of fourth-graders are not proficient in reading and 76 percent of

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eighth-graders in the state are not proficient in math. The national averages for proficiency are 65 and 67 percent, respectively, for reading and math. Considering the well-known link between education and future well-being, this represents an important area for improvement in West Virginia.

Similarly, children who grow up in financially stable environments have better outcomes in the long run. With almost a quarter of West Virginia's children living in families with incomes below the federal poverty level, decision-makers need to support programs that connect parents to economic opportunities. Despite slight improvements in each of the economic indicators, West Virginia ranks 47th in overall economic well-being for children, dropping five spots from its ranking of 42 in the 2017 *Data Book*.

### **Decade of Damage Possible from Inaccurate Census**

Even as West Virginia is seeing some improvements, the prospect of an undercount of nearly 25 percent of the state's young children is concerning. Nationally, the 2010 survey had the worst undercount since 1950, with nearly five percent of children under five — about 1 million kids — not counted.

Approximately 24 percent of West Virginia's young children (or 25,000 children under 5) live in hard-to-count areas in the state, putting them at risk of being undercounted in the 2020 census. These are children living in rural areas, multi-dwelling homes and other areas throughout the state. In addition, children of color, those living in immigrant families and low-income children are disproportionately undercounted. If missed in the national count, these children stand to suffer the most if vital programs face reductions in funding.

An undercount of young children in the upcoming decennial census would shortchange child well-being over the next decade by putting at risk hundreds of millions of dollars of federal funding for programs that are critical to family stability and opportunity. Roughly 300 federal programs use census-derived data to allocate more than \$800 billion a year.

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“If we don’t count children, we render their needs invisible and their futures uncertain,” said Casey Foundation President and CEO Patrick McCarthy. “A major census undercount will result in overcrowded classrooms, shuttered Head Start programs, understaffed hospital emergency rooms and more kids without health care.”

**West Virginia sees improvements in education and other child outcomes, but potential undercount in 2020 census jeopardizes progress.**

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