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**Twenty-fifth Edition of National *KIDS COUNT Data Book* Highlights Improvements in
Kentucky Child Health and Education Since 1990 but More Children in Poverty**

Policies Have Made a Positive Impact but Vast Opportunities Still Exist

Jeffersontown, KY – Kentucky ranks 35th in the nation on overall child well-being, according to the Annie E. Casey Foundation’s 2014 national *KIDS COUNT Data Book* co-released today by Kentucky Youth Advocates. This year’s book marks the 25th edition of the annual publication.

The national *KIDS COUNT Data Book* provides state level data and rankings. The 2014 *Kentucky KIDS COUNT County Data Book*, which includes county level data and rankings, will be released in September.

In addition to ranking 35th in overall child well-being, Kentucky ranks 35th in Economic Well-Being, 30th in Education, 28th in Health, and 40th in Family and Community. Kentucky’s rankings are similar to those of the past two years (which used the same 16 indicators), and all 16 indicators of well-being continue to move in the same direction as last year’s book compared to the pre-recession, baseline data.

“The real takeaways from this report come from reflecting on the changes that have occurred in Kentucky since the first national *KIDS COUNT Data Book* was released 25 years ago and asking some essential questions to better understand the picture of child well-being today compared to 1990,” said Dr. Terry Brooks, executive director, Kentucky Youth Advocates. “How are kids better off? How are kids worse off? How can we improve kids’ lives over the next 25 years?”



This [Kentucky Supplemental Fact Sheet](#) shows long-term trends for the 16 indicators of child well-being. Notable findings include:

Health: Kentucky has made strides since 1990 to improve child health. For example, the percentage of children without health insurance was cut in half from 1990 to 2011. This is likely due to the creation of the State Children’s Health Insurance Program (CHIP) in 1997 and efforts in recent years by the state to make it easier for eligible children to enroll in Medicaid and CHIP. Kentucky is expected to make even more progress on this indicator over the next few years, because of the state healthcare exchange, kynect, and expanding coverage to low-income parents through Medicaid. Research shows that when parents are covered, their children are more likely to be enrolled in coverage as well.

“I’m proud of the health gains we’ve made here in the Commonwealth,” said Governor Steve Beshear. “By connecting eligible children to Medicaid and KCHIP in recent years, our child uninsured rate continues to decline. And, with the success of kynect and expanding Medicaid to low-income adults, we are now a national model for connecting people to health coverage.”

Education: Kentucky has also made great strides in education since the first national *KIDS COUNT Data Book*. In school year 1990/1991, more than one in four (27 percent) Kentucky students did not graduate high school on time compared to less than one in five students (18 percent) in school year 2011/2012. Kentucky also improved over the last 25 years in the proportion of 4th graders reading proficiently at grade level and 8th graders proficient in math (based on the National Assessment of Educational Progress), as well as the percentage of children attending preschool.

“In 1990, as the General Assembly passed the Kentucky Education Reform Act in response to the Kentucky Supreme Court’s ruling that our system of public education was unconstitutional, former Governor Bert Combs said Kentucky had ‘decided to become educated’,” said Dr. Leon Mooneyhan, CEO, Ohio Valley Educational Cooperative. “We’ve developed a world-class system of education since, but not one educator in Kentucky should rest on history as much work remains to be done. Job one must be continuing to push for the funding *excellent* schools require.” Mooneyhan added, “We also have a responsibility to help our policymakers understand College and Career Readiness begins in preschool and universal Pre-K would be the ticket out of low-wage America for countless children”

“Kentucky educators should take pride in the improvements shown in our schools, and yet we as a Commonwealth cannot accept an education system in which 2 of 3 third graders don’t read at national proficiency and 2 of 3 eighth graders cannot perform math at national proficiency,” added Brooks. “There is a lot of good work going on in our schools, but to make the next leap ahead, we have to begin paying attention to factors like early childhood, health, and economics that transcend reading, writing and arithmetic. When we begin to look more closely at the whole child and the family, then and only then will our student achievement make Kentucky world-class.”

Family and Community: Kentucky has progressed in many areas of the Family and Community domain, but much work remains. The percentage of children in families where the household head lacks a high school diploma was cut by more than half from 1990 to 2012 (28 percent vs. 13 percent). In addition, the teen birth rate fell by 37 percent from 1990 to 2012, yet Kentucky still has one of the highest teen birth rates in the nation.

Economic Well-Being: The biggest problem facing Kentucky kids today is poverty as it impacts all other domains of well-being. Kentucky children’s economic security is far worse off today than in 1990. The percentage of children living in poverty grew by 13 percent from 1990 to 2012, and Kentucky has now had four consecutive years in which more than one in every four children lives in poverty.

“Reducing poverty is the single most important way to improve child well-being,” said Brooks. “Kentucky families are hurting and we need to enact solutions that will make stark improvements in the economic security of low-income families. Solutions such as enacting a state refundable Earned Income Tax Credit to help working families make ends meet, helping families build up assets, and expanding supports to working families like child care assistance will reduce poverty and help make Kentucky a top-ranked state in years to come.”

Brooks added, “Since 1990, it’s obvious that several policies have made a measurable impact on child well-being, such as connecting kids to health coverage and the Kentucky Education Reform Act. Policy change can change the trajectory for kids and families, and that’s why we continue to work with our elected leaders to create policies that are good for kids, improve current policies, and change policies that aren’t working.”

The *KIDS COUNT Data Book* features the latest data on child well-being for every state, the District of Columbia and the nation.

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Kentucky Youth Advocates is a non-partisan, non-profit, children's advocacy organization. KYA represents a voice for Kentucky's most precious asset – its youth. We believe that Kentucky's youth deserve the opportunities and resources necessary to ensure their productive development and health.

The Annie E. Casey Foundation creates a brighter future for the nation's children by developing solutions to strengthen families, build paths to economic opportunity and transform struggling communities into safer and healthier places to live, work and grow. For more information, visit www.aecf.org. KIDS COUNT® is a registered trademark of the Annie E. Casey Foundation.