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Twenty-fifth Edition of *KIDS COUNT Data Book* Highlights Improvements in Health, Safety, Education and Decline in Teen Birth Rate Since 1990
Mississippi Moves to 50th Spot in Annual Ranking of Overall Child Well-Being

STARKVILLE — Demographic, social and economic changes combined with major policy developments have affected the lives of lower-income children in both positive and negative ways since 1990, according to the Annie E. Casey Foundation’s 25th edition of its annual *KIDS COUNT Data Book*. The good news is that there has been steady improvement in the number of children attending preschool and a decline in the number of schoolchildren not proficient in reading and math. In Mississippi, the number of children not proficient in reading went from 86 percent in 1992 to 79 percent in 2013.

There is also a positive trend in parental education that benefits kids: In Mississippi, a smaller percentage of children live in families in which no parent has a high school diploma – from 35 percent in 1990 to 14 percent in 2012. That is a 60 percent improvement. In addition, the teen birth rate is at a historic low, and the death rates for children and teens have fallen, because of medical advances and increased usage of seat belts, car seats and bike helmets. The child and teen death rate in Mississippi decreased by 42 percent over the twenty-five year period (from 66 to 38 deaths per 100,000 children ages 1 to 19).

Worrisome trends include a rise in the official child poverty rate as defined by the federal government. Although the rate nationally dropped from 18 to 16 percent from 1990 to 2000, the rate had reached 22 percent by 2010 and has remained at roughly that level. In 2012, nearly 16.4 million kids were living in poverty. In 1990, the percentage of Mississippi children living in poverty stood at 33 percent. In 2012, the number increased to 256,000 or 35 percent. The percentage of children living in single-parent families across the nation has risen significantly – in 1990, 25 percent of children lived in a single-parent household, and by 2012, the figure had risen to 35 percent. In Mississippi, 35 percent of children lived in single-parent households in 1990. That figure had increased to 49 percent in 2012.

“With advances in neuroscience, as well as solid research on what works, we now know more than ever before about how to give children a good start and help them meet major developmental milestones throughout childhood,” said Patrick McCarthy, the Foundation’s president and CEO. “On several fronts, we’ve seen the difference that smart policies, effective programs and high quality practice can make in improving child well-being and long term outcomes. We should all be encouraged by the improvements in many well-being indicators in the health, education and safety areas.”

“But we must do much more,” McCarthy said. “All of us, in every sector—business, government, nonprofits, faith-based groups, families—need to continue to work together to ensure that all children have the chance to succeed. We should strengthen our commitment and redouble our efforts until every child in America develops to full potential. We simply cannot afford to endanger the futures of the millions of low-income children who

don't have the chance to experience high-quality early childhood programs and the thriving neighborhoods that higher-income families take for granted.”

To examine the more recent trends between 2005 and 2012, the new *Data Book* uses 16 indicators across four areas – Economic Well-Being, Education, Health and Family and Community.

- **Children continue to progress in the areas of education and health.** All four education indicators covering milestones such as preschool attendance and high school graduation showed steady improvements on a national level as well as in Mississippi. The percentage of Mississippi children not attending preschool went from 54 percent in 2005-2007 to 50 percent in 2010-2012. High school students not graduating on time also improved. In 2005/2006, 36 percent of Mississippi high school students did not graduate on time compared to 32 percent in 2011/2012. Child health also improved across all four indicators, nationally and in Mississippi. More children have access to health insurance coverage than before the recession. The percentage of children in Mississippi without health insurance was nearly cut in half between 2008 and 2012 (13 percent in 2008 compared to 7 percent in 2012).
- **Economic progress still lags, even after the end of the recession.** At the national level, three of the four economic well-being indicators were worse than the mid-decade years, which is not surprising given the severity of the economic crisis over the past six years. Mississippi did not fare as well with all four indicators worsening in the same period. The number of Mississippi children whose parents lack secure employment rose to 301,000 in 2012 – a 14 percent increase since 2008.
- **Mixed picture on Family and Community indicators.** The teen birth rate is at a historic low across the country. In Mississippi, the number improved from 61 teen births per 1,000 in 2005 to 46 in 2012. On the national level, there was a small drop in the percentage of children living in families where the household head lacks a high school diploma and more significantly in Mississippi where the percent decreased from 20 percent in 2005 to 14 percent in 2012. However, there was an increase in the percentage of children living in single-parent families and more children living in high-poverty areas in the state and across the nation.

At the state level, Massachusetts ranked highest for overall child well-being, while Mississippi returned to the 50th spot after ranking 49th in 2013 just ahead of New Mexico. Although Mississippi saw no change in any of the four focus areas, the overall ranking fell due to improvements in other states. The largest single-year improvement in Mississippi was the teen birth rate indicator, which moved the state from 50th to 47th. The state remained at 48th in education and health domains, but also remained 50th in the economic well-being and family and community domains.

“These rankings reinforce the crucial importance of promoting evidence-based policies to improve children’s outcomes,” said Dr. Linda Southward, Mississippi KIDS COUNT director. “We have a tremendous opportunity to make positive long term impacts by investing early in children’s well-being. The recent passage of Pre-K legislation is a small step in the right direction.”

The [*KIDS COUNT Data Book*](#) features the latest data on child well-being for every state, the District of Columbia and the nation. This information is available in the [KIDS COUNT Data Center](#), which also contains the most recent national, state and local data on hundreds of measures of child well-being. Data Center users can create rankings, maps and graphs for use in publications and on websites, and view real-time information on mobile devices.

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