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**North Dakota ranks well nationally with regard to overall child well-being;
However, substantial opportunities for improvement exist**

FARGO - North Dakota's overall child well-being ranks sixth in the nation according to the Annie E. Casey Foundation's 25th edition of the *KIDS COUNT Data Book*, an annual assessment of children's well-being in the United States. The *Data Book* provides a comprehensive portrait of how U.S. children are doing in four key areas of well-being: Economic, Family and Community, Education, and Health. States are ranked on 16 indicators of child well-being, four for each key area, that reflect current research regarding the conditions needed for proper child development.

"It is encouraging to see improvements in all four areas of well-being," said Karen Olson, Program Director for North Dakota KIDS COUNT. "This report also helps to identify opportunities for addressing challenges. Research suggests that investment is most critical in the early years, birth through age eight, to support families and help young people succeed." Olson added, "An investment in young children is an investment in the future economy and workforce of the nation. The more we know and about our children, the better equipped we are to make smart decisions about the future."

North Dakota continues to lead the nation in growth of Growth Domestic Product and per capita income and continues to have the nation's lowest unemployment rate. Yet, despite these positive measures, Olson notes that "many North Dakotan children face challenges. Our current prosperity provides us with a unique opportunity to make investments in the lives of our children to ensure they get the best possible start in life."

Although North Dakota is showing nearly uniform progress in the Economic, Education, and Health indicators for children, the results with regard to the Family and Community indicators are slightly more mixed. Additionally, despite North Dakota's top ranking in the nation with regard to Economic Well-being, the child poverty rate has not changed since 2005. Highlights for each of the key areas are as follows.

Economic Well-Being (1st in the nation)

- **Strengths:** North Dakota continues to rank 1st in the nation with regard to the economic well-being of children. North Dakota has the smallest percentage of children without secure parental employment (19 percent), the lowest percentage of children in families with a high housing cost burden (16 percent), the lowest child poverty percentage (13 percent), and the third lowest rate of idle teens (5percent). In addition, three of these four economic well-being measures showed improvement since 2005, with child poverty being the exception.
- **Challenges and Opportunities:** Despite these economic strengths, the percentage of children living in poverty has shown no change over the past seven years - this amidst an economic boom in the state. Currently, about 20,000 North Dakota children (13 percent) are impoverished.

Family and Community (4th in the nation)

- **Strengths:** When compared with other states, children in North Dakota fare well in terms of family and community indicators. North Dakota has the lowest percentage of children living in families where the household head lacks a high school diploma (5 percent) and the third lowest percentage of children living in single-parent

families (28 percent). In addition, North Dakota saw improvement in the teen birth rate, from 35 births per 1,000 teenage girls in 1990 to 26 per 1,000 in 2012.

- Challenges and Opportunities: The proportion of North Dakota children who live with a single parent has nearly doubled since 1990. Just over one in four North Dakota children now live with a single parent (28 percent in 2012, up from 23 percent in 2005 and 15 percent in 1990), and these children are about six times more likely to be living in poverty than children living with married parents.

Education (19th in the nation)

- Strengths: Three of the four education indicators showed improvement since 2005: children not attending preschool, eighth graders not proficient in math, and high school students not graduating on time. North Dakota has the fourth lowest percentage of high school students in the nation not graduating on time (9 percent).
- Challenges and Opportunities: Despite these improvements, two-thirds of 4th graders are not proficient in reading – a proportion that has shown very little change over time. North Dakota also has the 5th worst ranking with regard to preschool enrollment. High-quality early learning programs for 3- and 4-year-olds can improve school readiness, with the greatest gains accruing to the highest-risk children. Yet, two-thirds of 3- and 4-year-olds in North Dakota do not attend nursery school or preschool.

Health (23th in the nation)

- Strengths: All four health indicators showed improvement since the mid-2000s: the child and teen death rate, children without health insurance, low birth weight babies, and teens who abuse alcohol or drugs.
- Challenges and Opportunities: Though showing some improvement, the child death rate in North Dakota ranks 41st in the nation. With regard to uninsured children, North Dakota dropped in ranking from 19th last year to 30th in this year's analysis.

The 2014 *KIDS COUNT Data Book* includes the latest data on child well-being for every state, the District of Columbia, and the nation. This information will be available July 22, 2014 at 12:01 a.m. EDT at www.aecf.org. The KIDS COUNT Data Center (<http://datacenter.kidscount.org>) also contains the most recent national, state, and local data on hundreds of other measures of child well-being. The Data Center allows users to create rankings, maps, and graphs for use in publications and on websites, and to view real-time information on mobile devices. Follow the Annie E. Casey Foundation on Twitter @aecfkidscount and on Facebook at <http://www.facebook.com/KIDSCOUNT>.

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The North Dakota KIDS COUNT program is a project of the Annie E. Casey Foundation. Our mission is to provide the information necessary to inform discussions and decisions to improve the health and well-being of children in North Dakota. You can see more at <http://www.ndkidscount.org> or search for “ndkidscount” on Facebook.