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NM Shows Slight Improvement, Some Decline in 2014 *KIDS COUNT Data Book* State ranking moves from 50th to 49th over the year

ALBUQUERQUE—New Mexico moved up from the bottom position of 50th in the 2013 national KIDS COUNT rankings to 49th in child well-being this year in the 2014 KIDS COUNT Data Report. While improvement was made from 2013 to 2014 in some child well-being indicators in the data report, such as child poverty (dropped from 31 percent to 29 percent), high school graduation rates (rose from 67 percent in 2010 to 74 percent in 2012) and our teen birth rate (which dropped from 53 births per 1,000 female teens to 47 per 1,000), others declined.

Key child well-being indicators that declined from the 2013 data report to this year's 2014 report include the percent of children living in single-parent families (which increased from 43 percent to 44 percent), the rate of children living in high-poverty areas (an increase from 21 percent to 22 percent), and the percentage of eighth graders who are not proficient in math (which increased from 76 percent to 77 percent).

Dr. Veronica C. García, executive director of New Mexico Voices for Children, which runs the KIDS COUNT program in New Mexico stated, "Although our ranking has slightly improved, there is still much work to be done to improve children's ability to thrive in the state. It's a tiny step forward, but only if we can keep up the positive momentum of change. The fact that New Mexico has always been in the bottom ten states—and this year in the bottom five states—in terms of child well-being is what's concerning. In other words, we need to do better by our children—much, much better."

This is the 25th year the Annie E. Casey Foundation has released the *KIDS COUNT Data Book* along with its rankings of the 50 states. The highest New Mexico has ever ranked was 40th and that was back in 1995. States are ranked according to how well children fare in 16 indicators of health, economic security, education, and family/community factors that have an impact on children's ability to succeed in life. This include rates of children without health insurance, the percentage of children whose parents do not have secure income or high school diplomas, fourth grade reading proficiency rates and the like.

“If we continue to fail to address the well-being of our children in a comprehensive and effective way, New Mexico will maintain its rank at the bottom of the heap,” said Dr. García. “New Mexico’s future is being formed today. It is shaped by whether all our children have access to the opportunities that will put—and keep—them on the path to success. We know what policies will move the needle. We know, for example, that high-quality early childhood care and learning programs provide a strong, positive basis for children’s long-term health, academic and employment success. We know that the return on this kind of investment far out-performs any other later investments we might make. The only question is whether we are willing to commit to making the investments,” she added.

The 2014 edition of the *Data Book* includes a look at some longer-term trends in the data both at the state and national levels. While, in general, New Mexico has followed the national trend in most KIDS COUNT indicators such as teen birth rate (which has declined over the past 25 years) and percent of children living in single-parent homes (which has increased over that time frame), there are two notable exceptions.

For one, since 1992, the rate of fourth grade reading proficiency—a basic indicator of students’ ability to succeed in education—has risen in all states except New Mexico and North Dakota. North Dakota’s rates, however, have been consistently higher than New Mexico’s in this measure. Also, though the percentage of teens 16-19 who are not working and not in school improved in the U.S. over this time period, the rate has gotten worse in New Mexico.

After New Mexico’s drop to 50th last year, NM Voices released *NM KIDS are COUNTing on Us: A Policy Agenda for a Better New Mexico*, which included policy recommendations for addressing all 16 of the indicators of child well-being in a comprehensive way. The child advocacy group released an updated policy agenda last month that includes several new recommendations. It also notes whether recommended policies were addressed during the last legislative session.

The KIDS COUNT Data Book and the New Mexico profile are available on the Casey Foundation [website](#). The updated *NM KIDS are COUNTing on Us* policy agenda is available here: <http://www.nmvoices.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/06/KIDS-COUNTing-policy-agenda-June-2014-update-web.pdf>

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New Mexico Voices for Children is a nonpartisan, nonprofit organization advocating for policies to improve the health and well-being of New Mexico's children, families and communities.

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