



# Children's Action Alliance

*A Voice for Arizona's Children for Over 25 Years*

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## **2015 KIDS COUNT Data Book Ranks Arizona 46<sup>th</sup> for Child Well-Being** *Arizona leaders can act to improve conditions for children*

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Arizona still ranks 46<sup>th</sup> out of 50 states in critical conditions for children, according to the 26th annual *KIDS COUNT*<sup>®</sup> *Data Book* from the Annie E. Casey Foundation.

There is some good news in the data. Arizona has seen improvement in 11 of the 16 indicators used to measure child well-being in the last five years, including fourth grade reading, teens who abuse alcohol or drugs, and babies born to teen moms.

Two areas stand out with promise or peril for Arizona's future economy and quality of life.

The slow and uneven economic recovery and the lack of secure, good-paying jobs for parents mean that more than one in four children in Arizona is stranded in poverty. Such low family income puts kids at high risk for family instability, school failure, health problems, and a difficult future. Since 2008, the number of children in poverty rose from 349,000 to 421,000 – a 24 percent increase since the midst of the recession.

“While we’ve seen an increase in employment in recent years, many of these jobs are low-wage and cannot support even basic family expenses,” said Patrick McCarthy, president and CEO of the Casey Foundation.

Unfortunately, Arizona state lawmakers have voted in recent years for policies and budgets that will make it harder for poor children to succeed. These actions include zeroing out state funding for child care assistance for working families and shrinking the lifetime limit to 12 months for Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (known as TANF) for the poorest mothers and children – the shortest of any state in the country.

Arizona continues to stand out for its extremely low rate of young children participating in preschool. More than two out of three young children miss this foundation for educational success, ranking the state third worst in the nation.

“Arizona can’t achieve our goals for third-grade reading, high school graduation, and college and career readiness with so many children starting kindergarten already behind,” said Dana Wolfe Naimark, president and CEO of Children’s Action Alliance.

Arizona does have a new opportunity to improve these rankings. Due to a \$20 million federal grant, plans are underway to expand high quality preschool programs for four-year-old children living in high need communities. With dozens of community partners, this could open the doors of educational success for more than 2,000 children each year.

This step to expand preschool participation and close some of our education gaps depends on sustaining financial support. The federal funding is already at risk, with a new U.S. House Appropriations subcommittee budget bill that eliminates the funding for this grant. Funding from the state, philanthropy, and business and community partners will be needed to sustain and grow preschool enrollment.

“This is a chance right in front of us to expand a most critical and basic opportunity for education that can lead to a stronger workforce and a stronger community down the road,” said Naimark. “We call on our Congressional delegation to work with us to retain the federal funding for the five-year plan. And we ask our state and local leaders to work with us to invest Arizona resources to build Arizona success.”

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*The 2015 Data Book will be available July 21 at 12:01 a.m. EDT (9:01 p.m. Arizona Time) at [www.aecf.org](http://www.aecf.org). Additional information is available at <http://databook.kidscount.org>, which also contains the most recent national, state and local data on hundreds of indicators 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.*

*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](http://www.aecf.org). KIDS COUNT® is a registered trademark of the Annie E. Casey Foundation.*

*Children's Action Alliance is an independent voice for Arizona children at the state capitol and in the community. CAA works to improve children's health, education, and security through information and action.*