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More Louisiana Children Live in Poverty Today Than in Midst of Great Recession

2015 KIDS COUNT Data Book Ranks Louisiana 48th in Overall Child Well-Being

NEW ORLEANS —About 33,000 more Louisiana children live in poverty today than during the Great Recession, according to the newly released 2015 *KIDS COUNT*[®] *Data Book* from the Annie. E. Casey Foundation. In 2013, 28 percent of children in Louisiana lived in poverty, compared to 25 percent in 2008. Over a third (34 percent) of Louisiana children live in families where no parent has full-time, year round employment. Even when parents are able to find full time positions, many are working in low-wage jobs that don't offer the wages and benefits needed to support a family.

The 2015 *Data Book*, which focuses on key trends in child well-being in the post-recession years, measures child well-being in four domains: economic well-being, education, health, and family and community. Louisiana ranked 48th overall, and was ranked 47th in terms of economic well-being. The Casey Foundation's report shows that, even as the nation's economy has improved, economic conditions have failed to improve for Louisiana's children. Not only are more Louisiana children living in poverty than before the recession, but they are also more likely to live in high-poverty neighborhoods where access to good schools and other opportunities is more limited.

"Every child deserves the opportunity to grow up healthy, safe and well-educated," said Dr. Anthony Recasner, CEO of Agenda for Children. "The latest *KIDS COUNT Data Book* shows that Louisiana is leaving far too many children behind. Since 2008, conditions have worsened for Louisiana children on many fronts. Louisiana's future depends on our ability to get things right for today's children."

Bright Spots for Louisiana Children

Though Louisiana ranked 48th overall, the state has made progress on several measures:

- **Fourth grade reading and eighth grade math proficiency improved** modestly between 2007 and 2013. Where 80 percent of fourth graders were not proficient readers in 2007, by 2013, that figure had fallen by three percentage points, to 77 percent. The percentage of eighth graders not proficient in math fell from 81 percent to 79 percent during the same time period.
- **More children now have health insurance.** In 2013, the number of children lacking health insurance dropped to six percent from eight percent in 2008, ranking the state 20th on this health indicator.

- **The child and teen death rate fell** from 47 deaths per 100,000 in 2008 to 37 deaths per 100,000 in 2013.
- **Teen births continue to reach historic lows.** The teen birth rate fell by 28 percent between 2008 and 2013.

“Louisiana’s progress in key areas, such as the child health insurance rate and math and reading proficiency, show that improvements in child well-being are possible when policymakers and the community make a strong commitment to children’s issues,” Dr. Recasner said. “Many of these successes can be directly tied to public investments and policy decisions. For example, the Louisiana Department of Health and Hospitals’ LaCHIP program is a national leader in getting more children connected to health insurance. Our friends in the Louisiana legislature need to hear from all of us—the business community, voters, and parents—about why investing in children and families is critical to our state’s future.”

Challenges facing Louisiana’s Children

Conditions worsened on seven different measures of child well-being, including:

- **Half of Louisiana three- and four-year-olds are not attending preschool.** This rate has gotten slightly worse since 2007-2009. While Louisiana’s rate is actually among the best in the country, 64,000 children each year miss out on early learning experiences that could help prepare them for success in school and in life.
- **The number of children whose parents have stable employment is down.** In 2013, 34 percent of Louisiana children lived in families where no parent had year-round, full-time employment.
- **In 2013, 10.9 percent of Louisiana babies were born at low birthweight.** Only Mississippi had a higher rate of low birthweight babies.

Improving Opportunities for All Children

“Connecting more families to jobs and work supports is essential to improving overall child well-being,” said Dr. Recasner. “Louisiana’s high child poverty rate is a major contributor to our poor performance on a whole range of other measures, including our educational and health outcomes. We support the Casey Foundation’s recommendations to use a two-generation strategy to fight poverty and improve child outcomes.”

The Casey Foundation offers a number of recommendations to make good on the American promise of opportunity for all children. The Foundation promotes a two-generation strategy that simultaneously addresses the needs of children directly while providing tools and resources to their parents. Three critical strategies include:

- Provide parents with multiple pathways to get family-supporting jobs and achieve financial stability.
- Ensure access to high-quality early childhood education and enriching elementary school experiences.
- Equip parents to better support their children socially and emotionally and to advocate for their kids' education.

The Casey Foundation recommends policies that promote higher pay, paid sick leave, flexible scheduling and expanded unemployment benefits that will result in higher family income, reduced parental stress and an increased capacity of parents to invest in their kids. Detailed recommendations can be found in the 2014 report, [Creating Opportunity for Families: A Two-Generation Approach](#).

The 2015 *Data Book* will be available July 21 at 12:01 a.m. EDT at www.aecf.org. Additional information is available at <http://datacenter.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, <http://mobile.kidscount.org>. KIDS COUNT® is a registered trademark of the Annie E. Casey Foundation.

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Agenda for Children, a private non-profit organization, works to make Louisiana a state in which all children can thrive. Visit www.agendaforchildren.org to learn more.