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Texas is 9th Worst State for Kids, Despite Some Progress

2015 KIDS COUNT Data Book highlights challenges facing the next generation of Texans

(AUSTIN, TEXAS) – Texas remains one of the worst states to be a kid, according to the new national *KIDS COUNT*[®] *Data Book* from the Annie E. Casey Foundation, though there were a few bright spots for the Lone Star State including improved math proficiency for eighth graders. Overall Texas ranks near the bottom in many measurements of child well-being, threatening the next generation of Texans and the caliber of the state's workforce.

"With nearly one in 10 children in the country living in Texas, it's long past time for state leaders to do more for our kids," said Center for Public Policy Priorities (CPPP) Executive Director Ann Beeson. "The legislative session that just ended saw some moderate policy improvements in pre-kindergarten and child protective services, but overall there were too many missed opportunities to support our children."

Key findings include:

- Texas ranks 41st out of 50 states (9th worst) in terms of overall child well-being. This is on par with Texas' rank in recent years (43rd in 2014 and 42nd in 2013).
- Texas ranks near the worst in children without health insurance (49th), children living in high-poverty neighborhoods (46th), and teen birth rates (46th).
- Bright spots for Texas rankings are eighth graders who score below proficient in math (15th) and children living in families where no parent has full-time employment (17th), although the number of Texas kids in both of these categories is still unacceptably high.

Over the past five years, Texas kids have experienced very slow and uneven progress in key areas of well-being, and are generally still worse off than before the recession. The notable exception is in health. Following national trends, Texas improved on all four key health indicators (child and teen death rate, low-birthweight babies, children without health insurance, and teens who abuse alcohol/drugs).

Although the rate of children without health insurance improved from 18 to 13 percent from 2008 to 2013, Texas still ranks 2nd worst for kids without health insurance. Thirty-two states have a child uninsured rate that is less than half that of Texas. Teen births across the nation have been on the decline, and although the number of teen births in Texas declined from over 54,000 in 2008 to 37,525 in 2013, Texas still ranks 46th.

"The two most important things we could do to raise our child well-being rankings are to provide more children with health insurance and reduce the teen birth rate," said CPPP Research Associate Jennifer Lee.

Notably, one in four Texas kids live in poverty. This is consistent with recent years and does not bode well for the next generation of Texans or the caliber of the state's workforce.

A growing number of Texas children live in a high-poverty neighborhood, where there are fewer opportunities in education, and where health and safety are at risk. And too many Latino and African-American children in Texas lack the opportunities they need to move forward and reach their full potential.

"All children – regardless of race or ethnicity – should have the chance to compete and succeed in life," said Lee. "It's time to adopt comprehensive policy solutions that benefit children of all backgrounds and prepare them to be healthy, well-educated and financially secure."

The 2015 Kids Count Data Book is available on July 21 at 12:01 a.m. EDT at 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. KIDS COUNT® is a registered trademark of the Annie E. Casey Foundation.

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