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Connecticut One of Five Best States for Children

2016 KIDS COUNT Data Book finds CT youth are healthier and completing high school on time despite facing future limited by economic inequality, unaffordable higher education

HARTFORD, CONN. –For the first time since rankings began, Connecticut has risen to number five in the nation for overall child well being, behind only Minnesota, Massachusetts, Iowa and New Hampshire according to the 2016 *KIDS COUNT*[®] *Data Book* from the Annie E. Casey Foundation. Connecticut now ranks number two in child health and three in youth education, up last year from four and five, respectively.

“We’re very happy to report that Connecticut has finally broken into the top five of state rankings for overall child well-being. We’re also very proud to be number two in child health and number three in youth education”, says Roger Senserrich, the Policy Director at the Connecticut Association for Human Services (CAHS).

Teens in Connecticut are making smart choices when it comes to their health and education. Since 2008, the percent of teens that abused drugs or alcohol has declined from eight percent to five percent. This is in spite of increasing concern over adult opiate usage which prompted Governor Dannel Malloy to sign a bill in July 2015 meant to assist in curbing substance abuse and opioid overdoses. The teen birth rate has been cut almost in half, down to 12 percent in 2014 from 23 percent in 2008. In addition, 87 percent of Connecticut high school students are graduating on time, increasing from 82% in 2008. Graduation rates have increased dramatically within communities that have traditionally struggled with encouraging youth to get their high school diploma. Specifically, the percentage of students receiving high school degrees in East Hartford has increased from 80% in 2011 to almost 95% in 2015.

“Despite these successes, we still see major racial inequities throughout the state which cause barriers to future success, particularly among lower-income neighborhoods like Hartford, Bridgeport and New Haven. These need to be better addressed,” continued Senserrich.

Nationally, the teenagers of Generation Z – the rising cohort born after 1995 that follows the Millennials – broke records in education and health indicators despite growing up in the midst of the economic downturn.

Aided by federal, state and local policies and investments in prevention, a record number of teens have managed to avoid bad choices that could have derailed their future prospects. Comparing data between 2008 and 2014, teen birth rates fell 40%, drug and alcohol abuse dropped 38%, and the percent of teens not graduating on time decreased by 28%.

These improvements are remarkable given the economic challenges faced by far too many of their families. Despite rising employment numbers, 22% of children lived in poverty in 2014 – the same rate as in 2013 and almost one in three children live in families where no member of the household has full-time, year-round employment. While navigating their own family challenges, an increasing number of our young people are also growing up in neighborhoods that lack the resources they need to thrive. Since 2006-2010, the number of children living in high poverty areas increased to 14%, up from 11%.

“This generation of teenagers and young adults are coming of age in the wake of the worst economic climate in nearly 80 years, and yet they are achieving key milestones that are critical for future success,” said Patrick McCarthy, president and CEO of the Casey Foundation. “With more young people making smarter decisions, we must fulfill our part of the bargain, by providing them with the educational and economic opportunity that youth deserve. We urge candidates in state and national campaigns to describe in depth their proposals to help these determined young people realize their full potential.”

In the *Data Book*, the Casey Foundation offers a number of recommendations for how policy makers can ensure all children are prepared for the future, based on this country’s shared values of opportunity, responsibility and security.

- **OPPORTUNITY:** Increase opportunity by expanding access to high-quality Pre-K and early childhood services so that all children are prepared to succeed in school. In addition, expand access to higher education and training so that every low-income child has a fair chance to develop his or her potential.
- **RESPONSIBILITY:** Increase the Earned Income Tax Credit for low-income workers who do not have dependent children. This strategy will bolster workers, who may in fact be helping to support children who do not live with them and who are struggling to get by on low wages.
- **SECURITY:** Policies can ensure American families have a measure of security, particularly low-income parents of young children, by providing paid family leave that helps them balance their obligations at home and in the workplace.

The 2016 *Data Book* will be available June 21 at 12:01am 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.

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The Connecticut Association for Human Services (CAHS) is a statewide non-profit agency that seeks to decrease poverty and increase economic success for children and their families.

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. KIDS COUNT[®] is a registered trademark of the Annie E. Casey Foundation. For more information, visit www.aecf.org.