



BUILDING BETTER LIVES

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New Report Shows Illinois Kids Making Progress, But Too Many Still Face Challenges

*Illinois' national ranking drops to 21st in the latest **KIDS COUNT Data Book** report on child well-being from the Annie E. Casey Foundation*

Chicago — New data released today show that conditions for kids in Illinois are improving in important key indicators of child well-being including education and health, according to the 2016 *KIDS COUNT® Data Book* from the Annie E. Casey Foundation. However, one in five children in Illinois continue to live in poverty, and the number of kids growing up in high poverty neighborhoods has increased since 2008.

Illinois is ranked 21st nationally on indicators of child well-being, down from 20th place in 2015.

Illinois continues to improve on key health indicators. Fewer Illinois teens are abusing alcohol and mortality rates of children and teens have been declining. Illinois is ranked third for the lowest number of uninsured kids among states, cutting the uninsured rate by 50 percent since 2008. The percentage of low-birth weight babies has dropped slightly since 2008, but has remained stagnant at 8.2 percent over the past three years.

“The results we’ve achieved in lowering our uninsured rate for Illinois kids is due in large part to sound state policy decisions to expand Medicaid under the Affordable Care Act and other state investments in the All Kids Program,” said Tasha Green Cruzat, president of Voices for Illinois Children. “But these improvements we’ve seen in child well-being, while good news, come with important caveats. The data in this year’s *KIDS COUNT Data Book* reflect child well-being before our state entered into an unprecedented budget crisis. Unfortunately, the current budget impasse is dismantling key parts of Illinois’ health and human services infrastructure as well as vital programs that would ensure Illinois continues to improve outcomes for our kids.”

Illinois is improving on key education indicators. The number of teens not engaged in school or work declined and more of our kids are graduating from high school on time.

In 2013, 83 percent of Illinois high school students graduated on time, up from 80 percent in 2008.

“One troubling trend is that Illinois’ kids, like the rest of the country, are still not improving fast enough on reading and math indicators,” continued Tasha Green Cruzat. “While the percent of Illinois’ fourth graders scoring below proficient in reading fell from 68 percent in 2007 to 65 percent in 2014, this level is still too high and leaves too many kids ill-prepared for higher educational achievement and career success.”

In eighth grade math outcomes, 68 percent of Illinois’ eighth graders scored below proficient level, only a slight improvement from 69 percent in 2007. Illinois maintained its ranking of fifth for lowest proportion of children ages 3-4 not attending school (46 percent).

Disappointingly, 12 percent of children (362,000) are living in high-poverty neighborhoods today, up from 10 percent in 2008. And 29 percent (858,000) of kids live in households where neither parent has full-time, year-round employment, up from 26 percent in 2008. The proportion of kids living in households that spend more than 30 percent of their income on housing improved—dropping from 41 percent in 2008 to slightly more than one-third of Illinois’ kids in 2014. This represents more than 1 million kids that live in families that lack affordable housing in the state.

Nationally, African-American children were twice as likely as the average child to live in high poverty neighborhoods. In Illinois, African-American children are more than three times more likely to live in high poverty neighborhoods: 44 percent, compared to 12 percent across all race groups.

“Every child in Illinois counts—no matter where they live, their racial or ethnic background, or their income,” said Tasha Green Cruzat, “Poor economic conditions for families pose risks to children and are associated with diminished prospects later in life. Raising the incomes and increasing job opportunities of low- and middle-income families remains an important challenge for the state. Illinois must do more to ensure that all children have continued access to health insurance, affordable housing and high-quality early education.”

This year’s *KIDS COUNT Data Book* focuses on trends over the last six years (roughly 2008-2014). It also examines the influence of parents’ education, health and other life circumstances on their children’s well-being. The *KIDS COUNT* index, across four domains—economic well-being, education, health and family and community—capture key elements children need to thrive. Each domain includes four indicators, for a total of 16. These indicators represent the best available data to measure the status of child well-being at the state- and national-level.

Note on data sources: The *KIDS COUNT Data Book* uses the most up-to-date estimates from federal statistical agencies including the U.S. Census Bureau, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the National Center for Education Statistics and the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration. For more information, see the Definitions and Sources section at www.aecf.org.

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The *KIDS COUNT Data Book* with state-by-state rankings and supplemental data is embargoed until 12:01 a.m. EDT, June 21, 2016, and can be viewed at www.aecf.org/2016db at that time.

Voices for Illinois Children is a champion for the full development of every child in the state from birth to adulthood, working with families, communities and policymakers on a wide range of children's issues. Illinois Kids Count is a project of Voices for Illinois Children and is part of a nationwide network of state-level projects supported by the Annie E. Casey Foundation. Learn more at www.voices4kids.org.

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.