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New Hampshire Ranks 4th in the Nation in Child Well-Being

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

CONCORD, N.H. – New Hampshire fell to fourth position for overall child well-being in 2016, down from second place in 2015 and marking a further decline from the prior 10 years during which N.H. had been ranked first in the nation, according to *The 2016 KIDS COUNT Data Book*[®] from the Annie E. Casey Foundation. The overall rank is a composite index that measures four domains: 1) economic well-being 2) education 3) health and 4) family and community. The report notes that state policy choices strongly influence children’s chances for success.,

New Hampshire is ranked first in the nation in a state-to-state comparison of family and community. “A child’s chances of thriving depend not just on individual, familial and community characteristics, but also the state in which he or she is born and raised,” said Amy Ireland Bourgault, state director of NH Kids Count. “When communities have strong institutions and the resources to provide safety, good schools and quality support services, families and their children are more likely to thrive.” The report compares the following state-to-state indicators when determining family and community rank: the number of children in single parent families, families where the head of household lacks a high school diploma, children living in high poverty areas and number of teen births.

In the three other domains that the report measures, New Hampshire ranked seventh in economic well-being, fourth in education and 25th in health.

In establishing the conditions that promote successful educational achievement, where New Hampshire ranks fourth, the researchers look at the percentage of fourth grade children in New Hampshire who scored below proficient reading level. In N.H., between 2007 and 2015, this percentage has declined 8 percent. Over the same time frame, the percent of eighth graders who scored below proficient math levels showed an even greater decline at 13 percent. “With a strong and healthy beginning, children are more likely to stay on track to finish high school and pursue postsecondary education,” said Bourgault. In New Hampshire, the number of children aged 3 and 4 attending school has been going up, while the percentage of high school students not graduating on time has declined 24 percent since 2007/2008.

Health is the only domain in which New Hampshire does not rank in the top 10. The report cites 2014 for the latest statistics, looking at four factors that contribute to N.H.'s health ranking: 1) the percentage of low-birthweight babies, which increased 6 percent between 2008 and 2014; 2) the number of children without health insurance, which increased from 10,000 to 12,000; 3) the child and teen death rate (per 100,000 children ages 1-19), which stayed constant between 2013-2014 but decreased 10 percent since 2008; and 4) the percent of teens who use or abuse drugs, which saw a modest decline from 7 percent in 2013 to 6 percent in 2014.

“With exorbitant higher education costs, stagnant wages and a flimsy social safety net, teens are less likely than their parents or grandparents to obtain economic security,” said Patrick McCarthy, president and CEO of the Annie E. Casey Foundation. “For the sake of our economy and our society, we must reverse this trend to ensure that today’s youth – who will be the next generation of workers, parents and community leaders – have a successful transition to adulthood and beyond.”

New Hampshire’s child poverty rate continues to climb, rising from 10 percent in 2013 to 13 percent in 2014. Poverty is defined as a family of two adults and two children who have an annual income below \$24,008. The number of children living in homes where no parent has full-time, year-round employment is 64,000 an increase of 14 percent since 2008.

Bourgault added, “Our economy is dependent upon the next generation being healthy and well educated. The *KIDS COUNT Data Book* provides some hopeful signs but it also points out obstacles that many children will have to overcome if they are going to reach 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 12:01 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.

New Hampshire Kids Count is a 501(C)3 dedicated to improving the lives of New Hampshire's children by providing research and advocating for public initiatives that affect children's potential for a successful future. For more information, please visit <http://nhkidscount.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.