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Kansas Ranks 15th in Latest National Rankings for Overall Child Well-Being

State makes progress on several fronts, but stronger investments in early childhood education needed

TOPEKA, Kan., June 13, 2017 — Kansas children are experiencing the benefits of targeted investments in early childhood and families are seeing a rise in their economic stability, placing the state at 15th in overall child well-being, according to the *2017 KIDS COUNT[®] Data Book* released today by the Annie E. Casey Foundation.

The annual *KIDS COUNT Data Book* uses 16 indicators to rank each state across four domains — health, education, economic well-being and family and community — that represent what children need most to thrive.

Comparing 2015 and 2009, the state saw no improvement in the percentage of fourth graders not proficient in reading and experienced a six percent rise in eighth graders not proficient in math. In addition, Kansas saw a rise in the percentage of 3- and 4-year-olds not attending school, from 53 to 56 percent, over a five-year period.

“High-quality early education prepares the state’s youngest residents to succeed in school and in life, but the majority of young Kansas children are not in school,” said Annie McKay, president and CEO of Kansas Action for Children (KAC). “The percentage of children not performing at a grade level in math and reading is very concerning, as well.”

The *Data Book* reveals that policymakers need to recommit to early childhood education as a foundation from which to build strong families, communities and a state economy. Support for evidence-based programs and services, like those funded by the Children’s Initiatives Fund (CIF), is key for both educational and economic success.

Kansas saw improvement in all four economic well-being measures. The number of children living in families where no parent has a full-time, year-round job declined nearly 2 percent between 2014 and 2015 to 167,000. This decline marks a five-year low for the state and a 4 percent drop since 2010.

“This year’s report is promising because it shows us what works. The data reveal strong economic recovery post-recession for families during a time when the Kansas safety net was stronger than it is today,” McKay said. “Following the adoption of new policies that restrict access to the safety net, coupled with reductions in early childhood investments, we expect to see a decline in well-being in future state profiles. Overall, we’re heartened to observe such marked improvements, but the data also expose some alarming trends for children in their earliest and most formative years of life.”

According to the *Data Book*, Kansas ranks:

- **Seventh in economic well-being.** The economic well-being domain examines data related to child poverty, family employment, housing costs and the number of teens not in school and not working.
- **20th in health.** The health domain looks at the percentage of children who lack health insurance, child and teen death rates, low-birth weight babies, and alcohol or drug abuse among teens.
- **23rd in the family and community domain.** This domain examines the percentage of children living in high-poverty areas, single-parent households and education levels among heads of households, as well as teen birth rates.
- **26th in education.** This domain examines the percentage of children ages three and four not attending school; fourth graders not proficient in reading; eighth graders not proficient in math; and high school students not graduating on time.

Most troubling was the jump in the percentage of children living in high-poverty areas, up to 9 percent. This further emphasizes the critical need for the Children’s Initiatives Fund in Kansas, as data prove that kids with scarce resources in the earliest years are at risk to struggle later in life. However, early childhood investments can change the trajectory of vulnerable children’s lives and provide them the strong foundations they need to succeed.

When it comes to the early education, health and economic well-being of Kansas children and families, lawmakers must remain forward-thinking and intentional.

“If kids aren’t given strong educational opportunities early in life, their education, health and economic well-being as adults — and as future parents — will suffer,” said McKay. “We urge lawmakers to reinvest in what works for children and families of today and tomorrow.”

Release Information

The *2017 KIDS COUNT Data Book* will be available June 13 at 12:01 a.m. EDT at www.aecf.org. Additional information is available at www.aecf.org/databook, which also contains the most recent national, state and local data on hundreds of indicators of child well-being. Journalists interested in creating maps, graphs and rankings in stories about the *Data Book* can use the KIDS COUNT Data Center at datacenter.kidscount.org.

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About Kansas Action for Children

For more than 30 years, Kansas Action for Children has worked to shape health, education, and economic policy that puts children first. Visit www.kac.org to learn more about our policy priorities and to view KIDS COUNT data at the state and county levels. This October, KAC will issue the Kansas KIDS COUNT report with updated county-level data.

About the Annie E. Casey Foundation

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