



Giving Every Child A Chance

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New Jersey Ranks Eighth in Latest National Rankings for Child Well-Being

State ranks second in education nationwide but lags in economic well-being

NEWARK, N.J., June 13, 2017 – New Jersey continues to be a national leader in education, with high enrollment in early education and a high percentage of high school students graduating on time, according to the *2017 KIDS COUNT® Data Book* from the Annie E. Casey Foundation.

“New Jersey has maintained its reputation as a leader on the education front, but in order to sustain the progress made in this arena and improve outcomes for children, policymakers must continue to advance legislation that puts children and their families at the forefront of the agenda. New Jersey is one of two states in the nation with a gubernatorial election this year, giving voters a critical opportunity to engage with candidates to ensure children’s issues are a priority,” said **Cecilia Zalkind**, president and CEO of Advocates for Children of New Jersey (ACNJ), the KIDS COUNT grantee for New Jersey.

However, New Jersey’s performance on overall economic well-being is lacking, with the state falling from 20th nationally in 2016 to 26th in 2017 in that domain. The state also placed next to last—tied with New York—for children living in households that spend more than 30 percent of their income on housing. At 42 percent, it is woefully higher than the national average of 33 percent.

“While more than 800,000 kids in the Garden State live in families that are struggling to afford housing, the burden is most felt by our poorest families. In a state as wealthy as New Jersey, we could and should do better,” Zalkind said.

Despite troubling economic realities for the state’s children, New Jersey posted some improvements in the health domain. The percentages of low-birthweight babies, children without health insurance and teens who abuse alcohol or drugs all saw declines since 2010; child and teen deaths saw no change.

“The 33 percent change in uninsured children in our state is a real success story, helping thousands of kids access the healthcare they need,” Zalkind said.

Nationally, only 5 percent of U.S. children do not have healthcare coverage, a historic low, due to the combination of key provisions of the Affordable Care Act (ACA) and expansions of Medicaid and the Children’s Health Insurance Program (CHIP).

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. New Jersey ranks:

- **Second in education.** This domain examines the percentage of children ages 3 and 4 not attending school; fourth graders not proficient in reading; eighth graders not proficient in math; and high-school students not graduating on time.
- **12th 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.
- **12th in health.** The health domain looks at the percentage of children who lack health insurance, child and teen death rates, low-birthweight babies, and alcohol and drug abuse among teens.
- **26th in economic well-being.** The economic well-being domain examines data related to child poverty, family employment, housing costs and whether older teens are not in school or working.

The Annie E. Casey Foundation pointed to the importance of using the information from the *Data Book* to drive policy decisions. “We must use reliable data to inform policy decisions that ease poverty and create the next generation of healthier and better-educated citizens,” said Annie E. Casey Foundation president and CEO **Patrick McCarthy**. “We call on policymakers to use this evidence to continue and expand what’s working, and to find additional solutions that make a measurable difference for children.”

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 Advocates for Children of New Jersey

Advocates for Children of New Jersey is the trusted, independent voice putting children’s needs first for more than 35 years. Our work results in better laws and policies, more effective funding and stronger services for children and families. And it means that more children are given the chance to grow up safe, healthy, and educated. For more information, visit www.acnj.org. Follow ACNJ on Twitter @acnjforkids and on Facebook at <http://www.facebook.com/acnjforkids>.

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.