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Georgia Ranks 39th in the Nation for Child and Family Well-being, Shows Improvement Across Education and Economic Domains

State continues to lag in some areas, but investments in children are poised to pay dividends

ATLANTA—Georgia ranks 39th in the nation for overall child and family well-being in the latest *KIDS COUNT*[®] *Data Book*, released today by the Annie E. Casey Foundation. This is the first time that Georgia has been ranked better than 40th since 2012.

While this ranking cannot be directly compared to previous years' ranks because methodology has changed over time, the report shows that more students in Georgia are proficient in reading and math, fewer children are living in poverty, and more children are living in families where the head of the household has a high school diploma. And though Georgia's children and families still face challenges, there are some promising trends for the state.

The investments Georgia has made in its children and families over the past decade are poised to pay dividends. The state's commitment to increasing high-quality early care and learning through the Quality Rated Campaign, and its emphasis on wanting to create a Georgia where all children can read on grade level by the end of third grade, are examples of these investments. A continued commitment to serving children and families will position the state to improve further, both in rank and in the opportunities for our children to become successful Georgians.

"Georgia has made some key investments in areas such as early care and learning, child welfare, and K–12 education over the last several years, and it's already paying off for our families, communities, and economy," said Gaye Smith, executive director of Georgia Family Connection Partnership. "This is good news for all of us, and we can't stop. If we stay the course with these types of strategic investments, all Georgians will benefit from the resulting progress and positive community outcomes."

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—as an assessment of child well-being. The report uses data from 2016, the most recent available.

37th in Economic Well-being

Georgia's families and children are experiencing more economic stability than in previous years, with Georgia's economic domain rank improving by seven spots over last year, and all four indicators showing progress both year over year and compared to 2010. Georgia's child poverty rate continued to drop,

decreasing to 23 percent, down from 24 percent in 2015, and 25 percent in 2010. (The national average is 19 percent.) Georgia's percentage of teens not in school and not working also improved to 8 percent, down from 9 percent in 2015 and 12 percent in 2010. Finally, the percentages of children whose parents lack secure employment and children living in households with a high housing cost burden, both dropped one percentage point from last year, and several percentage points from 2010.

Continued Positive Education Trends Key to a Robust Workforce

Georgia ranks 34th in education. Mostly positive education trends continue, with fewer eighth-graders scoring below proficient in math, and fewer fourth-graders scoring below proficient in reading. The 2015 data showed that 72 percent of eighth-graders were below proficient in math, and in 2016, that percentage fell to 69 percent, compared with a national average of 67 percent. The percentage of high school students not graduating on time remained the same as in the previous report at 21 percent, but that number represents a significant improvement from 2010, when 33 percent of Georgia high school students failed to graduate on time. A strong educational pipeline, from birth through early adulthood, is key to ensuring that Georgia builds a capable, robust workforce and continues to be a place people want to call home.

Teen Birth Rate at an All-Time Low

Georgia ranks 40th in the family and community domain, improving in that domain by one spot over last year's rank, based on improvements in teen births, children living in high-poverty areas, and adult educational attainment. At 13 percent, this is the lowest ever percentage of Georgia children growing up in a family where the head of the household lacks a high school diploma. Georgia's teen birth rate continues to fall, reaching an all-time low at 24 per 1,000, compared to the national average of 20 per 1,000.

Low Birthweight on the Rise

Georgia ranks 39th in health this year, but the domain rank cannot be compared to previous years because the methodology for calculating drug and alcohol abuse changed. This domain saw mixed results that included an increase in low birthweight babies and child and teen deaths. After improving its low birthweight rate between 2010 and last year's data, Georgia's rate rose to tie its highest rate in the Data Book's 29-year history at 9.8 percent. The national low birthweight rate rose as well between 2015 and 2016, but remains significantly lower than Georgia's rate at 8.2 percent. Georgia did improve on the percentage of children without health insurance, going from 7 percent last year to 6 percent this year, and down from 10 percent in 2010.

“Georgia's economic vitality depends upon our ability to improve the quality of life for all Georgians,” said Chris Clark, president and CEO of the Georgia Chamber of Commerce. “With over 29 percent of rural children living in poverty we must be proactive in our efforts to provide adequate healthcare, transportation, education, and employment to end the cycle of generational poverty. As we seek to invest in our next generation, it is critical that we create solutions that advance sustainable economic mobility for Georgia's most vulnerable citizens.”

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Release Information

The 2018 KIDS COUNT® Data Book will be available June 27 at 12:01 a.m. EDT at aecf.org. Additional information is available at 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.

About Georgia Family Connection Partnership

Georgia Family Connection Partnership (GaFCP) is a public-private partnership created by the State of Georgia and investors from the private sector to assist communities in addressing the serious challenges facing children and families. GaFCP also serves as a resource to state agencies across Georgia that work to improve the conditions of children and families. Georgia KIDS COUNT provides policymakers and citizens with current data they need to make informed decisions regarding priorities, services, and resources that impact Georgia's children, youth, families, and communities. Georgia KIDS COUNT is funded, in part, through a grant from The Annie E. Casey Foundation, a private charitable organization dedicated to helping build better futures for disadvantaged children in the United States. For more information, visit gafcp.org.

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 aecf.org. KIDS COUNT® is a registered trademark of the Annie E. Casey Foundation.