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CONTACT: Christine Tiddens, Idaho Voices for Children
208-947-4259; ctiddens@jannus.org

Idaho Ranks Last in Nation for Early Childhood Education Participation

Local advocates offer recommendations to improve the well-being of Idaho's children

BOISE, Idaho — Idaho ranks last in the nation for early childhood education participation. The early years of a child's life lay the foundation for future success. Yet Idaho is one of only six states that does not invest in prekindergarten or school readiness programs.

According to the *2018 KIDS COUNT® Data Book*, released by the Annie E. Casey Foundation today, 68 percent of Idaho's 3- and 4-year-olds are not attending preschool. Troubling disparities persist among children of color and those from families earning lower wages: 83 percent of Idaho's Hispanic children are not enrolled in pre-K programs, compared to 64 percent of white children. And only one out of four children who live in families with incomes below 200 percent of poverty is enrolled in pre-K.

“High-quality early learning programs play an important role in preparing children for success. When 3- and 4-year-olds attend pre-K, they experience higher levels of educational attainment, career advancement and earnings later in life,” said Christine Tiddens, community outreach director for Idaho Voices for Children. “Idaho is missing opportunities to invest in proven measures to secure our state's economic future.”

The *2018 KIDS COUNT Data Book* shows improvements in Idaho in many factors that lead to a child's healthy development. Since 2010, the percentage of children living in families where no parent has full-time, year-round employment dropped by 23 percent. The percentage of children living in poverty decreased 5 percent.

State Trends in Child Well-Being

The annual *Data Book* uses 16 indicators to rank each state across four domains to assess overall child well-being. Idaho ranks 21st nationally in overall child well-being. Other rankings for Idaho include:

- **12th in economic well-being:** Approximately 76,000 kids in Idaho – or 18 percent – live in poverty (income below \$24,339 for a family of two adults and two children).
- **14th in family and community:** Teen birth rates have declined significantly since 2010, dropping by 39 percent. Twenty-six percent of children in Idaho live in families with one parent, which is the third lowest rate in the nation.
- **26th in health:** The number of children without health insurance has decreased 55 percent since passage of the Affordable Care Act in 2010. Yet there are still 20,000 children who lack health coverage. The share of babies born with low birthweight increased slightly to 7 percent this year.

- **40th in education:** Idaho’s fourth-graders saw some improvement in reading proficiency between 2015 and 2017, but 62 percent failed to gain proficiency in the subject. Meanwhile, 65 percent of Idaho’s eighth-graders scored below proficiency in math.

Investing in the Future of Idaho

Based on this year’s *Data Book* trends, Idaho Voices for Children offered two recommendations for policymakers to improve the overall well-being of Idaho’s children:

1. **Pre-K and school readiness:** Idaho should make smart public investments in high-quality pre-K and school readiness programs;
2. **2020 census funding:** Congress should adequately fund the 2020 census to improve the accuracy of data that will affect the lives of Idaho’s children for years to come.

Child advocates across the state are working to advance proposals that invest in the future of Idaho. The upcoming November elections offer opportunities for the public and candidates to discuss options for state investment in pre-K and other school readiness programs, such as home visiting programs that offer support and coaching to vulnerable families.

“Idaho can do a lot more to make quality early learning programs accessible and affordable for every child in the state. Kids starting off at a disadvantage only see their struggles compound in an education system that is overwhelmed and under-resourced,” explained Tiddens. “With [80 percent](#) of Idaho voters supporting state investment in pre-K, it’s clear that this should be a top priority for our legislators in 2019.”

Advocates are also actively urging members of Congress to allocate sufficient funds to the Census Bureau for 2020 census preparations. The 2020 census will determine Idaho’s share of resources that are critical to child development for the next decade. If children are not counted accurately, Idaho could face losing millions of dollars for supports that give kids the opportunity for a strong and healthy start in life — like education, school lunches, Head Start, Medicaid and the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program.

Historically, low-income rural households and young children have been undercounted in the census. “Reliable data, particularly census data, are critical to informing decisions that improve the lives of children,” stated Laura Speer, associate director for policy reform and advocacy at the Casey Foundation. “An inaccurate census threatens to undermine essential resources for communities and erode many of the advancements made in recent years for our children — particularly children of color — for years to come.”

Release Information

The *2018 KIDS COUNT*[®] *Data Book* will be available June 27 at 12:01 a.m. EDT at www.aecf.org. Additional information is available at www.aecf.org/databook. 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 Idaho Voices for Children

Idaho Voices for Children works to develop and promote a statewide public policy agenda that advocates for children on issues of health, education, safety, well-being and family economic security. Learn more at idahovoices.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 www.aecf.org. KIDS COUNT® is a registered trademark of the Annie E. Casey Foundation.