

UNDER EMBARGO

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Tennessee's Growing Child Population: More Reasons to Focus on Improving Child Well-Being Today

NASHVILLE, Tennessee — The well-being of Tennessee children has improved in many areas in the last 30 years, according to information in the *KIDS COUNT® Data Book* released today by the Annie E. Casey Foundation. Despite having been ranked in the 40s in earlier years, the state's overall rankings in recent years have hovered in the mid-30s, including its ranking of 36th in the 2019 report.

"While changes in the way the data are collected limit our ability to compare this year's ranking to older ones, TCCY is pleased Tennessee now ranks better than it did in the early days of its participation in KIDS COUNT when the state ranking was much nearer the bottom," said Richard Kennedy, Executive Director of the Tennessee Commission on Children and Youth, the state's KIDS COUNT affiliate.

Tennessee is among the top quarter of states with the greatest increase in the number of children between 1990 and 2017.

"Tennessee's 1.5 million children are each born with skills and potential for success if given the opportunities and support needed to nurture their growth," said Kennedy. "The state's future relies on them."

The report recommends exerting time and effort to assure every one of these 1.5 million children is counted during the 2020 census. Most federal funds spent on children are allocated based on data collected by the census. TCCY's Resource Mapping Report, released April 15, found that 38 percent of all dollars expended through the state budget for services to children came from federal sources. Excluding the state's spending through its Basic Education Program, seven of every 10 dollars spent were federal dollars. When state spending matches required to draw down federal money are included, this figure rises to nine of every 10.

Tennessee's 2019 ranking on how the state is providing opportunities and supports to children and families is based on rankings in four domains - economic well-being, education, health and family and community context, each of which is comprised of four measures. Data from 2017, the most recent year available, is compared to data from 2010 to look at trends over time.

Tennessee's highest rank is in the economic well-being domain at 32, and its lowest is for family and community context, where the state ranked 39.

The state's ranked 33rd in the education domain, with 90 percent of Tennessee high school students graduating on time in 2017, the second-highest rate in the country. However, the state had one of the lowest rates of young children attending pre-K programs, with over 60 percent not enrolled in any early childhood education.

Tennessee struggles with health issues and fell in the rankings to 33nd from 27th last year. Low birth weight continues to be a challenge, with 9.2 percent of babies born at low birth weight, higher than the national average of 8.3 percent, and one of the 10 highest rates in the country. The state's ranking was also negatively affected by an increase in child and teen deaths driven by increases in suicide and homicide deaths, 60 percent of which involved firearms.

The 2019 Tennessee state budget has provided funding to address teen suicide deaths, which have risen since 2014. It increased mental and behavioral health spending and added \$1.1 million to expand the state's partnership with the Tennessee Suicide Prevention Network.

The state improved slightly in the economic well-being domain, moving to 32nd from 33rd. Poverty continues to be a problem for the state, with one in five children living in poverty. However, the state has seen a 19 percent decline of children living in poverty and a 30 percent increase of teens in school or working since 2010.

The state has also shown progress in its lowest-ranking domain, family and community context, though the progress in some areas continues to fall behind the national average. Tennessee's teen birth rate dropped from 43 per 1,000 in 2010 to 27 per 1,000 in 2017; however, rates in other states decreased at a faster rate, leaving Tennessee ranked 41. The state ranks near the center for children living in a home where no parent has a high school diploma, though the state sees slight improvements on this indicator over the past few years as the Drive to 55, with Tennessee Promise for youth graduating from high school and Tennessee Reconnect for returning students, continues.

“Tennessee has been a leader in good public policy, but we need to make sure all our children count,” said Kennedy.

Release Information

The 2019 KIDS COUNT® *Data Book* will be available June 17 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 the Tennessee Commission on Children and Youth

The Tennessee Commission on Children and Youth is an independent agency created by the Tennessee General Assembly. Its primary mission is to advocate for improvements in the quality of life for Tennessee children and families. Information on the agency is available at www.tn.gov/tccy.

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.

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