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Texas Ranks 41st in Latest National Rankings of Child Well-Being

State legislature missed opportunities to improve child well-being; 2020 census is our state's next big test

AUSTIN, Texas — Texas ranks 41st in child well-being — one of the 10 worst states for kids — according to the 2019 KIDS COUNT® Data Book released today by the Annie E. Casey Foundation. For 30 years, this annual report has highlighted which states have better outcomes for their kids. This year, the report also focuses on the critical role of the upcoming 2020 census, which will allocate billions of dollars for health care, housing and food programs that Texas kids and families count on. Given that Texas has added nearly 2.5 million kids since these reports began — accounting for more than a quarter of the national increase — the wellbeing of Texas' nearly 7.4 million children truly does drive the overall wellbeing of US children as a whole.

The 2019 Texas Legislature made some progress for kids this session, putting billions more toward improving Texas' public-school system. But lawmakers also missed numerous opportunities to improve child well-being, including taking no action to reduce the number of children who lack health-insurance.

"The data show us that Texas children face dire challenges, many of which have been created or made worse by our past policy choices," said Ann Beeson, CEO of the Center for Public Policy Priorities. "The good news is that common-sense policy solutions could make conditions better for every Texas child. We just have to have the political will."

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. Specifically, Texas ranks:

- **39th in economic well-being.** Child poverty in Texas is significantly better now than in 2010, thanks to policy improvements. Unfortunately, child poverty is still much too common in a wealthy state like Texas. About 1.5 million (out of nearly 7.4 million) Texas kids live in poverty.
- **30th in education.** One of every 10 high school students in Texas do not graduate on time. In a positive move for Texas kids, the Texas Legislature did pass meaningful GED legislation allowing a good score on the high school equivalency exams to qualify for the college-readiness standards, which designate the student as having the knowledge and skills ready to succeed in entry-level postsecondary courses.
- **47th in family and community.** Texas is again one of the 10 worst states for the rate of teen births. On the positive side, this rate has dropped by nearly half in the last several years to 28 teen births per 100,000 births.

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- **39th in health.** Concerning statistics show that nearly 146,000 Texas kids lost Medicaid or Children’s Health Insurance Program (CHIP) insurance last year, according to the Georgetown University Center for Children and Families. State legislators failed to provide continuous health coverage over a 12-month period for children enrolled in Medicaid.

“Any conversation about child well-being in Texas must also include the thousands of children that the federal government is holding in family detention centers — really, baby jails — or that are being separated from their parents as part of a suppression on migrants and asylum seekers,” said Luis Figueroa, Legislative and Policy Director of the Center for Public Policy Priorities. “Using kids as pawns and separating them from their parents to instill fear is neither conscionable nor American nor Texan.”

The accurate completion of the 2020 census count is another area where federal immigration policy will likely have significant harmful effects for children and families. Today’s report discusses how an accurate census count helps protect Texas’ voice in Congress and quality of life through funding for essential health and nutrition programs. Even though 30 percent of Texas kids under the age of 5 are at an increased risk of being missed, lawmakers devoted no state funding to ensure a complete and accurate count of Texas residents. And researchers, former census bureau directors and elected officials across the country agree that the likely addition of a first-time, untested citizenship question will contribute to significant undercounts of Texas children and families.

Release Information

The 2019 KIDS COUNT® Data Book is available 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 Center for Public Policy Priorities

At the Center for Public Policy Priorities, we believe in a Texas that offers everyone the chance to compete and succeed in life. We envision a Texas where everyone is healthy, well-educated and financially secure. We want the best Texas — a proud state that sets the bar nationally by expanding opportunity for all.

The Center for Public Policy Priorities has been the Texas grantee for the Annie E. Casey Foundation’s national KIDS COUNT Project for more than 25 years. Visit CPPP.org/kidscount to view the Center’s Texas-specific data reports and link to our regular updates and county-level data on the KIDS COUNT Data Center.

CPPP is an independent public policy organization that uses data and analysis to advocate for solutions that enable Texans of all backgrounds to reach their full potential. We dare Texas to be the best state for hard-working people and their families.

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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.

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