

KIDS COUNT 2021: Oklahoma remains in bottom 10 for child well-being

Oklahoma children continue to remain in the nation's bottom 10 when it comes to major health and well-being indicators, according to the 2021 edition of the *KIDS COUNT® Data Book* published annually by the Annie E. Casey Foundation.

Oklahoma ranks 42nd overall for child well-being, with its individual rankings on major categories and change from last year are:

- 33rd in economic well-being, the same as in 2020,
- 41st in family and community context, down one spot from the previous report,
- 45th in education, up three spots from last year, and
- 42nd in health, up seven places from the 2020 report.

[VIEW THE REPORT HERE ON JUNE 21: www.aecf.org/databook](http://www.aecf.org/databook)

The **2021 KIDS COUNT Data Book** — the most comprehensive annual report on child well-being in the United States — is based on the latest available data for 16 key indicators that include health, education, economic well-being, and family and community. For the 2021 report, those data are from 2019, so they do not reflect current conditions amidst the COVID-19 crisis. (A [December 2020 special KIDS COUNT report](#) provided a snapshot of issues of concern related to the pandemic.)

The release of this year's report also coincides with the federal government launching a new website and other resources for parents and caregivers eligible for an expanded child tax credit, which will provide critical financial support for families who are struggling to make ends meet and help reduce long-standing disparities that affect families of color.

The Data Book includes 16 indicators measuring four domains – economic well-being, education, health, and family and community context – used by the Annie E. Casey Foundation in annually assessing child well-being. The KIDS COUNT data and rankings, which represent the most recent information available but do not capture the impact of the past year, showed Oklahoma had significant concerns in each of the major categories:

- **ECONOMIC WELL BEING:** In 2019, 1 in 5 Oklahoma children (186,000, or 20 percent) were living in households with an income below the poverty line.
- **EDUCATION:** In 2019, 59,000, or about 57 percent, of Oklahoma's young children ages 3 and 4 were not in school.
- **AFFORDABLE HEALTH CARE:** In 2019, 86,000 Oklahoma children — nearly 1 in 10 — did not have health insurance.

- **FAMILY AND COMMUNITY CONTEXT:** In 2019, 95,000 Oklahoma children lived in high poverty areas.

“In examining the latest KIDS COUNT report, we can see places where Oklahoma has made some small progress toward child well-being, but on balance those gains aren’t enough to catch up with the smart investments other states are making to positively influence their children’s well-being,” said Gabrielle Jacobi, OK Policy’s Child Well-Being Policy Analyst and KIDS COUNT Coordinator.

The *Data Book* shows simply returning to a pre-pandemic level of support for children and families would shortchange millions of kids and fail to address persistent racial and ethnic disparities.

The Oklahoma Policy Institute, which has been the state’s host agency for the KIDS COUNT project since 2018, previously has outlined several policy recommendations that can help address Oklahoma’s rankings:

- *Addressing ethnic and racial inequities.* The national averages of child well-being can mask the reality that black and brown children still face a greater number of obstacles. This is true in Oklahoma, where children of color experience **significantly higher poverty rates** and are much more likely **to have incarcerated parents**.
- *Protecting health care access and other programs that keep children healthy.* Now that Oklahoma has expanded Medicaid to cover low-income adults, elected officials and policy makers should work to ensure robust coverage for new enrollees, many of whom have children in the home. Research shows that [children are more likely to have health coverage and receive annual well-child visits](#) once their guardians receive coverage. The additional care from Medicaid expansion also would help protect children by ensuring more parents have increased access to care for chronic diseases and mental illness. Additionally, [providing paid family and medical leave](#) for Oklahoma workers also would ensure that caregivers can take the time they need to care for themselves or a loved one.
- *Strengthening tools proven to help families lift themselves up economically.* Oklahoma lawmakers this session made an important first step to help low-income working families keep more of their earnings by making the [Earned Income Tax Credit \(EITC\) once again refundable](#). However, by choosing to decouple the state EITC from the federal EITC, the state credit will no longer be indexed to inflation, meaning the power of this credit will eventually decrease over time. If Oklahoma lawmakers are serious about supporting Oklahoma workers, they would be better served by increasing the EITC, recoupling it to the federal rate, and implementing targeted tax cuts that benefit low-income, working families
- *Investing in our public schools and pathways to postsecondary education and training.* Despite [modest Pre-K through 12 education funding increases during the last four years](#), lawmakers still have not adequately funded Oklahoma schools, which have received

some of the [deepest education cuts in the country in the last decade](#). Oklahoma's public school system continues to serve a near-record number of students, but is still plagued with [overly large class sizes, deteriorating physical spaces, inadequate numbers of support staff, teacher retention, and more](#).

Release Information

The 2021 KIDS COUNT® Data Book will be available June 21 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 OK Policy

Oklahoma Policy Institute is a non-partisan, non-profit organization focused on advancing equitable and fiscally responsible policies that expand opportunity for all Oklahomans through non-partisan research, analysis, and advocacy. Based in Tulsa, the organization was founded in 2008 as a think tank to provide independent, data-driven policy analysis for use in shaping policies that improved the lives for all Oklahomans. To learn more, visit okpolicy.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.