



UNDER EMBARGO Until Monday, June 21, 2021 at 12:01 a.m. ET

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The District's Progress on Child and Youth Well-Being Imperiled by Pandemic
Intentional Policy and Investment Decisions Could Sustain Beginnings of Recovery,
According to 50-State Data Report

WASHINGTON —The District of Columbia had a higher percentage of 3-and 4-year-olds attending school before the pandemic than any other state, according to the Annie E. Casey Foundation's **2021 KIDS COUNT® Data Book**, a 50-state report of recent household data analyzing how families have fared between the Great Recession and the COVID-19 crisis.

This year's *Data Book* shows that the COVID-19 pandemic could erase nearly a decade of progress unless policymakers act boldly to sustain the beginnings of a recovery with intentional policy and investments.

But despite some progress in the District of Columbia over the prior decade on key indicators like the percentage of children living in high-poverty areas, the percentage of older teens neither attending school nor working, and high school graduation rates, in 2019, the District still fell short compared with the national average on these measures. And across nearly every indicator for which data by race are available, the opportunities the District provided Black and Latinx children and youth were less than those provided to white children in the District.

"These data show that even where we're making progress, we have a lot more work to do. In fourth grade reading, for example, in the last decade we've narrowed the gap between how many white and Black students our schools get to proficiency, but if we just keep going at that current pace it would take over a century to actually *close* that gap," said Kimberly Perry, executive director of DC Action, DC's member of the national KIDS COUNT network. "The setbacks we've experienced during the pandemic just exacerbate the pre-existing inequities."

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

Sixteen indicators measuring four domains— economic well-being, education, health, and family and community context— are used by the Annie E. Casey Foundation in each year's *Data Book* to assess child well-being. The annual KIDS COUNT data and rankings represent the most recent information available but do not capture the impact of the past year:

- **ECONOMIC WELL-BEING:** In 2019, nearly one in five DC children (19%) lived in households with an income below the federal poverty line. That's a lower percentage than a decade prior. Still, racial disparities persist: 31% of Black children lived in households with an income below the federal poverty line compared to less than 1% of white children (reliable single-year estimates aren't available for Latinx children).
- **EDUCATION:** In 2019, the District's schools got far more of their fourth graders to reading proficiency than in 2009, from 17% to 30%. There are major racial gaps here, too, with the reading proficiency of fourth-graders being 19% for Black students, 27% for Latinx students, and 79% for white students.
- **AFFORDABLE HEALTH CARE:** In 2019, the District of Columbia held the highest rates of health insurance for children and youth in the country, tied with Massachusetts, New York, Rhode Island, and Vermont. But despite that coverage, [other data sources](#) indicate that many DC children did not get a preventative care visit that year, including approximately 20% of Black and Latinx children (versus just 2% of white children).
- **FAMILY AND COMMUNITY CONTEXT:** In the District of Columbia, from 2010 to 2019, the percentage of children and youth in families where the head of household lacks a high school diploma went down by nearly half (19% to 10%), faster than the national average.

Household Pulse Survey data reveals more about the impact of the pandemic:

- From April through December of 2020, 24% of adults with children in the household had little or no confidence in their ability to pay their next rent or mortgage payment. This percentage includes 36% of Black and 40% of Latinx adults. By March 2021, this figure had fallen to 17%. Given that this report shares that in 2019 34% of DC children lived in households with a high housing cost burden — and given the District's [long-standing shortage of affordable housing](#), there is much work to do to ensure that all children and families are secure in their housing.

The **2021 KIDS COUNT® Data Book** also includes data on food insecurity, health insurance, mental health, and education during the COVID-19 pandemic.

These indicators and others found in the new KIDS COUNT report are why DC Action advocates for policy solutions to address these disparities and ensure all kids grow up safe, resilient, powerful, and heard. For example, to address some of the challenges, DC Action [calls for](#) investments in early learning (child care). More health supports for young children and their families, programs that enrich children's out-of-school time, and programs that help meet the housing and employment needs of youth experiencing homelessness.

Investing in children, families and communities is a priority to ensure an equitable and expansive recovery. Several of the Annie E. Casey Foundation's suggestions are in the American Rescue Plan, and additional recommendations include:

- **Congress should make the expansion of the child tax credit permanent.** The child tax credit has long had bipartisan support, so lawmakers should find common cause and ensure the largest one-year drop ever in child poverty is not followed by a surge.

- **State and local governments should prioritize the recovery of hard-hit communities of color.**
- **States should expand income support that helps families care for their children.** Permanently extending unemployment insurance eligibility to contract, gig and other workers and expanding state tax credits would benefit parents and children.
- **States that have not done so should expand Medicaid under the Affordable Care Act.** The American Rescue Plan offers incentives to do so.
- **States should strengthen public schools and pathways to postsecondary education and training.**

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 national KIDS COUNT Data Center at datacenter.kidscount.org.

About DC Action

[DC Action](#) is a nonprofit, nonpartisan advocacy organization making the District of Columbia a place where all kids grow up safe, resilient, powerful and heard. DC Action uses research, data, and a racial equity lens to break down barriers that stand in the way of all kids reaching their full potential. Our collaborative advocacy campaigns—[DC Kids Count](#), [Under 3 DC](#), [DC Out-of-School Time Coalition](#), the [DC Home Visiting Council](#), and the [Youth Homelessness Advocacy Coalition](#)—bring the power of young people and all residents to raise their voices to create change.

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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