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Latest National Rankings for Child Well-Being Show Pennsylvania at 19

HARRISBURG, Pennsylvania — The *2021 KIDS COUNT® Data Book*, released today by the Annie E. Casey Foundation, shows Pennsylvania ranks 19th for overall child well-being. The 50-state report of recent household data is a comprehensive review of child well-being and uses 16 indicators across four domains to rank each state: economic well-being, education, family and community, and health.

For the 2021 report, the data captured are from 2019, so the impact of the COVID-19 crisis is not reflected.

“It is clear across some key indicators that Pennsylvania was moving in the wrong direction heading into the pandemic. Too many children were without health insurance and in poverty,” said Kari King, president and CEO of Pennsylvania Partnerships for Children. “The 2020 data will be very telling as it will reflect economic hardships faced by families, and whether they enrolled their children in publicly funded health care coverage like Medicaid or the Children’s Health Insurance Program under the crush of the public health crisis.”

King said that although Pennsylvania performed well compared with other states in fourth grade reading and eighth grade math proficiency, 60% of fourth graders are not proficient in reading and 61% of eighth graders are not proficient in math. The pandemic likely will have a significant long-term impact on student data. In addition to the decision by the National Assessment of Education Progress (NAEP) to postpone its 2021 assessment administration, many states have allowed state-administered proficiency exams, like the Pennsylvania System of School Assessment, to be waived or delayed given the challenges in administering them in remote learning environments.

“This means moving forward, when looking at student achievement data available for at least the 2020 and 2021 school years, Pennsylvania’s ranking will likely remain unchanged,” she noted. “While the challenges of assessments in remote education are understandable, this does present a question of how we will measure student proficiency at a critical point in time and adapt policy accordingly for children as we come out of the pandemic to meet their needs.”

According to the *Data Book*, Pennsylvania now ranks:

- **17th in health.** The health domain looks at the percentage of children who lack health insurance, child and teen death rates, the percentage of low birth-weight babies and obesity among teens. The rate of uninsured children has not changed when compared to the baseline year of 2010. Approximately 46% of children in Pennsylvania have access to affordable, quality health care coverage through Medicaid and the Children’s Health

Insurance Program, according to the state Department of Human Services. For Pennsylvania to be the top-ranked state in this domain, an additional 72,000 children would need health care coverage.

- **20th in economic well-being.** The economic well-being domain examines data related to child poverty, family employment, housing costs and whether older teens are not in school and not working. The number of children in poverty remained the same between 2018 and 2019 and it remains to be seen what the full economic impact will be as data become available following the pandemic.
- **8th in education.** The education domain looks at early education opportunities for preschoolers, reading and math proficiency, and whether high school students graduate on time. Pennsylvania's ranking for the percent of fourth graders performing below the proficient level on the NAEP assessments was fourth place — by far the state's best ranking in this year's *Data Book* and since 2009. The state's ranking for math proficiency improved to sixth place although 61% of eighth graders scored below proficient.
- **26th in the family and community domain.** This domain examines the percentage of children living in high poverty areas, percentage of children living in single-parent households and education levels among heads of households, as well as teen birth rates. One in ten Pennsylvania children live in high poverty areas. Although this indicator improved slightly in this year's *Data Book*, it is Pennsylvania's worst ranking across all indicators. If Pennsylvania had just 36,000 fewer children in high poverty areas, it would improve the state's rate by 10%.

Release Information

The *2021 KIDS COUNT® Data Book* may be accessed at aecf.org. Additional information is available at aecf.org/databook. Tools to create maps and graphs illustrating the data may be found at the KIDS COUNT Data Center (datacenter.kidscount.org).

About Pennsylvania Partnerships for Children

Pennsylvania Partnerships for Children is a strong, effective, and trusted voice to improve the health, education, and well-being of children and youth in the commonwealth. Since 1992, our public policy victories have helped countless children learn, thrive, and succeed, regardless of circumstances. PPC is statewide, independent, nonpartisan and nonprofit.

About the Annie E. Casey Foundation

The Annie E. Casey Foundation creates a brighter future for the nation's young people 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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