



Embargoed for Release Until:
August 8, 2022, at 12:01 a.m. ET

Contact:
Adam Muhlendorf, Longleaf Strategies; adam@longleafstrategies.com; 334.625.0175

Alabama's Children Continue to Struggle Relative to the Other States

MONTGOMERY – A new, national report released today says Alabama leads the nation in the number of students who are graduating from high school on time. However, the state ranks in the bottom third of nearly every other measurement affecting children.

The state's outlook was included in the [Annie E. Casey Foundation's 2022 KIDS COUNT® Data Book](#), a 50-state report of recent household data compiled annually to track child well-being in the United States. Each year, the *Data Book* presents national and state data from 16 indicators in four domains – economic well-being, education, health, and family and community factors – and ranks the states according to how children are faring. The data in this year's report are a mix of pre-pandemic and more recent figures and are the latest available.

Overall, Alabama ranks 46th nationally for child well-being. Only Nevada, Mississippi, Louisiana, and New Mexico fared worse. Massachusetts led this year's rankings.

[VOICES for Alabama's Children](#) is the Annie E. Casey Foundation's KIDS COUNT grantee in Alabama.

"It is disappointing to see the well-being of Alabama's children continue to lag behind other states despite the state making critical gains for our children," said **Rhonda Mann, VOICES for Alabama's Children's Interim Executive Director**. "We know it is easier to focus on rankings. However, regardless if we jumped ahead one or two spots, or fell backwards, it's more important to ask why children in our state are faring this way, and what it will take to improve their well-being. Behind every number in this report is a child."

Among the highlights of this year's *Data Book*, Alabama ranks in the top 20 nationally in three indicators, including two in the top five: the percentage of students not graduating on time (8%) and the percentage of children without health insurance (3%).

Alabama ranks in the bottom three nationally in three indicators: The percent of students who scored below proficient in fourth-grade reading (72%), the percent of low-birth weight babies (10.8%), and the percent of students who scored below proficient in eighth-grade math (79%).

Alabama did improve in 11 of the 16 indicators that the Casey foundation tracks. However, in four of those indicators, the state's improvement lagged behind the rest of the nation. As a result, despite making critical gains, Alabama's ranking relative to other states fell in those indicators.

Nationally, the KIDS COUNT *Data Book* shows that children in America are in the midst of a mental health crisis. It reports that children across America, and in more than 40 states and the District of Columbia, were more likely to encounter anxiety or depression during the first year of the COVID-19 crisis than in the years leading up to the pandemic. The national figure jumped 26%, from 9.4% of children ages 3-17 (5.8 million) to 11.8% (7.3 million) between 2016-2020.

Alabama saw a 7% increase in the number of children aged 3-17 with anxiety or depression as the rate increased from 8.2% to 8.8%, between 2016-2020.

"Mental health is just as important as physical health in a child's ability to thrive," said **Lisa Hamilton, president and CEO of the Annie E. Casey Foundation**. "As our nation continues to navigate the fallout from the COVID crisis, policymakers must do more to ensure all kids have access to the care and support they need to cope and live full lives."

The Casey Foundation calls for lawmakers to heed the surgeon general's warning and respond by developing programs and policies to ease mental health burdens on children and their families. They urge policymakers to:

- Prioritize meeting kids' basic needs. Youth who grow up in poverty are two to three times more likely to develop mental health conditions than their peers. Children need a solid foundation of nutritious food, stable housing, and safe neighborhoods – and their families need financial stability – to foster positive mental health and wellness.
- Ensure every child has access to the mental health care they need, when and where they need it. Schools should increase the presence of social workers, psychologists, and other mental health professionals on staff and strive to meet the 250-to-1 ratio of students to counselors recommended by the American School Counselor Association, and they can work with local health care providers and local and state governments to make additional federal resources available and coordinate treatment.
- Bolster mental health care that takes into account young people's experiences and identities. It should be trauma-informed – designed to promote a child's healing and emotional security – and culturally relevant to the child's life. It should be informed by the latest evidence and research and should be geared toward early intervention, which can be especially important in the absence of a formal diagnosis of mental illness.

Last year, Alabama lawmakers approved legislation requiring every school system in the state to hire a mental health coordinator. While this is a good first step, VOICES is encouraging state leaders to build off of this legislation to ensure all Alabama children one day have access to the mental health services they need to thrive.

-END-

RELEASE INFORMATION

The 2022 *KIDS COUNT® Data Book* will be 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 <http://datacenter.kidscount.org>.

About VOICES for Alabama's Children

VOICES for Alabama's Children is a statewide nonprofit that works to ensure the well-being of Alabama's children through research, public awareness, and advocacy. For more information, visit alavoices.org.

ABOUT THE ANNIE E. CASEY FOUNDATION

The Annie E. Casey Foundation creates a brighter future for the nation's young children, youth, and young adults 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.