



Contact: Bill Valladares
william@gafcp.org
404-739-0043

UNDER EMBARGO Until Aug. 8, 2022 at 12:01 a.m. ET

Georgia Ranks 38th in the Nation for Child and Family Well-Being Children Continue to Suffer from Pandemic-Related Mental Health Issues

Effects of the coronavirus crisis linger as 220,000 kids in Georgia report that they struggle with anxiety or depression, according to The Annie E. Casey Foundation.

ATLANTA—Georgia ranks 38th in the nation in child and family well-being for the fourth consecutive year, according to the 2022 *KIDS COUNT*[®] *Data Book*, released today by The Annie E. Casey Foundation. The annual report, for the first time in 33 years, focuses on youth mental health, concurring with the U.S. surgeon general’s recent assessment that conditions amount to a “youth mental health pandemic.” The *Data Book* reveals that children across the country are in the midst of a mental health crisis, struggling with anxiety and depression at unprecedented levels.

Children in more than 40 states and the District of Columbia, according to the report, were more likely to encounter anxiety and depression during the first year of the COVID-19 crisis than in previous years. The national rate jumped from 9.4% of children ages 3 – 17 (5.8 million kids) in 2016 to 11.8% (7.3 million) in 2020—the year the pandemic swept across the United States. That’s 1.5 million more children who are struggling to make it through the day. In Georgia, 10.4% of children ages 3 – 17 reported anxiety or depression in 2020, up from 8.5% in 2016.

“Mental Health and trauma affect everyone in different ways, though it often takes years to unpack exactly how, why, and what is happening in different communities,” said Resilient Georgia Executive Director Emily Anne Vall. “The social, economic, and physical conditions in which children live can affect their health and serve as a source of prolonged stress and childhood adversity. Having access to reliable data provides stakeholders with a way to effectively identify gaps, prioritize needs, and measure impact and outcomes to bolster preventative efforts and move toward improved health and resilience.”

Racial and ethnic disparities contribute to disproportionately troubling mental health and wellness conditions among children of color. During the year previous to the most recent federal survey, 9% of high schoolers overall attempted suicide—but 12% of black students, 13% of students of two or more races, and 26% of American Indian or Native Alaskan high schoolers attempted suicide.

LGBTQ young people also are facing challenges as they seek mental health support. Among heterosexual high school students of all races and ethnicities, 6% attempted suicide. Among gay, lesbian, or bisexual students, 23% attempted suicide.

The Annie E. Casey Foundation, heeding the surgeon general’s warning, offers strategies for local and state-level leaders to ease mental health burdens on children and their families:

Georgia ranks 38th in the Nation for Child Well-Being (cont.)

- 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 that 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. 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 geared toward early intervention, which can be especially important in the absence of a formal diagnosis of mental illness.

The *KIDS COUNT® Data Book*, which uses 16 indicators to rank each state across four domains—health, education, economic well-being, and family and community—to assess child well-being, sheds light on the health, economic, and other challenges that affect American children, as well as how those challenges are more likely to affect children of color.

“COVID-19 has intensified the struggles our children were already facing at school, in community, and in families,” said Georgia Family Connection Partnership Executive Director Gaye Smith. “The pandemic brought to the forefront the barriers to success children and families in Georgia had been up against for decades, like high rates of child poverty, housing cost burden, and low-birthweight births.”

The percentage of Georgia's children ages 3 – 4 not in school, 51%, is better than the national average of 53%. But Georgia continues to lag national averages on most indicators of child well-being. Nearly one-third of children still live in households that spend 30% or more of their income on housing—a high housing cost burden—while 20% of Georgia's kids in two-child, two-parent households live in poverty.

“The Georgia House and Senate during the 2022 legislative session made substantial investments in resources to address mental health issues,” said Smith. “It's incumbent upon all of us to capitalize on the opportunities these investments present as we continue to advocate for systems changes that eliminate barriers and inefficiencies standing in the way of progress and positive outcomes for children and families. We must set universal goals for all children, disaggregate data by race to inform our decisions, and encourage authentic engagement in our communities so the neighbors we serve—especially those who have been historically marginalized—have a seat at our decision-making tables.”

###

Release Information

The 2022 *KIDS COUNT® Data Book* will be available at aecf.org/resources/2022-kids-count-data-book.

Journalists interested in creating maps, graphs, and rankings in stories about the 2022 *Data Book* can use the KIDS COUNT® Data Center at datacenter.kidscount.org.

Georgia Family Connection Partnership (GaFCP) is a public-private partnership created by the State of Georgia and investors from the private sector to assist communities in addressing the serious challenges

Georgia ranks 38th in the Nation for Child Well-Being (cont.)

facing children and families. GaFCP also serves as a resource to state agencies across Georgia that work to improve the conditions of children and families. Georgia KIDS COUNT provides policymakers and citizens with current data they need to make informed decisions regarding priorities, services, and resources that impact Georgia's children, youth, families, and communities. Georgia KIDS COUNT is funded, in part, through a grant from The Annie E. Casey Foundation, a private charitable organization dedicated to helping build better futures for disadvantaged children in the United States. For more information, visit gafcp.org.

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 aefc.org. KIDS COUNT® is a registered trademark of The Annie E. Casey Foundation.