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Child Well-Being in Alabama, While in Decline, Is Worsening at a Slower Pace Than Other States

Alabama currently ranked 45th in the country for child well-being, 39th in education

MONTGOMERY, Ala. — According to a new state-by-state comparison released by the [Annie E. Casey Foundation](https://www.anniecaseyfoundation.org/), Alabama students are gaining on their peers in fourth-grade reading and eighth-grade math.

The Annie E. Casey's national 2023 *KIDS COUNT® Data Book* now ranks Alabama students 41st in the country in fourth-grade reading outcomes and 43rd in eighth-grade math. The state jumped six spots in both subjects. However, Alabama's improved rankings were not likely caused because student scores vastly increased; rather, the report found that Alabama students' scores are more likely worsening at a slower pace than other states. According to the report, 72 percent of fourth-graders scored below proficient reading levels in 2022, the same percentage who tested below proficiency in 2019. Eighty-one percent of eighth graders tested below proficient math levels—a two percent increase from the 2019 rate (79%).

The *KIDS COUNT Data Book* is 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 overall. This year, Alabama ranks 45th nationally for child well-being. New Hampshire, Utah, and Massachusetts rank first, second, and third; Mississippi, Louisiana, and New Mexico rank 48th, 49th, and 50th. Among the four domains, Alabama ranked best in education (39th).

[VOICES for Alabama's Children](https://www.anniecaseyfoundation.org/) is the Annie E. Casey Foundation's KIDS COUNT grantee in Alabama.

"While Alabama may be moving up in the rankings compared to other states measured in this year's *KIDS COUNT Data Book*, we are at best struggling to hold the line," said **Rhonda Mann, VOICES for Alabama's Children's Executive Director**. "Overall, the well-being of children in Alabama stayed the same or worsened in 11 of the 16 indicators that the Casey Foundation tracks. Still, this stands in contrast to what children in many other states have experienced over the last few years, especially as it relates to education outcomes. State leaders should be proud of what they implemented to mitigate COVID disruptions, but as this report suggests, we still have a lot of work left to do."

Among the highlights of this year's *Data Book*, Alabama ranks in the top 20 in two indicators. The state ranks 3rd in the percentage of high school students not graduating on time (9%), and it ranked 15th in the rate of children without health insurance (5%).

Alabama is in the bottom five in three indicators: low birth-weight babies (10.4%), child and teen deaths per 100,000 (44%), and teen births (23 per 1,000 births).

"It is no surprise that children in Alabama, and across the country, struggled throughout the COVID pandemic," **Mann said**. "Now that we are beginning to zero in on the areas where child well-being endured its biggest setbacks, we are better positioned to understand where to invest to reverse course. Child care is one of the most pressing areas needing help."

Nationally, the Casey Foundation found that the U.S. economy is losing \$122 billion a year because challenges finding safe and affordable child care that is compatible with their work schedules and commutes are causing parents to miss, quit or scale back work.

The *Data Book* reports that in 2020–21, 10 percent of children under age 6 in Alabama lived in families in which someone quit, changed, or refused a job because of problems with child care. And women are five to eight times more likely than men to experience negative employment consequences related to caregiving.

Even if parents can find an opening at child care near their home, they often can't pay for it. Alabama's average cost of center-based child care for a toddler was \$7,501, 8% of the median income of a married couple, and 30% of a single mother's income in the state.

While the cost of care burdens families, child care workers are paid worse than 98% of professions. Median national pay for child care workers was \$28,520 per year or \$13.71 an hour in 2022, less than the wage for retail (\$14.26) and customer service (\$18.16) workers.

Transitioning from a faltering child care system to creating a flourishing one will take new thinking and investing at the local, state, and national levels.

"A good child care system is essential for kids to thrive and our economy to prosper. But our current approach fails kids, parents, and child care workers by every measure," said **Lisa Hamilton, president and CEO of the Annie E. Casey Foundation**. "Without safe child care they can afford and get to, working parents face impossible choices, affecting not only their families, but their employers as well."

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RELEASE INFORMATION

The 2023 *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 datacenter.aecf.org.

About VOICES for Alabama's Children

VOICES for Alabama's Children is a statewide nonprofit that works to speak for 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 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. KIDS COUNT® is a registered trademark of the Annie E. Casey Foundation.