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KIDS COUNT Report Shows Oklahoma Ranks 46th for Child Well-Being

The rankings from the new Annie E. Casey Foundation report show Oklahoma's poor child well-being outcomes. These results demonstrate the impact of the state's ongoing disinvestment in programs and services that help our children thrive, including helping parents get affordable, accessible child care.

Oklahoma ranks 46th nationally in overall child well-being — and in the bottom half of all but one of the health and well-being metrics included in state rankings — for the *2023 KIDS COUNT® Data Book*, a 50-state report of recent household data developed by the Annie E. Casey Foundation analyzing how children and families are faring.

For the *2023 KIDS COUNT Data Book*, Oklahoma ranks 46th overall for child well-being, with only Nevada, Mississippi, Louisiana, and New Mexico ranking lower. Oklahoma's individual rankings on major categories were:

- 37th in health
- 38th in economic well-being
- 43rd in family and community context, and
- 49th in education (ahead of only New Mexico).

Oklahoma continues to rank in the bottom half of states in 15 of the 16 primary metrics used for the survey. The only metric where Oklahoma ranked in the top half of states was its percentage of children living in households that spend more than 30 percent of their income on housing, where Oklahoma ranked 20th. However, this issue continues to be a problem that affects 1 in 4 Oklahoma families, a share that is likely to increase with the current housing and rental market.

“Oklahoma's poor across-the-board rankings for child well-being show our state has urgent needs for consistent, sustained investments in programs and services that position our children for better futures,” said Shiloh Kantz, Executive Director for the Oklahoma Policy Institute, which is the state's KIDS COUNT affiliate.

Two decades of revenue-reducing tax cuts by Oklahoma lawmakers have made the state's budget today about 12 percent smaller (when adjusted for inflation and population growth) than it was in Fiscal Year 2000. This ongoing disinvestment is harming the state's ability to deliver programs and services to the Oklahomans who need it most, she said.

“It's telling that Oklahoma's highest categorical ranking this year was in children's health. Last fall, [Oklahoma was recognized for having the nation's largest improvement for child health care coverage](#) just one year after the state began implementing Medicaid expansion because voters demanded it. This

clearly shows that when you make investments in public programs and services, good things are far more likely to happen.”

One of the major findings in this year’s *KIDS COUNT Data Book* is that our country’s lack of affordable and accessible child care short-changes children and causes parents in Oklahoma to frequently miss work or even quit their jobs. Those who can find child care are paying dearly for it. These child care challenges cost the American economy billions of dollars a year and stymie women professionally. The report also describes low pay leading to a chronic shortage of providers and demands that policymakers at the state and national levels enact real solutions.

The *Data Book* reports that too many parents cannot secure child care that is compatible with work schedules and commutes. In 2020-21, 12 percent of Oklahoma children ages birth to five had a family member who quit, changed, or refused a job because of problems with child care. This was just below the national average of 13 percent. Nationwide, 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. Oklahoma’s typical cost of center-based child care for a toddler was \$8,399, which is 9 percent of the median income for a married couple in Oklahoma and nearly 30 percent of a single parent’s income.

While the cost of care burdens families, child care workers are paid worse than 98 percent of professions, the report noted. 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. In Oklahoma, the median annual wage for child care workers was about \$22,560, or \$10.84 an hour. Oklahoma had the nation’s seventh lowest wage for child care workers just ahead of six states (Mississippi, Louisiana, Alabama, West Virginia and Idaho) and Puerto Rico.

The failings of the child care market also affect the current and future health of the American economy, costing [\\$122 billion a year](#) in lost earnings, productivity and tax revenue, according to one study. All of these challenges put parents under tremendous stress to meet the dual responsibilities of providing for their families and ensuring their children are safe and nurtured.

“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.”

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.

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. An executive order issued by President Biden in April is aimed at expanding access, lowering costs, and raising wages. It could prove to be a helpful framework, but more is needed:

- Federal, state, and local governments should invest more in child care. State and local governments should maximize remaining pandemic recovery act dollars to fund needed child care services and capacity. Congress should reauthorize and strengthen the Child Care and

Development Block Grant Act and increase funding for public pre-kindergarten and Head Start. Additionally, Oklahoma lawmakers can support workforce development efforts by prioritizing budget investments to help ensure Oklahoma families can get affordable child care.

- Public and private leaders should work together to improve the infrastructure for home-based child care, beginning by lowering the barriers to entry for potential providers by increasing access to start-up and expansion capital.
- To help young parents, Congress should expand the federal Child Care Access Means Parents in School (CCAMPIS) program, which serves student parents.

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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 the Oklahoma Policy Institute

The Oklahoma Policy Institute seeks to create a more equitable Oklahoma through its nonpartisan policy research, analysis, and advocacy. OK Policy encourages critical conversations through data-driven research and outreach regarding state policy so that every Oklahoman has equitable opportunities to thrive. OK Policy is the KIDS COUNT affiliate for Oklahoma. Learn more at OKPolicy.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.