

# COLORADO CHILDREN'S CAMPAIGN

*Every Chance for Every Child*



UNDER EMBARGO Until June 10, 2024 at 12:01 a.m. ET

Contact: Jackie Zubrzycki | [jackie@coloradokids.org](mailto:jackie@coloradokids.org) | 215-208-4693

## Colorado Ranks 17<sup>th</sup> in Child Well-Being; Report Sounds Alarm About Learning Loss, Absenteeism

*Data across 50 states show academic outcomes, absence are linked to poverty, trauma; policymakers must act to promote kids' future success, Annie E. Casey Foundation finds*

**DENVER, CO** — Colorado ranks ninth in family and community context and 17<sup>th</sup> overall in child well-being, according to the **2024 KIDS COUNT® Data Book**, a 50-state report of recent data developed by the Annie E. Casey Foundation analyzing how kids are faring in post-pandemic America. The data shows Colorado leaders must do more to prepare children to learn so they are ready to earn when they reach adulthood. At stake nationally: hundreds of billions of dollars in future earnings and trillions of dollars in lost economic activity.

In its 35th year of publication, the *KIDS COUNT® Data Book* focuses on students' lack of basic reading and math skills, a problem decades in the making but brought to light by the focus on learning loss during the COVID-19 pandemic. Unprecedented drops in learning from 2019 to 2022 amounted to decades of lost progress. Chronic absence has soared, with children living in poverty especially unable to resume their school day routines on a regular basis.

In Colorado:

- There was a dramatic increase in the share of Colorado 8th graders who scored below proficient in math on the National Assessment of Educational Progress, or NAEP: 72% of students scored below proficient in the 2022, up from 63% in 2019 – a 14% increase.
- More Colorado 4th graders scored below proficient in reading on the NAEP: 62% of students scored less than proficient in 2022, up from 60% in 2019 – a 3% increase.
- The most recent data show 269,582 students, or around 31% of all kids enrolled in Colorado public schools, were chronically absent in the 2022-2023 school year. (The 2024 Data Book contains 50-state data from 2021-22; some states, including Colorado, have released newer figures that may not be comparable across states.)
- State averages mask disparities that affect students of color, kids in immigrant families and children from low-income families or attending low-income schools.

Nationwide, “less than a third of kids are on pace to have the math and reading skills for the careers of tomorrow, such as those in competitive, well-paying STEM careers,” said **Lisa Hamilton, President and CEO of the Annie E. Casey Foundation**. “Kids of all ages and grades must have what they need to learn each day, from enough food and sleep... to a safe way to get to school... to support like tutoring and mental health services.”

“Recent NAEP results make it clear that the pandemic had a negative effect on many students’ progress in math and reading,” said **Madeleine Ashour, Director of Youth Success at the Colorado Campaign**. “But gaps in academic outcomes between low-income families and students of color and their peers have persisted in Colorado for decades – and are larger here than in most states. Recent changes to our school funding system have the potential to help address those gaps, but Colorado must continue to intentionally invest in and support our schools and communities so every student has the opportunity to thrive.”

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.

Last year, Colorado saw a drop in the percentage of children in families where the household head lacks a high school diploma. The state ranked fifth-best in the share of children living in high-poverty areas. These and other indicators helped propel Colorado to ninth best in family and community factors. However, the state slipped two spots in the overall rankings for child well-being, largely due to ranking 28<sup>th</sup> in health factors. Colorado's child and teen death rate and share of babies born with a low birthweight were both well above the national average. Colorado ranks 25<sup>th</sup> in the percentage of children without health insurance.

"Thriving and well-funded health, care, and education systems benefit everyone," said **Heather Tritten, President and CEO of the Colorado Children's Campaign**, the state's member of the KIDS COUNT network. "The connection between health, care, education and overall child well-being has never been more apparent. Children facing fewer disruptions in these key areas are in a better position to achieve academically and thrive as adults."

The Casey Foundation report contends that the pandemic is not the sole cause of lower test scores: Educators, researchers, policymakers and employers who track students' academic readiness have been ringing alarm bells for a long time. U.S. scores in reading and math have barely budged in decades. Compared to peer nations, the United States is not equipping its children with the high-level reading, math and digital problem-solving skills needed for many of today's fastest-growing occupations in a highly competitive global economy.

This lack of readiness will result in major harm to the nation's economy and to our youth as they join the workforce. [Up to \\$31 trillion](#) in U.S. economic activity hinges on helping young people overcome learning loss caused by the pandemic. Students who don't advance beyond lower levels of math are more likely to be [unemployed after high school](#). One analysis calculates the drop in math scores between 2019 and 2022 will [reduce lifetime earnings](#) by 1.6% for 48 million pandemic-era students, for a total of \$900 billion in lost income.

However, some states have [delayed spending their share of the \\$190 billion critical federal pandemic funding](#) (Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief, or ESSER) that could help boost achievement. Colorado had spent 79.6% of its funding as of March 31, 2024. The deadline to allocate — not spend — this funding is September 30, 2024. Tens of billions of dollars set aside for schools will vanish forever if states do not act immediately.

The Foundation recommends the following:

- To get kids back on track, we must make sure they arrive at the classroom ready to learn by **ensuring access to low- or no-cost meals, a reliable internet connection, a place to study and time with friends, teachers and counselors.**
- **Expand access to intensive tutoring** for students who are behind in their classes and missing academic milestones. Research has shown the [most effective tutoring](#) is in person, high dosage and tied directly to the school.
- **States should take advantage of all their allocated pandemic relief funding to prioritize the social, emotional, academic and physical well-being of students.** As long as funds are obligated by the Sept. 30 deadline, states should have [two more full years to spend them](#).
- **States and school systems should address chronic absence, so more students return to learn.** While few states gather and report chronic absence data by grade, [all of them should](#). Improving attendance tracking and data will inform future decision-making. Lawmakers should embrace [positive approaches](#) rather than criminalizing students or parents due to attendance challenges, because they may not understand the consequences of even a few days missed.

- **Policymakers should invest in community schools**, public schools that provide wraparound support to kids and families. Natural homes for tutoring, mental health support, nutritional aid and other services, community schools use innovative and creative programs to [support young learners](#) and encourage parent engagement, which leads to [better outcomes for kids](#).

###

## RELEASE INFORMATION

The 2024 KIDS COUNT® *Data Book* will be available at [www.aecf.org](http://www.aecf.org). Additional information is available at [www.aecf.org/databook](http://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](http://datacenter.aecf.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](http://www.aecf.org). KIDS COUNT® is a registered trademark of the Annie E. Casey Foundation.

###

## About Colorado Children's Campaign

The Colorado Children's Campaign is a nonprofit, nonpartisan advocacy organization committed since 1985 to realizing every chance for every child in Colorado. We advocate for the development and implementation of data-driven public policies that improve child well-being in health, education and early childhood. We do this by providing Coloradans with trusted data and research and organizing an extensive statewide network of dedicated child advocates. For more information, please visit [www.coloradokids.org](http://www.coloradokids.org).

If you would like more information about this topic, please contact Jackie Zubrzycki at 215-208-4693 or email Jackie at [jackie@coloradokids.org](mailto:jackie@coloradokids.org).