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Connecticut Ranks 8th Nationally in Overall Child Well-Being, Yet Faces Increasing Learning Loss Post-Pandemic and Children's Economic Well-Being

Inaction on Learning Loss Could Cost U.S. Economy Up to \$31 Trillion, Warns Annie E. Casey Foundation's 2024 KIDS COUNT® Data Book.

New Haven, CONN — Connecticut ranks 8th in the nation in child well-being; however, in Connecticut and nationwide, the number of children experiencing learning loss has increased, which impacts our economy overall. That's 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.

In its 35th year of publication, the *2024 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. In Connecticut, 22 percent of all students were chronically absent, more than double pre-pandemic rates, and proficiency in both Math and English decreased.

"Our state's future depends on our willingness to invest in every child's potential," said **Emily Byrne, executive director of Connecticut Voices for Children, Connecticut's member of the KIDS COUNT network**. "While Connecticut's relative high ranking in overall well-being should be celebrated, the concerning rise in learning loss is a stark reminder of how much work must still be done to create equitable educational opportunities and ensure the family economic security necessary for learning to happen. This moment calls for bold steps, but steps that we can make next year, to address the downward academic indicators as well as the broader social and economic disparities."

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. 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. Additionally, families still lack the economic security they need for children to thrive.

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.

Despite this, 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. [As of March 2024, nearly a quarter of statewide ESSER III funds remained unspent in Connecticut.](#)

“Kids of all ages and grades must have what they need to learn each day, such as enough food and sleep and a safe way to get to school, as well as the additional resources they might need to perform at their highest potential and thrive, like tutoring and mental health services,” **said Lisa Hamilton, president and CEO of the Annie E. Casey Foundation.** “Our policies and priorities have not focused on these factors in preparing young people for the economy, short-changing a whole generation.”

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. These rankings are relative to other states year to year, so some rankings may shift based on the performance of other states and not necessarily because of changes in outcomes in Connecticut.

- **Overall: Connecticut is ranked #19 in the nation in children’s economic well-being.**
 - *This is a higher (worse) overall ranking than last year when CT ranked #15.*
- **Overall: Connecticut is ranked #3 in the nation in terms of education.**
 - *This is the same overall ranking as last year.*
- **Overall: Connecticut is ranked #11 in the nation in terms of health.**
 - *This is a lower (better) overall ranking than last year when CT ranked #12.*
- **Overall: Connecticut is ranked #22 in the nation in terms of family and community context.**
 - *This is a higher (worse) overall ranking than last year when CT ranked #19.*

Education Data (NAEP data is released every two years):

- **Percent of 4th graders who scored below proficient reading level:** Casey has ranked Connecticut #8 in the nation in terms of 4th grade reading proficiency.
 - The percent of 4th graders in Connecticut who scored below proficient went from 60% in 2019 to 65% in 2022, an eight percent change.
 - In 2013 (CT ranked #4), 57 percent of 4th graders in Connecticut scored below proficient on the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP). This represents a 14 percent decline in 4th grade reading proficiency.
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- **Percent of 8th graders who scored below proficient math level:** The Foundation has ranked Connecticut #11 in the nation in terms of math proficiency.
 - Between 2019 and 2022, there was a 15 percent change in 8th grade math proficiency. The percent of 8th graders who scored below proficient on the math section went from 61% in 2019 to 70% in 2022.
 - In 2022, 70 percent of 8th graders scored below proficient on the math section of the NAEP. This represents an 11 percent decline in math proficiency between 2013 and 2022.

Key findings from this year’s *Data Book* include:

The High Points

- **Connecticut ranks #1 in the nation regarding preschool attendance.** The state is tied with New Jersey although the District of Columbia technically outranks both states. During 2018-22, 39 percent of the state's children ages 3 and 4 were not attending preschool (estimated 30,000 children), which is an increase from last year's data book that showed 35 percent of the state's children were not attending preschool (estimated at 27,000 children). More work still needs to be done but all-in-all this is a high point for Connecticut.
- **Connecticut ranks #2 in the nation in terms of teen births to females ages 15 to 19.** In 2012, Connecticut had 15 teen births per 1,000 teenage females. In 2019, Connecticut had 8 teen births per 1,000 females. In 2022, Connecticut had 6 teen births per 1,000 teenage females. This represents a 25 percent decline in Connecticut's teen birth rate from 2019 to 2022. A high point all the more because Connecticut improved two places from #4 last year.
- **Connecticut ranks #3 in the nation in terms of children with health insurance.** In 2019, three percent of children in Connecticut did not have health insurance (estimated 27,000 children). In 2022, 3 percent of children in Connecticut did not have health insurance (estimated 25,000 children). While this is a slight dip in rank from last year (when CT was #2), the persistent high ranking is a high point.

Need To Watch

- **Connecticut ranks #9 in the nation in terms of keeping teens engaged in school and/or work.** In 2022, 5 percent of teens in Connecticut were not attending school and not working (estimated 9,000 young people). The percent increased by 25 percent from 4% in 2019 to 5% in 2022 and our ranking fell from #1 to #9 during this time. In 2019, 8,000 teens in Connecticut were not attending school and not working, but in 2022, 9,000 teens in Connecticut were not attending school and not working. While the overall rank is in the top ten, this is a significant change from last year when Connecticut ranked #2, which is why it's on the watch list this year.
- **Connecticut ranks #15 in the nation in parental secure employment.** In 2019, 27 percent of children lived in families where no parent had full-time, year-round employment (estimated 197,000 children) while in 2022, 23 percent of children lived in families where no parent had full-time, year-round employment (estimated 167,000 children). This represents a 15 percent increase in children living in families with parental employment. While this is a slight improvement from last year's #17 rank, the overall percent and numbers of children living in these households is too high, which is why it's on the watch list this year.
- **Connecticut ranks #23 in the nation for youth obesity.** In 2021-2022, the percent of teens ages 10 to 17 who are overweight was 32 percent to other states in the Northeast, New Hampshire is ranked #1, Vermont is ranked #3, Massachusetts and New Jersey are ranked #7, and Maine and New York are ranked #15.

The Low Points

- **Connecticut ranks #22 in the nation in terms of number of children in families where the household head lacks a high school diploma.** In 2014, 9 percent of children in Connecticut lived in a family where the head of the household lacked a high school diploma. In 2019, 8 percent (estimated 57,000 children) of children in Connecticut lived in a family where the head of the household lacked a high school diploma. In 2022, 9 percent of children in Connecticut lived in a family where the head of the household lacked a high school diploma (estimated 66,000 children). While the rank isn't as bad as others, it's not good either. However, the greater reason it's on this year's low point is due to the dramatic increase from last year (when Connecticut ranked #12).
- **Connecticut ranks #32 in the number of children living in high-poverty areas (Census tracts with poverty rates $\geq 30\%$).** In 2017-21, 7 percent of children (estimated at 54,000 children) lived in high-poverty areas. In 2018-2022, 8 percent of children lived in high-poverty areas (estimated 57,000 children). This is a low point due to the poor rank and in particular comparison with other Northeast states (New Hampshire #1 (0% of children live in high-poverty areas), Vermont #2 (1% of children), Maine #5 (2% of children living in high-poverty areas), Rhode Island #16 (4% of children living in high-poverty areas), Massachusetts #19 (5% of children living in high-poverty areas), and New Jersey #22 (6% of children living in high-poverty areas).
- **Connecticut ranks #40 in the state on housing cost-burden.** In 2019, 34 percent of children lived in households that spent more than 30 percent of their income on housing (estimated 244,000 children). In 2022, 31 percent of children lived in households that spent more than 30 percent of their income on housing (estimated 230,000 children). This represents a nine percent improvement in the percentage of children living in households that spend more than 30 percent of their income on housing. Although we saw improvements on this indicator Connecticut still ranks in the worst quartile.

CT Voices joins The Foundation's recommendations that will help children get back on track academically. Some of those recommendations are as follows:

- Policymakers should ensure access to low- or no-cost school meals; a reliable internet connection; and a place to study and time with friends, teachers and counselors.
- Policymakers should 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. Fortunately, Connecticut is already doing this but more resources could provide a meaningful expansion so that all students benefit.
- Policymakers should invest in more wraparound services to kids and families as well as invest in communities to [support young learners](#) and encourage parent engagement, which leads to [better outcomes for kids](#).
- States and local educational agencies (LEAs) should address chronic absence, so more students return to learning. We agree with the Foundation that 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.
- Connecticut has made good use of the federal pandemic relief and recovery funding; however, funds must be obligated by the Sept. 30 deadline. We hope LEAs prioritize the

social, emotional, academic and physical well-being of students with their funding.
[NOTE: States should have [two more full years to spend them.](#)]

While the aforementioned national recommendations are important, we know how much family economic security contributes to a child’s ability to learn. As such, to improve family economic well-being and reduce child poverty, CT Voices recommends Connecticut invest in families and children by:

- **establishing a state-level child tax credit,**
- **making early care and education more affordable and accessible,**
- **ensuring fair and full employment that pays dignified wages for all workers,**
- **providing more opportunities for parents to achieve higher education without amassing debt, and**
- **increasing the supply of affordable housing in every town across the state.**

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RELEASE INFORMATION

The *2024 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 CONNECTICUT VOICES FOR CHILDREN

Connecticut Voices for Children is a “think and do” tank working to ensure that Connecticut is a thriving and equitable state where all children achieve their full potential. In furtherance of its vision, we work in the state and nationally to advance economic justice systems change through research and policy development as well as power building and legislative advocacy.

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.