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## **44% of District of Columbia Students Chronically Absent, More Than All But 2 States**

*50-State Data Show the District Making Progress But Still Has a Long Way to Go to Promote Kids' Future Success, Annie E. Casey Foundation Finds*

**WASHINGTON, DC (June 10)**—44% of District of Columbia students are chronically absent from school, and only 75% of those who start high school [graduate on time](#), 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 show that District 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.

The District's overall graduation rate masks massive racial disparities. In 2020-21, 92% of white students graduated in four years compared to just 70% of Latine students and 73% of Black students. When digested along with chronic absenteeism and lower-than-average graduation rates, there is a level of disengagement that should be of extreme concern to elected officials, educators, parents, and the community.

"District children and youth tell us with their actions and [words](#) when they don't feel heard," said Kimberly Perry, executive director of DC Action, the Washington, DC member of the KIDS COUNT network. "We know from youth, families, and research that kids who participate in high-quality afterschool and summer programs are [more likely](#) to [attend school](#) and engage in their classrooms while [developing emotional maturity, learning new skills, and staying safe](#). Ensuring that all of them - especially those facing the hurdles of racism or poverty - have access to these types of programs is a key component of keeping them engaged in the education they need to thrive as adults."

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.

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 to look at how children are faring overall.

Key findings from the most recent Data Book include:

- While the percentage of District children in families where no parent has full-time, year-round employment has decreased considerably between 2019 and 2022, it is still higher than in any state (34% vs. 26% nationally). The District's high rate is driven by economic insecurity for children of color: [just 9%](#) of white District children are in families where no parent has full-time, year-round employment, far lower than the District average.
- While the percentage of children living in high-poverty areas in the District has decreased significantly in the last few years (18% in 2018-22 vs. 31% a decade prior), it's still among the highest of any state: only Louisiana, Mississippi, and New Mexico are higher. DC's Black children are much more likely than others to be economically segregated in this way: [29% live in high-poverty areas compared to 9% of Latine children, 8% of multiracial children, and 1% of white children.](#)
- The District has one of the highest rates of child and teen deaths: 40 per 100,000 children and youth compared to 30 per 100,000 children and youth nationally. Only Alaska, Arkansas, Louisiana, Mississippi, Missouri, Montana, and Wyoming have worse rates.
- The District continues to excel at ensuring children have access to pre-K and health insurance.

This report makes it clear that while the District has made impressive progress toward ensuring that our children have health insurance and to prekindergarten, we have a long way to go in giving them educational opportunities, including afterschool and summer programming, and economic opportunities they need to thrive.

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. The District has spent [60% of its funding as of February](#), less than [most other states](#). 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](#).

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#### **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 DC ACTION**

[DC Action](#) is a nonprofit, nonpartisan advocacy organization that makes the District of Columbia a place where all kids grow up safe, resilient, powerful, and heard. It uses research, data, and a racial equity lens to break down barriers that stand in the way of all kids reaching their full potential. Its collaborative advocacy campaigns bring the power of young people and all residents to raise their voices to create change. DC Action is also the home of [DC KIDS COUNT](#), an online resource that tracks key indicators of child and youth well-being.