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Delaware in Top 10 for Economic Well-Being, but Struggles With Poor Educational Outcomes

Data from the Annie E. Casey Foundation Reveal Low Proficiency Rates in Reading and Math for Delaware Students, 27% of Students Chronically Absent

NEWARK, DE — Delaware ranks 31st in the nation in overall 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.

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.

By issue area, Delaware ranks 8th out of all states in economic well-being, 25th in child health, 32nd in family and community, and 45th in education. Despite Delaware’s high economic ranking, the data show Delaware leaders must do more to prepare children to learn so they are ready to earn when they reach adulthood.

In its 35th year of publication, the *KIDS COUNT® Data Book* focuses on better preparing student to learn, 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 dramatic declines in student proficiency. Chronic absence has soared, with children living in poverty especially unable to resume their school day routines on a regular basis.

“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 Janice Barlow, director of KIDS COUNT in Delaware. “In a landscape where education serves as a foundation for future success, it is imperative to ensure that every child has access to a quality educational experience.”

The issue of chronic absenteeism has emerged as a significant barrier to educational attainment. More than one-fourth of Delaware students were chronically absent in the 2021-2022 school year, representing a concerning trend that impedes learning and development. Research indicates absenteeism disproportionately affects marginalized communities, including children with disabilities, children living in poverty, and children of color. Factors such as transportation barriers, unsafe commutes, and chronic health issues contribute to absenteeism. Further highlighting the complex web of challenges facing students, 43% of Delaware children experienced at least one adverse childhood experience.

Key findings from the most recent school year available (2021-2022) paint a stark picture of educational challenges in Delaware. Assessment scores reveal Delaware students are performing worse than the national average and that student proficiency for the state has worsened since 2019. In 2022, 75% of the state’s fourth-graders were not proficient in reading, and 82% of the state’s eighth-graders were not

proficient in math. Moreover, state averages mask disparities that affect students of color, kids in immigrant families and children from low-income families or those attending low-income schools.

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.

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. 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 KIDS COUNT IN DELAWARE

KIDS COUNT in Delaware, a project of the Center for Community Research and Service within the Joseph R. Biden, Jr. School of Public Policy and Administration at the University of Delaware, is a collaborative effort of over forty organizations to enrich local and state discussion concerning ways to secure better lives for all of Delaware's children by providing policy makers and citizens with benchmarks of child well-being. Learn more at www.dekidscount.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.

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