

# PRESS RELEASE

THE ANNIE E. CASEY FOUNDATION

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## PANDEMIC LEARNING LOSS AND FAILURE TO EQUIP CHILDREN FOR SCHOOL THREATEN U.S. ECONOMY AND YOUNG PEOPLE'S FUTURES

**50-STATE DATA SHOW POOR ACADEMIC OUTCOMES AND CHRONIC ABSENCE ARE LINKED TO POVERTY AND TRAUMA; POLICYMAKERS MUST ACT SOON TO PROMOTE KIDS' FUTURE SUCCESS**

JUNE 10, 2024 - BALTIMORE – The failure of the U.S. to prepare our kids to learn is setting up millions of young people to struggle through adulthood. If leaders don't make sure students learn what they missed out on during the pandemic, it could cost our children hundreds of billions of dollars in future earnings and the U.S. economy trillions in lost activity. The 2024 KIDS COUNT® Data Book, released today by the Annie E. Casey Foundation, uses 50-state data to call attention to the factors that cause these challenges, from poverty to physical and mental health, trauma and others.

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.

Key findings from the most recent school year available (2021-2022) include:

- In 2022, Only 26% of eighth graders were at or above proficient in math, much worse than before the pandemic (33% in 2019).
- Less than a third of fourth graders (32%) were at or above proficient in reading, two percentage points lower than right before the pandemic (34% in 2019).

- Thirty percent of all students (14.7 million students) were chronically absent, nearly double pre-pandemic rates (16% in 2018–19, the final school year fully unaffected by COVID). Two out of three students attended schools plagued by chronic absence.
- Four out of ten (40%) had undergone at least one adverse childhood experience (ACE), such as family economic hardship or their parents having divorced, separated or served time in jail.

These averages mask even worse educational outcomes for students of color, kids in immigrant families and children from low-income families or attending low-income schools. The gaps they face can affect their ability to succeed and thrive as adults.

“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.”

The Casey Foundation report contends that the pandemic is not solely to blame for the country’s worsening educational outcomes. 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 our economy and to our youth as they join the workforce. [Up to \\$31 trillion](#) in U.S. economic activity hinges on helping young people complete learning delayed by the pandemic. Research indicates that students who don’t advance beyond lower levels of math may be 50% more likely to be [unemployed after high school](#). One analysis calculates that the drop in math scores between 2019 and 2022 will [reduce lifetime earnings](#) by 1.6% for our 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 in critical federal pandemic funding](#) (Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief, or ESSER) that could help boost achievement. 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 Casey Foundation recommends the following:

- To get kids back on track, we must ensure 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.