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## **Georgia Ranks 37<sup>th</sup> in the Nation for Child and Family Well-Being** Ties Georgia's Highest National Overall Ranking, But Families Continue to Struggle

*Georgia continues to rank in the bottom 10 states in the health. Child poverty, low birthweight, teen death rate, chronic absenteeism are still causes for concern. The good news—more high-school students are graduating on time.*

**ATLANTA**—Georgia ranks 37th in the nation for overall child and family well-being in the latest *KIDS COUNT<sup>®</sup> Data Book*, released today by the Annie E. Casey Foundation.

While this ties Georgia's highest national ranking, the *2024 Data Book* reveals that low birthweight (LBW) and child poverty rates are still high, and health continues to be one of our state's toughest challenges. The report also shows a significant increase over previous years in the number of single-parent families, signaling possible added economic burdens for Georgia's most vulnerable residents.

The *KIDS COUNT<sup>®</sup> Data Book* uses 16 indicators to rank each state across four domains—health, education, economic well-being, and family and community—to assess child and family well-being.

“Business leaders have often told me you count and measure what matters to be successful,” said Georgia Family Connection Partnership Executive Director Gaye Smith. “Well, our children and families matter, so we must stay focused on our data trends to ensure we understand our challenges and bright points of progress to build upon.”

### **Georgia Ranks 43rd in Health**

Georgia continues to rank in the bottom 10 states in the health domain—Georgia's lowest—at 43rd. The state has suffered a higher-than-average—and rising—LBW rate since 2012, peaking in 2018 at 10.1%. The increase appeared to level off in recent years at 10% in 2019 and 9.9% in 2020. However, Georgia's LBW rate rose to 10.6% in 2021 and remained there in 2022. LBW matters because it's the single strongest predictor of infant mortality and provides insight into the state of women's overall health.

Georgia's child and teen death rate also increased at an alarming rate—jumping by 21% from 2019 to 2022.

While there continues to be concerning health trends for Georgia, the *2024 Data Book* does report some good news. The rate of Georgia's teens who are overweight or obese was 31% in 2021 and 2022. This is a

## **Georgia ranks 37th in the Nation for Child Well-Being (cont.)**

departure from the country's rising obesity rate of 33%, leading to Georgia's national ranking of 18 for this indicator. The report also reveals 31,000 more children in Georgia had health insurance in 2022 compared to 2019. However, it remains to be seen how the nationwide process of Medicaid redetermination will affect this indicator.

"The release of these data each year is significant. For instance, data on child health insurance coverage is critical since we know that access to affordable, high-quality insurance is essential to a child's ability to thrive," said Kristy Klein Davis, president of Georgia Health Initiative. "Regularly tracking and releasing these data can help us better understand the effect policies, such as the end of Medicaid continuous enrollment, have on the youngest of Georgians. Taken together, the 2024 *Data Book* shows us where progress has been made, but also how far we have to go to improve health for all children in Georgia. But with regional and statewide collaborations—like those supported by Georgia Family Connection Partnership—we are creating a Georgia that provides opportunities for all kids to attain their fullest potential for health and well-being."

## **Georgia Ranks 32nd in Economic Well-Being**

The rate of Georgia's children who lived in households where no parent had full-time, year-round employment in 2022 was the same as the national average of 26%, while the percentage of children living in poverty is higher—17% in Georgia compared to 16% nationwide. Still, this represents an improvement from 2021 when 20%—or 91,000 more—of Georgia's children were living in poverty.

The number of children who live in households spending more than 30% of their income on housing also declined by over 30,000 from 2021 to 2022, representing a return to pre-pandemic numbers.

## **Georgia Ranks 42nd in Family and Community Factors**

The percentage of children living in single-parent families in 2022 remained high in Georgia at 39%, compared to the national average of 34%. The rate of children in families where the head of household lacks a high school diploma matched the national average of 11% in 2022.

The good news is that Georgia continues to see an encouraging decline in its teen birth rate—with 17 births per 1,000 females ages 15 to 19 in 2022, compared with 20 per 1,000 in 2019, representing a 15% decrease in the number of teen births over that time. The rate of children living in high-poverty census tracts also improved from 13% from 2013 – 2017 to 9% in 2018 – 2022, reflecting 100,000 fewer children living in high-poverty areas.

## **Georgia Ranks 31st in Education**

Georgia's highest ranking in the four domains is in education at 31st. However, the Casey Foundation identified chronic absenteeism as an issue affecting education outcomes across the country and Georgia is not immune to this issue. At 27%, the rate of children who were chronically absent during the 2021-22 school year in the Peach State is lower than the national average of 30%.

Georgia's fourth graders scoring below proficient in reading remained high at 68% in 2019 and 2022, but a drastic improvement in the state's national ranking from 36th to 21st over that same timeframe indicates Georgia was able to hold steady while other states lost ground.

"While the percent of fourth graders in our state reading on grade level is far below where it needs to be, it's commendable that the percent held steady during the pandemic, representing a herculean effort by educators and students," said Georgia Partnership for Excellence in Education President Dana Rickman. "But to significantly decrease the percentage of children not reading on grade level requires an equally herculean effort focusing on root causes—such as poverty, mental and physical health disparities, and access to other needed support services."

## Georgia ranks 37th in the Nation for Child Well-Being (cont.)

The rate of Georgia's eighth graders who scored below proficient in math rose significantly from 69% in 2019 to 76% in 2022, reflecting the national trend where 67% of eighth graders scored below proficient in 2019, compared with 74% in 2022.

“One symptomatic issue is the rise in absentee rates among Georgia’s public-school students,” said Rickman. “In 2022, 66% of students attended a school in Georgia where 20% or more of the students were chronically absent. This compares to only 25% the previous year. As Georgia implements comprehensive reforms in how reading is taught in schools, we must pay attention to other causes of learning disruptions that lead to increased absenteeism in the classroom.”

The report, however, shows steady improvement in the percentage of Georgia’s high school students not graduating on time, with 16% not meeting this milestone in the 2020-21 school year. That’s an improvement from 18% who didn’t graduate on time in 2018-19 and a significant improvement from 33% in 2010-2011.

“ALL children and families matter—not a select few,” said Smith. “We must take our data and dig deeper to find where our children and families are not experiencing healthy births, readiness for school, succeeding when they get to school, living in safe and stable families in thriving communities. As Georgians, that is what must matter to every one of us. It’s our future AND our legacy that we leave for our great state.”

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### RELEASE INFORMATION

The *2024 KIDS COUNT® Data Book* is available at [aecf.org](https://aecf.org). Additional information is available at [aecf.org/databook](https://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](https://datacenter.aecf.org).

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**Georgia Family Connection Partnership** (GaFCP) is a public-private partnership created by the State of Georgia and investors from the private sector to assist communities in addressing the serious challenges facing children and families. GaFCP also serves as a resource to state agencies across Georgia that work to improve the conditions of children and families. Georgia KIDS COUNT provides policymakers and citizens with current data they need to make informed decisions regarding priorities, services, and resources that impact Georgia’s children, youth, families, and communities. Georgia KIDS COUNT is funded, in part, through a grant from The Annie E. Casey Foundation, a private charitable organization dedicated to helping build better futures for disadvantaged children in the United States. Visit [gafcp.org](https://gafcp.org).

**The Annie E. Casey Foundation** creates a brighter future for the nation’s children 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. Visit [aecf.org](https://aecf.org). KIDS COUNT® is a registered trademark of The Annie E. Casey Foundation.