

EMBARGOED until
Sunday, June 9, 2024 at 6:01 p.m. HST

Contact: Jen Armstrong, 808-286-3816
jen@strongarmcommunications.com

Less Than Half of Hawai'i Students Proficient in Reading and Math and Nearly 4 in 10 Chronically Absent

*50-State Report from the Annie E. Casey Foundation Also Finds
Hawai'i in Bottom Third of Nation for Children's Economic Well-Being*

HONOLULU — Hawai'i's low student reading and math scores and attendance rates are hampering their ability to be prepared for high-skill occupations when they reach adulthood, 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 Hawai'i leaders must do more to make sure our keiki are ready to learn.

Many of today's fastest-growing, well-paying occupations require high-level reading and math skills. Our children and youth today will be our future workforce, but the most are not proficient in either subject:

- Only 35% of Hawai'i's fourth graders were at or above proficient in reading in 2022, barely changed from before the pandemic (in 2019), when 34% were proficient. However, our state ranking jumped from 28th in the nation in 2019 to 8th in 2022, unfortunately due to the national average proficiency rate worsening by 3%.
- Just 22% of eighth graders were at or above proficient in math in 2022, significantly worse than in 2019, when 28% of Hawai'i's eighth graders were at or above proficient in math. While we remain in the bottom third of the nation, our state ranking improved from 42nd in 2019 to 38th in 2022, due to the national average proficiency rate dropping by 10%.

Children cannot learn if they don't attend school. In 2022, nearly 4 in 10 (39%) of Hawai'i students were chronically absent from school. This share is more than double what it was in 2019, when 18.5% of students were chronically absent, and [places Hawai'i in the worst 10 states](#). Of special concern is that a majority (59%) of Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander students were reported as [chronically absent](#) in 2022, reflecting many disparities and barriers to learning that they face.

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.

“This year’s data suggests a concerning trend for Hawai’i’s youth and that is they will continue to be the population who suffers when our state’s policies do not support the economic well-being of working families,” said Deborah Zysman, executive director of Hawai’i Children’s Action Network, Hawai’i’s member of the KIDS COUNT network. “Parents face a heavy financial burden when it comes to childcare so they often look to their older children to carry the burden of watching the younger siblings. It is not alarming to see families with minor children spiral towards poverty levels because our state simply does not prioritize policies that help working families.”

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.

Key findings from the 2024 KIDS COUNT Data Book include:

- Hawai’i’s overall ranking is 25. The state ranked 20th in education, 15th in health and 18th in family and community.
- In contrast, Hawai’i ranked in the bottom third of states (38th) in economic well-being, mostly due to ranking 47th in housing cost burden. Nearly 38% of Hawai’i children lived in households that spent more than 30% of their income on housing in 2022, which is 8 percentage points higher than the national average.
- Hawai’i also ranked in the bottom third of the nation (37th) for parent’s employment, with more than 1 in 4 (28%) of children living in families where no parent had full-time, year-round employment in 2022. That stands in sharp contrast to 2019, when Hawai’i was ranked in the top third of the nation (16th), and represents 12,000 more children living in families without stable employment between 2019 and 2022.

“It is concerning that too many children are living in families where parents lack secure employment,” said Ivette Rodriguez Stern, junior specialist at the UH Center on the Family. “In addition, we continue to have among the worst housing cost burdens in the nation. Year after year, the KIDS COUNT Data Book reminds us that more can and must be done to support the economic well-being of Hawai’i’s children and their families,” Stern added.

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.

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. A summary of Hawai'i's rankings in the 2024 *KIDS COUNT*® *Data Book* will be available at www.hawaii-can.org/kidscount.

ABOUT HAWAI'I CHILDREN'S ACTION NETWORK

Hawai'i Children's Action Network (HCAN) is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit and the only one in the state of Hawai'i solely committed to advocating for children. We address the root causes of poverty and inequity and develop public policies that help children and their families. For more information, visit hawaii-can.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.