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IDAHO RANKS 38TH IN EDUCATION, WITH HIGH RATES OF 'ADVERSE CHILDHOOD EXPERIENCES' KEEPING STUDENTS FROM HIGHER ACHIEVEMENT

50-State Data in Annie E. Casey Foundation Report Reveals Childhood Instability Contributing to Lower Student Test Scores

Boise, Idaho — Idaho ranks 13th 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. The data show Idaho leaders must do more to prevent and address childhood instability to ensure children come to school ready to learn.

In its 35th year of publication, the *KIDS COUNT® Data Book* this year 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. The *Data Book* calls attention to national and state-by-state data tied to lower student test scores not directly accounted for by the KIDS COUNT index: adverse childhood experiences. In 2021–22, roughly two in five Idaho children (41%) had undergone an ACE. These experiences included things such as family economic hardship, a child's parents having divorced, and living with someone with a mental illness or substance use problem.

"Two-thirds of Idaho students are scoring below proficient in reading and math, resulting in Idaho falling behind a majority of other states' test scores," said Christine Tiddens, executive director at Idaho Voices for Children, Idaho's member of the KIDS COUNT network. "High rates of adverse childhood experiences (ACES) can and do keep Idaho students from higher achievement. Children may not come to school ready to learn, or come to school at all, if they are experiencing instability at home."

2024 KIDS COUNT DATA BOOK EXAMINES IDAHO'S CHILD WELL-BEING

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 most recent data include:

- ▶ **ECONOMIC WELL-BEING:** Idaho ranked 22nd in the nation on the *Data Book* economic well-being domain. In 2022, 13% of Idaho children lived in poverty, and one-quarter (25%) of Idaho children lived in families with a housing cost burden, meaning they spend more than 30% of their income on housing.
- ▶ **EDUCATION:** Idaho ranked 38th in the nation on the *Data Book* education domain. In 2018-22, about two-thirds (64%) of 3- and 4-year-old Idaho children were not attending preschool. In 2020-21, One-fifth (20%) of Idaho high school students were not graduating on time, the fifth highest in the country, and in 2022, 68% of fourth graders were not proficient in reading and 68% of eighth graders were not proficient in math.
- ▶ **HEALTH:** Idaho ranked 9th in the nation on the *Data Book* health domain. In 2022, 6% of children did not have health insurance, a 20% increase from 2019 to 2022. One-quarter (25%) of teens ages 10 to 17 were overweight or obese, the lowest percentage in the country.

- ▶ FAMILY AND COMMUNITY: Idaho ranked 4th in the nation on the *Data Book* family and community domain – the state’s highest ranking. In 2022, 23% of Idaho children lived in single parent households, the second lowest in the country. The teen birth rate dropped to a record low of 11 teen births per 1,000, a 27% decrease from 2019 to 2022.

POLICIES ARE NEEDED TO PROMOTE CHILD WELL-BEING AT HOME AND AT SCHOOL

“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.”

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 safe home, a place to study and time with friends, teachers and counselors.
- ▶ 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](#).
- ▶ We must ensure every child has access to the mental health care they need, when and where they need it. Schools should increase the presence of social workers, psychologists and other mental health professionals on staff, and they can work with local health care providers and local and state governments to make additional federal resources available and coordinate treatment.

“There has been no progress in Idaho’s student test scores, and unless the causes of children’s instability are addressed, education outcomes will only continue to worsen,” said Christine Tiddens. “It is essential that Idaho policymakers consider the data and what it is telling us about the needs of our youth. Idaho can and should do more to ensure schools have the resources and community supports to establish environments that address children’s history with traumatic experiences.”

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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 IDAHO VOICES FOR CHILDREN

Idaho Voices for Children works to develop and promote a statewide public policy agenda that advocates for children on issues of health, education, safety, well-being and family economic security. Learn more at www.idahovoices.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.