



**UNDER EMBARGO Until June 10, 2024 at 12:01 a.m. ET**

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**Louisiana Ranks 48<sup>th</sup> in 2024 KIDS COUNT Data Book: Agenda for Children Calls for Better Investments in Kids' Education and Well-Being**

*The Annie E. Casey Foundation's Annual National Report Finds Poor Academic Outcomes Linked to Poverty and Trauma; Urges Policymakers to Act Now to Promote Kids' Future Success*

NEW ORLEANS — Louisiana moved up a slot in the national rankings of its children's overall well-being, but the state continues to struggle to educate, care for, and prepare its children for the future, according to the *2024 KIDS COUNT® Data Book*, the latest national annual report on education, poverty, health, and families and communities conducted by the Annie E. Casey Foundation.

Louisiana saw success in some areas, such as improved 4th grade reading and relatively low chronic absenteeism, the Foundation's data show. But its consistently low national ranking continues to imperil the future livelihoods of today's children and the economic outlook of the entire state – to the tune of billions of dollars.

"Louisiana's future will be determined largely by how well we meet the needs of our children today," said Jen Roberts, CEO of Agenda for Children, Louisiana's member of the KIDS COUNT network. "As our state faces an uncertain economic future, our elected officials and voters must remember that there is simply no better investment in our state's economy than an investment in our children."

The *2024 KIDS COUNT® Data Book* is the Foundation's 35th edition of its annual report tracking each state's approach to improving the lives and future outcomes of its children. Its findings indicate a national struggle with learning loss and soaring chronic absenteeism brought on by the COVID-19 pandemic.

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.

This year's *Data Book* focused 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 nationwide, with children living in poverty especially unable to resume their school routines on a regular basis.

"The data are clear: far too many children in our state don't have the reading and math proficiency that they will need to get well-paying jobs in the future," said Teresa Falgoust, Director of Data and Research at Agenda for Children. "To combat this, a major opportunity is to better invest in our teachers. Higher salaries will give them the financial stability to keep teaching and focus on what's most important - the education of the children in their classes."

Louisiana demonstrated improvements and positive outcomes in some key areas:

- During the 2021-2022 school year, 18% of Louisiana's children were chronically absent. Only two states had lower rates.
- Louisiana was one of only three states to improve reading proficiency among 4th graders between 2019 and 2022, despite its consistently high poverty rates.

Despite those advancements, the *Data Book* shows that Louisiana children are more likely to experience challenges that, in turn, make it less likely that they'll do well in school or enjoy good health.

- In 2022, 25% of children in Louisiana lived in poverty, which was nine percentage points higher than the national average.
- In 2021-22, nearly half (47%) of Louisiana's children experienced at least one adverse childhood experience (ACE), a traumatic event that can have ripple effects on a child's life, from increasing the likelihood that they will repeat a grade to having emotional and behavioral challenges.
- In 2022, 81% of eighth graders in Louisiana were not proficient in math, up from 77% in 2019.
- 51% of Louisiana children ages 3 and 4 weren't attending school or child care in 2017-2022, up from 49% in 2013-2017.

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

Not equipping children with the high-level reading, math and digital problem-solving skills needed for many of today's fastest-growing occupations 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, according to Stanford University's Hoover Education Success Initiative. And the National Bureau of Economic Research 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.

Nonetheless, some states have [delayed spending their share of the \\$190 billion critical federal pandemic funding](#) (Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief, or ESSER) that could help boost achievement. While most Louisiana districts are on track to allocate the funding, Louisiana is especially vulnerable to a fiscal cliff after those dollars are expended. ESSER spending represents approximately 14% of education dollars in Louisiana, a greater portion than any other state besides Mississippi. The Louisiana Department of Education's [dashboard](#) shows that the state has used ESSER to address critical needs, including paying teachers' stipends, mental health and well-being, and summer learning loss.

In light of its findings, the Annie E. Casey Foundation recommends the following:

- Make sure kids 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.
- **Address chronic absences so more students return to learn.** While few states gather and report chronic absence data by grade, [all of them should](#). Improving attendance tracking 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 missed days.

- **Policymakers should invest in community schools**, public schools that provide wraparound support to kids and families. As 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.

#### **ABOUT AGENDA FOR CHILDREN**

Agenda for Children is Louisiana's oldest child advocacy organization, and has worked to make Louisiana a state where all children can thrive since 1984. Agenda provides parish-level data on child well-being for each of Louisiana's 64 parishes in the online KIDS COUNT Data Center at [datacenter.aecf.org](http://datacenter.aecf.org) and in our annual parish profiles of child well-being. For more information, visit [www.agendaforchildren.org](http://www.agendaforchildren.org).