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Contact: Kali Schumitz, kschumitz@mdeconomy.org,
410-412-9105 ext. 701



One-Third of Students Chronically Absent as Test Scores Drop: Maryland Ranks 22nd in *2024 KIDS COUNT Data Book*

50-State Data Show Academic Outcomes, Absence are Linked to Poverty, Trauma; Policymakers Must Act to Promote Kids' Future Success, Annie E. Casey Foundation Finds

Baltimore, Md. — Many Maryland children, particularly those living in poverty, are still facing significant barriers to success in school, 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 Maryland leaders must do more to prepare children to learn so they are ready to earn when they reach adulthood. At stake nationally: hundreds of billions of dollars in future earnings and trillions of dollars in lost economic activity.

The latest data, which reflect outcomes for students at the end of the 2021-2022 school year, show that about 33% of Maryland students were chronically absent from school, meaning they missed 10% or more school days. This is slightly above the national average of about 30% of students chronically absent during the same period. There were also noticeable declines in the number of students passing grade-level proficiency exams. For example, the number of 8th graders deemed at or above proficient in math dropped from 33% in 2019 to 25% in 2022. In Maryland, 75% of 8th graders scored below proficient in math. Statewide, 69% of 4th graders scored below proficient in reading in Maryland.

“The data underscore the importance of successful implementation of Maryland’s recent education reforms,” said Benjamin Orr, President and CEO of the Maryland Center on Economic Policy, Maryland’s member of the KIDS COUNT network. “The Blueprint for Maryland’s Future was targeted to students who face the greatest barriers to success in school, and it is vital for our students’ future and the health of our economy that the state continue funding those reforms and supporting local school districts in implementing the changes.”

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.

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 report show that Maryland fares better than most states on measures of income but families here still face significant housing costs along with other challenges:

- In 2022, 155,000 or 12% of children lived in households with income below the poverty line with Maryland ranking 6th nationally.
- In 2022, 294,000 or 22% of children lived with parents who lack secure employment with Maryland ranking 11th nationally.

- In 2022, 402,000 or 30% of children lived in households with high housing cost burdens with Maryland ranking 37th nationally.
- In 2022, 60,000 or 4% of children did not have health insurance with Maryland ranking 17th nationally.
- Between 2018 and 2022, 46,000 or 3% of children lived in high-poverty areas with Maryland ranking 9th-best nationally.
- In 2021-22, 38% of Maryland children experienced one or more “[adverse childhood experience](#),” such as experiencing violence or growing up in a household with someone with substance use problems

“The challenges children and their families experience outside of the classroom are often linked to the challenges they face inside the classroom,” said Nonso Umunna, MDCEP’s KIDS COUNT Director. “Addressing barriers like high housing costs, access to high quality child care and pre-K, and substance use and mental health care will also lead to better outcomes for children.”

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.

However, 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. Just over one-quarter of the statewide funds in Maryland are still available, according to the latest publicly available report. 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 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 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. 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 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.

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