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Drop in Test Scores: Maine Ranks 37th in Education in 2024 KIDS COUNT Data Book as MCA Urges Focus on Equipping Kids to Learn

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

Augusta, ME — Maine ranks 15th 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 Maine and national 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.

Compared to other states, Maine ranked in the top 20 in indicators related to health (18th), family and community context (5th), and economic well-being (13th). Yet, Maine ranked 37th in indicators related to education. Notable and contributing to this low ranking were high rates of a lack of proficiency for 4th grade reading and 8th grade math. Additionally, national data shows that rates of student chronic absenteeism have not rebounded post-pandemic, accounting for 30% of all students; in line with the national, the Maine rate of chronic absenteeism for the 2021-2022 school year was 31% of students.

“All children and youth in Maine deserve to have the essential supports to ensure a strong early start for future success,” said Rita Furlow, Senior Policy Analyst with the Maine Children’s Alliance, Maine’s member of the KIDS COUNT network. “It is clear from our performance in the education indicators, that much more policy and investment are needed at the state level to ensure children have a stronger foundation for academic success.”

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 most recent KIDS COUNT Data Book include: Increases in a lack of proficiency for 4th grade reading and 8th grade math. Nationally, between 2019 and 2022, the rate of 4th grade students reading below proficiency increased from 66% to 68%; in Maine, the rate increased from 64% to 71%. Nationally, between 2019 and 2022, the rate of 8th grade students scoring below proficiency in math increased from 67% to 74%; in Maine, the rate increased from 66% to 76%. 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.

“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.”

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.

Students who regularly attend school have better academic outcomes. In the 2021-2022 school year, 31% of Maine students were chronically absent. When students believe that teachers and other adults care about them they are more likely to feel included and engaged and less likely to be chronically absent. Establishing a positive school climate is important for Maine to recover from high rates of chronic absenteeism, as is implementing strategies to work directly with students and families to address specific barriers to regular attendance.

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.

ABOUT THE MAINE CHILDREN'S ALLIANCE

The Maine Children's Alliance advocates for sound public policies and best practices that improve the lives of all Maine children, youth, and families. Learn more at www.mekids.org.