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Contact: Laura Millard Ross | lauramr@mlpp.org | 517-281-1084

40% chronic school absence rate, drop in test scores: Michigan ranks 34th in 2024 KIDS COUNT Data Book as Michigan League for Public Policy 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

LANSING, MICHIGAN — Michigan ranks 34th in the nation when it comes to 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 shows that Michigan 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 numbers in this year's *Data Book* show that Michigan not only ranks in the bottom half of states for overall child well-being, but also has a 40% chronic school absenteeism rate, with over half a million Michigan students chronically absent in the 2021-2022 school year. This is well above the national rate of 30%. Among the 2 in 5 children in Michigan who were chronically absent in the 2021-2022 school year, there were significant disparities by race, with 63% of Black, 50% of American Indian or Alaska Native and 46% of Latino children chronically absent.

“Michigan’s high absenteeism rate unfortunately comes as no surprise considering that school absence is linked to childhood poverty and trauma. Here in Michigan, 18% of our state’s children are living in poverty, which is slightly above the national average, and 41% of our state’s kids have gone through at least one adverse childhood experience,” said Monique Stanton, president and CEO of the Michigan League for Public Policy. “These findings underscore the importance of strengthening Michigan families and mitigating childhood poverty through bold state policy decisions, so that all of our kids have the solid foundations they need to be present and successful in their classrooms.”

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. Michigan’s best ranking was, once again, in health at 22nd, thanks in large part to high rates of children with health insurance, while the state came in 31st in economic well-being and 28th in family and community. A continuing positive trend that Michigan has

seen for the past 15 years is a decline in teen births. However, when it comes to economic well-being, Michigan continues to face significant challenges, with over half a million children living in families where no parent has full-time, year-round employment and 1 in 4 children living in cost-burdened households that spend more than 30% of their income on housing.

Key findings from the most recent school year available (2021-2022) show that Michigan also remains in the bottom 10 states for education at 41st, which is, once again, the state's worst ranking. The percent of high school students not graduating on time increased for the first time after declining steadily for over a decade, with 1 in 5 Michigan students not completing high school on time. And 72% percent of 4th graders scored below proficient in reading in 2022 — up 6% from 2019 — while 75% of 8th graders scored below proficient in math in 2022 — up 9% from 2019. 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.

However, some Michigan schools/districts 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. These dollars can help schools close opportunity gaps, meet unfinished learning, and support Michigan's kids during some of their most formative years. Schools/districts have until September 30, 2024 to obligate the ESSER funds they have received or they will lose them.

The Foundation recommends the following:

- To get kids back on track, we must make sure they arrive at the classroom ready to learn by **continuing access to universal free meals and ensuring 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 MICHIGAN LEAGUE FOR PUBLIC POLICY

The Michigan League for Public Policy, www.mlpp.org, is a nonprofit policy institute focused on opportunity for all. Its mission is to use data to educate, advocate and fight for policy solutions that undo historic and systemic racial and economic inequities to lift up Michiganders who have been left out of prosperity. It is the only state-level organization that addresses poverty in a comprehensive way. The League is also the state's Kids Count organization, working as a part of a national effort to measure the well-being of children at the state and local levels and to shape efforts that improve the lives of Michigan children.