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2024 KIDS COUNT® Data Book: Minnesota Ranks 5th Overall in Child Well-Being, Drops to 19th in Education Due to Test Scores, PreK Enrollment

Minnesota's Education Outcomes Linked to Opportunity Gaps and Pandemic, Annie E. Casey Foundation Finds; Predate Historic 2023 State Investments

St. Paul, MINNESOTA — Children's Defense-Fund-Minnesota welcomes recent news that Minnesota ranks as the fifth- best state in the nation for child well-being for the second consecutive year. The findings come from the Annie E. Casey Foundation's **2024 KIDS COUNT® Data Book**, a 50-state report analyzing how kids have fared in post-pandemic America.

The study suggests that Minnesota Governor Tim Walz and legislative leaders' commitment to make the best in the nation to live in as a child, regardless of their race or zip code, require significant investment in children and families – including those delivered in 2023. Minnesota ranked high, but not first, in Economic Well-Being (6th), Health (7th), and Family and Community Context (7th).

However, a 19th-place ranking in the Education category shows Minnesota leaders must do more to address barriers and prepare all children to learn so they can thrive and be ready to earn when they reach adulthood. At stake nationally are hundreds of billions of dollars in future earnings and trillions of dollars in lost economic activity.

“Educational outcomes are not only affected by what happens in the classroom,” said **Alisha Porter, State Director, Children's Defense Fund-Minnesota**. “That’s why it was so important that in 2023 Minnesota enacted universal school meals and made historic new investments in housing, child care, health, family economic stability, and education. To do well in school, thrive overall, and experience the joy in growing up, our children need their basic needs met.”

Each year, the *Kids Count 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 states according to how children are faring overall. It also includes information on adverse childhood experiences. In every area highlighted in the *Data Book*, national and Minnesota averages mask disparities that affect students of color, kids in immigrant families, and children from families with low incomes or attending low-income schools.

Key findings from the most recent available school-year (2021-2022) show the percentage of Minnesota fourth graders not proficient in reading has increased from 62 percent in 2019 to 68 percent in 2022. Minnesota also ranked 21st among states in fourth grade reading proficiency. While Minnesota ranks fifth in the nation in math, during the same time frame eighth-graders not proficient in math increased from 56 percent to 68 percent. Nearly a third of all Minnesota students were also chronically absent (missed 10 percent or more of school days) during the 2021-2022 school-year.

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 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 regularly.

Additionally, only 11 percent of Minnesota ninth graders reported on the 2022 Minnesota student survey that they participated in tutoring, homework help, or academic programs outside of the regular school day. Afterschool programs, like the CDF Freedom Schools® model, have a proven track record of improving academic achievement.

"As we face critical challenges in educational achievement, particularly in the early stages of learning, it's imperative to strengthen our commitment to out-of-school time opportunities for young people," said **Keem Anderson, Associate Director of IGNITE AfterSchool**. "Recent data highlights a troubling rise in the unmet demand for afterschool and summer programs. In rural Minnesota, for every 1 child enrolled in a program there are 3 more waiting to get in. Addressing this issue requires not only immediate action but sustained efforts. By making state grant programs for out-of-school learning permanent and reimagining targeted service funding, we can provide our children with the essential resources they need to succeed."

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.

The Foundation recommends the following:

- To get kids back on track, we must make sure they arrive in 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. Through 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 CHILDREN'S DEFENSE FUND

Founded in 1973, Children's Defense Fund envisions a nation where marginalized children flourish, leaders prioritize their well-being, and communities wield the power to ensure they thrive. The only national, multi-issue advocacy organization working at the intersection of child well-being and racial justice, CDF advances the well-being of America's most diverse generation, the 74 million children and youth under the age of 18 and 30 million young adults under the age of 25. CDF's grassroots movements in marginalized communities build power for child-centered public policy, informed by racial equity and the lived experience of children and youth. Its renowned CDF Freedom Schools® program is conducted in nearly 100 cities across 30 states and territories. Learn more at www.childrensdefense.org.