



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

Contact: Tracy Greever-Rice | tracy.greeverrice@mofact.org | (573) 823-0092
William Dent | bill.dent@mofact.org | (573) 636-6300

**Improved food security among Missouri children, but the state continues to see school attendance and graduation rates decline
Missouri ranks 32nd in overall child well-being -- 2024 *KIDS COUNT Data Book* released**

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

JEFFERSON CITY, Mo. – Missouri children are faring better when it comes to overall health, but some educational trends – like high school graduation rates – continue to slip in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, according to the 2024 *KIDS COUNT Data Book*. The Annie E. Casey Foundation's report provides an annual snapshot of the wellbeing of the nation's children by state.

Missouri's results indicate the state has work to do to prepare children to learn so they are ready to earn when they reach adulthood.

"By paying careful attention to what the indicators tell us, we can leverage resources wisely at the state, community, and district levels to ensure our children thrive," said Tracy Greever-Rice, Program Director of Missouri KIDS COUNT.

In its 35th year of publication, the Casey Foundation's *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. Missouri, like the rest of the states, experienced unprecedented declines in learning between 2019 and 2022. Increases in chronic absenteeism have persisted with children living in poverty especially unable to resume their school day routines on a regular basis.

Each year, the *Data Book* presents 16 national and state indicators organized by four domains — economic well-being, education, health, and family and community — and ranks the states according to how children are faring overall. The sources used by the *Data Book* provide reliable 50-state data to enable comparisons.

Separately, Missouri-specific data from the Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, although not contained in the *Data Book*, offer additional insight for policymakers. In Missouri in 2022, the state Department of Elementary and Secondary Education reported almost three out of five (58.1%) eighth graders scored below proficiency levels in English and about the same share of fourth graders (58.7%) did not achieve proficiency in mathematics.

Other findings for Missouri overall from the most recent school year available (2021-2022) include slightly lower high school graduation rates, lower school attendance and fewer licensed childcare settings.

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.

The Casey Foundation report contends that the pandemic is not the sole cause of falling educational indicators: 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. Missouri has spent only 79% of the allocated ESSER funding for the state. The deadline to allocate – not spend – this funding is September 30, 2024. Tens of billions of dollars set aside for schools will become unavailable if states do not act immediately.

"The national KIDS COUNT Data Book from the Annie E. Casey Foundation serves as a valuable resource for policymakers, advocates, and communities, offering insights into the obstacles confronting children and families nationwide. We deeply appreciate this invaluable tool, which empowers us to make well-informed choices and implement strategies aimed at enhancing the welfare of families in Missouri," said William Dent, Executive Director of the Family and Community Trust.

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.