



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

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**Nearly Half a Million Children in Ohio Live in Poverty: Ohio Ranks 28 in 2024 KIDS COUNT Data Book as Children's Defense Fund-Ohio 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*

**Columbus, Ohio** — Ohio ranks twenty-eighth 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 shows that Ohio 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.

Recent data paints a challenging picture: around 40% of children in Ohio have faced one or more Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACES), a significant factor that can impact their overall well-being and future success. However, this data also presents an opportunity for change. Research has shown that poverty is a key driver of ACES, and in a state where nearly half a million children live in poverty, addressing this issue is paramount. By focusing on poverty alleviation and providing resources for those who have experienced ACES, we can create a more equitable and just society for all children to thrive in.

“We face a complicated and multifaceted problem in our state,” said Matthew Tippit, Policy Associate of Children's Defense Fund-Ohio (CDF-Ohio), Ohio's member of the KIDS COUNT network. “Many children in our state live in high-poverty areas where conditions lead to ACES. These ACES then impact student success, which then affects their ability to earn as adults. The good news is that because the issue has multiple entry points there are multiple policy strategies to put us on a better path. We must do all we can to help end childhood poverty and improve children's education.”

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 *Data Book* show that Ohio ranks 18th in Education, but there is still much room for improvement. In 2022, 65% of fourth graders scored below proficient reading level, and 71% of eighth graders scored below proficient in math. One of the most troubling facts is that even with these poor metrics, Ohio ranks as one of the better states in terms of education. 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 so we may not truly understand the depths of the failing of our education. The Ohio General Assembly and Governor Mike DeWine have recognized the problem in our education and have begun implementing possible solutions but more can be done to support our students.

“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.

An important first step that leaders in our state can take is ensuring that every child receives a free school lunch during the school day. Research has long shown that student success can be impacted by the availability of food. As [previously written](#) by Katherine Ungar for CDF-Ohio, “School meals are essential to ensuring that students have access to nutritious food, which has been proven to help children succeed in school. School meals are linked to better educational outcomes, including increased test scores, improved academic attendance, and increased graduation rates.” This would not only ensure that children have the fuel they need to be successful in school but also help ease financial burdens on families. By addressing these key issues, we can help end childhood poverty and hunger in our great state.

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](http://www.aecf.org). Additional information is available at [www.aecf.org/databook](http://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](http://datacenter.aecf.org).

**ABOUT THE ANNIE E. CASEY FOUNDATION**

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