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Too Far from Top Ten: Oklahoma Ranks 46th in 2024 KIDS COUNT® Data Book as OK Policy Urges Legislators to Invest in Children

Oklahoma ranks in the top half of all states in only two of sixteen diverse indicators measured in the **2024 KIDS COUNT® Data Book**, a 50-state report of recent data developed by the Annie E. Casey Foundation analyzing child well-being in post-pandemic America. The data show Oklahoma leaders must do more to position Oklahoma children and families for success.

For the **2024 KIDS COUNT® Data Book**, Oklahoma ranked 46th overall for child well-being, with only Nevada, Mississippi, Louisiana, and New Mexico ranking lower. Oklahoma's individual rankings on major categories were:

- 39th in economic well-being
- 40th in family and community context,
- 45th in health, and
- 49th in education (ahead of only New Mexico).

The report includes a comprehensive analysis of all 50 states across multiple domains of child- and family well-being. Among the 16 components of the report, Oklahoma ranked among the top half of all states in only two indicators: percent of children in single-parent families (34 percent) and percent of low-birthweight babies (8.5 percent).

By contrast, the state ranked in the bottom 10 on eight of 16 indicators:

- Percent of children in poverty, which for a family of two adults and two children was below \$29,678 in 2022 (43rd; 20%)
- Percent of 4th graders who scored below proficient reading level (47th; 76%)
- Percent of 8th graders who scored below proficient math level (48th; 84%)
- Percent of high school students not graduating on time (44th; 20%)
- Percent of children in families where household head lacks a high school diploma (42nd; 11%)
- Percent of children without health insurance (43rd; 7%)
- Percent of children and teens ages 10 to 17 who are overweight or obese (47th; 39%)
- Teen birth rate (44th; 21 births per 1,000 females ages 15-19)

“These numbers confirm what has long been obvious — Oklahoma is not making the investment it should in the health and well-being of our children,” said Shiloh Kantz, Executive Director of Oklahoma Policy Institute, which is Oklahoma's member of the KIDS COUNT network. “For two decades, lawmakers have chosen revenue cuts over meaningful, sustained investments in the shared services that are proven to help our children thrive. The latest KIDS COUNT results bear out the consequences of those choices. Oklahoma and its elected officials can turn these numbers around, but it will require purposeful action over time to make it happen.”

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 school year available (2021-2022) include that 76 percent of Oklahoma fourth-graders scored below proficient reading level (48th) and 84 percent of eighth-graders scored below proficient math level (48th). Like all states, Oklahoma saw a significant drop in key test scores during the pandemic. The share of high school students not graduating on time in Oklahoma increased five percentage points — from 15 percent to 20 percent — between 2019 and 2022. Moreover, state averages conceal disparities that affect students of color, children in immigrant families, and children from low-income families or attending low-income schools.

“State leaders have sometimes pointed to the need for conservative values in helping Oklahoma families get ahead,” said Carly Putnam, Policy Director and KIDS COUNT Coordinator for Oklahoma Policy Institute. “While Oklahoma ranks among the top half of states for children in two-parent households, our state’s overall results show that this factor alone isn’t enough to help our kids get ahead. From math and reading scores to health insurance coverage to the teen birth rate, these results demonstrate Oklahoma is not doing enough to position our children for success.”

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 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 OKLAHOMA POLICY INSTITUTE

The Oklahoma Policy Institute seeks to create a more equitable Oklahoma through its nonpartisan policy research, analysis, and advocacy. OK Policy encourages critical conversations through data-driven research and outreach regarding state policy so that every Oklahoman has equitable opportunities to thrive. OK Policy is the KIDS COUNT affiliate for Oklahoma. Learn more at OKPolicy.org.