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Rhode Island Ranks 12th in 2024 KIDS COUNT Data Book as Rhode Island KIDS COUNT Urges Focus on Equipping Kids to Learn

Providence, RI — Rhode Island ranks 12th in 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 show Rhode Island 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.

"Rhode Island's percentage of children in poverty has improved significantly, however, we should not be satisfied with being sixth best," said Paige Clausius-Parks, Executive Director of Rhode Island KIDS COUNT. "We have federal funds available to end deep child poverty in Rhode Island. We are thrilled that the General Assembly has proposed to undo harm to children in poverty by ending full family sanctions and increasing the monthly benefit amount. We look forward to working with the Governor, General Assembly, and the Raising RI Coalition to see how to continue to improve use of these federal dollars to end deep child poverty and move Rhode Island to the #1 ranking."

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 nationally, 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.

Rhode Island ranks 12th overall in the country. Rhode Island's rankings for the four domains are below:

- **Economic well-being: 9th**

- o Percent of children in poverty (income below \$29,678 for a family of two adults and two children in 2022): 6th
 - o Percent of children living in families where no parent has full-time, year-round employment: 11th
 - o Percent of children in households that spend more than 30% of their income on housing: 34th
 - o Percent of teens ages 16 to 19 not attending school and not working: 1st
- **Education: 29th**
 - o Percent of young children not in school: 17th
 - o Percent of 4th graders who scored below proficient reading level: 11th
 - o Percent of 8th graders who scored below proficient math level: 28th
 - o Percent of high school students not graduating on time: 31st
- **Health: 6th**
 - o Percent of low-birthweight babies: 18th
 - o Percent of children without health insurance: 1st
 - o Child and teen death rate (deaths per 100,000 children ages 1 to 19): 1st
 - o Percent of children and teens ages 10 to 17 who are overweight or obese: 28th
- **Family & Community: 20th**
 - o Percent of children in single-parent families: 40th
 - o Percent of children in families where the household head lacks a high school diploma: 13th
 - o Percent of children living in high-poverty areas (census tracts with poverty rates \geq 30%): 16th
 - o Teen birth rate (births per 1,000 females ages 15 to 19): 5th

"We are grateful for Speaker Shekarchi's continued focus on housing here in Rhode Island," said Clausius-Parks. "The percentage of children living in families with a housing cost burden has declined in Rhode Island, but we still rank #34, so continued effort is needed. Rhode Island's ranking in 4th graders reading at grade has improved but we know we have further to go. We are pleased with the Governor's and House's investment of \$5 million in reading and math achievement."

"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."

"Rhode Island needs to continue investing in education and not just in math and reading but also in meeting the basic needs of our children – the need for affordable housing, adequate nutrition (including free and healthy school meals), and health care, especially mental health care. Only by meeting these needs will we reduce chronic absenteeism and improve educational outcomes," said Stephanie Geller, Deputy Director of Rhode Island KIDS COUNT.

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 budgeted 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 deadline to allocate – not spend – this funding is September 30, 2024. Tens of billions of dollars set aside for schools will vanish forever if states do not act immediately.

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. 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 Rhode Island KIDS COUNT

Rhode Island KIDS COUNT is a statewide children's policy organization that works to improve the health, economic well-being, safety, education, and development of Rhode Island children with a core focus on equity. Please visit rikidscount.org.