



## National Report Ranks Tennessee 36<sup>th</sup> in Child Well-Being, Spotlights Learning Loss and Chronic Absenteeism

NASHVILLE, Tenn. (June 10, 2024) — Tennessee ranks 36th in overall child well-being for the fourth straight year, according to the **2024 KIDS COUNT® Data Book**, a 50-state report from the Annie E. Casey Foundation analyzing recent data on how kids across the country are faring. This year, the annual report highlights key education issues Tennessee and other states are grappling with in the wake of the pandemic—including learning loss and chronic absenteeism.

Tennessee's overall ranking in education was 32nd. National assessment data revealed large declines in proficiency between 2019 and 2022, but Tennessee's [own state assessments](#) show significant gains from 2022 to 2023—rebounding in many areas to or beyond pre-pandemic levels. The *Data Book* also shows that 23% of Tennessee students were chronically absent during the 2021–2022 school year, a historic high.

“These new numbers help us understand how Tennessee compares to other states in areas important for our state's economic competitiveness,” said Brian Straessle, executive director of the Sycamore Institute, Tennessee's member of the KIDS COUNT network.

In its 35th year of publication, the *KIDS COUNT® Data Book* focuses on students' basic reading and math skills, long-standing areas for improvement put in greater focus due to learning loss during the COVID-19 pandemic. Nationwide, unprecedented drops in learning from 2019 to 2022 amounted to decades of lost progress. Chronic absence also soared across the country, with children living in poverty especially unable to resume their school day routines regularly.

Other available national assessment data also show stark differences in educational outcomes across socioeconomic and demographic lines. For example, 83 percent of Tennessee 4th graders eligible for the school lunch program scored below proficient in reading in 2022—compared to 64 percent of their peers who are not eligible for the program. Similarly, 63 percent of white Tennessee 4th graders scored below proficient in reading—compared to 78 percent of Hispanic students and 87 percent of black students.

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. This year's report ranks Tennessee 34th in economic well-being, 32nd in education, 38th in health, and 39th in family and community factors.

These new rankings reflect both the effects of the pandemic and long-standing challenges. U.S. scores in reading and math have made little progress in recent decades. Tennessee saw significant gains in test scores in the early 2010s, but those improvements have largely stalled. Compared to peer nations, American children lag in 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.

Career readiness is important for the nation's economy, Tennessee's economic competitiveness, and our youth as they join the workforce. A recent report from the Hoover Institution estimates that America's pandemic-related learning losses could translate to [a \\$31 trillion](#) economic impact during this century. Another analysis calculates that the drop in math scores between 2019 and 2022 will [reduce lifetime earnings](#) by 1.6% for 48 million pandemic-era students nationwide—or \$900 billion in lost income.

While Tennessee students significantly improved on the state's assessments in 2023, opportunities may exist to move the needle further. For example, as of March, [Tennessee still had about 23%](#) of its federal education pandemic funding (Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief, or ESSER) remaining, which could be used to help boost achievement. The deadline to allocate this funding is September 30, 2024. Other opportunities could include:

- Understanding and addressing [the factors outside the classroom that influence attendance and academic achievement](#) — including things like food insecurity, access to reliable internet, [adverse childhood experiences](#), housing instability, medical needs, and nurturing relationships with adults, among others.
- Addressing [chronic absence](#) with proven [positive approaches](#) so more students return to learn.
- Evaluating and building on [recent investments in children's mental health services and programs](#) to address [the growing share of Tennessee youth struggling](#) with anxiety, depression, and other mental health challenges that make learning difficult.
- Ensuring the state's tutoring and summer learning camp investments follow [best practices](#).
- Exploring ideas like community schools that provide wraparound support to kids and families—including tutoring, mental health support, nutritional aid, and other services.
- Using and providing access to longitudinal data to better understand student outcomes in the short- and long-term .

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## RELEASE INFORMATION

The *2024 KIDS COUNT® Data Book* is 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 SYCAMORE INSTITUTE

The Sycamore Institute is an independent, nonpartisan public policy research center that helps Tennesseans identify, understand, and solve big challenges with impartial analysis of data and evidence. With leadership and staff from across the political spectrum, Sycamore provides accessible, reliable information in pursuit of sound, sustainable policies that improve the lives of all Tennesseans. For more information, visit <https://www.sycamoreinstitute.tn.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](http://www.aecf.org). KIDS COUNT® is a registered trademark of the Annie E. Casey Foundation.

