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Vermont Ranks Fourth in Child Well-Being but Economic Well-being Rank slips to 20th

*Report focuses on challenges and solutions to preparing kids for the future*

**MONTPELIER, VT**—Vermont ranks 4th in child well-being again this year, 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. 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. States are also ranked in each of the four domains: Vermont ranks 3rd, 5th, and 9th in the domains of Family and Community Context, Health, and Education, respectively, and 20th for Economic Well-being.

This year's report also puts a spotlight on education across the country, and emphasizes the need to strengthen public education to protect kids' futures. In Vermont, many communities have recently come through the school budget season acutely aware that they are navigating these same concerns against a backdrop of budget pressures as well as a state education finance system that is under scrutiny.

"We know the broad range of supports that our schools are providing. The acute contexts—including but not limited to the Pandemic—that call for these supports mean that sometimes, schools lack the resources to keep up with some of the measurable, academic pieces that have traditionally defined educational outcomes." says Sarah Teel, research director of Voices for Vermont's Children, Vermont's member of the KIDS COUNT network.

The report flags a drop in NAEP (National Assessment of Educational Progress) scores as a concern. Both reading and math scores have changed for the worse at the national level between 2019 and 2022, continuing a longer-term picture of stagnant test scores, and Vermont has seen a drop as well. Only 34% of 4th grade students in Vermont scored at or above proficient level in reading in 2022, down from 37% in 2019 (similar to the national decline from 34% in 2019 to 32% in 2022). In math, a larger decline has emerged: in Vermont, 27% of 8th grade students were at or above proficient level in 2022, down from 38% in 2019 (US: down from 33% in 2019 to 26% in 2022).

Disaggregated by household income, Vermont's NAEP results show 43% percent of kids not eligible for Free or Reduced Lunch (FRL) at or above proficient in 4th grade reading, but only 19% percent of those eligible for FRL achieving proficiency. This is a disparity very similar to

what is seen in other states and nationally (US: 19%/46%). In 2022, 8th grade math proficiency rates were similarly disparate - not eligible FRL rate was 34%, FRL only 15%.

The report includes a recommendation to 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](#).

“It makes sense for schools to be sites for wrap-around supports, Teel says, “because that is where children and youth spend so much time and form so many relationships.” She says that Voices for Vermont’s Children hopes that community schools can continue to emerge as a strategy for tackling inequities that disadvantage children inside and outside of school and for building on the unique assets of their students, families, and communities. Voices supports ongoing work in Vermont, building on Act 67 of 2021, to encourage communities to take advantage of the potential of the community school model, which is [flexible and can be implemented according to the particular needs of each community](#).

Other key findings from the most recent data year available include:

- **In 2022**, 29,000 kids in Vermont (26%) live in families where no adult has full-time, year round employment, giving Vermont a rank of 29th in the country for this indicator.
- In 2022, 25% of children live in households with a high housing cost burden, defined as housing expenses that are more than 30% of the household’s income. This is better than the national rate of 30%, but still places Vermont 19th in the country.
- In 2022, the rate of births to females ages 15-19 is the second lowest in the country.
- Between 2019 and 2022 the rate of low birth-weight births jumped from 7.0 to 7.6%, the highest rate the state has seen in the past decade.
- In 2021-22, 41% of children in Vermont experienced at least one Adverse Childhood Experience, a factor which the report names, along with increased rates of chronic absence (34% in Vermont), as pressures that weigh heavily on education systems and contribute to the drop in NAEP reading and math proficiency highlighted in the report.

“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,” said Lisa Hamilton, president and CEO of the Annie E. Casey Foundation.

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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 VOICES FOR VERMONT'S CHILDREN**

Voices for Vermont's Children is a research-based, multi-issue advocacy organization focused on promoting public policies that center a systemic response to meeting the needs of children and youth. We apply research, analysis and the lived experience of Vermont's children and families to the pursuit of equity for all kids. To learn more, visit [www.voicesforvtkids.org](http://www.voicesforvtkids.org).

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