



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

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## **Washington Ranks 14th in Overall Child Well-Being, but Pandemic Learning Loss Threatens Young People's Futures**

50-State Data Show Far Too Few Kids Have Literacy and Numeracy Skills Necessary to Thrive as Independent Adults, Annie E. Casey Foundation Finds

**SEATTLE, WASHINGTON** — Washington state ranks 14th 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 show that Washington 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.

While our state improved in overall child well-being, it still ranked in the bottom half of states for education, coming in at 26th. Data from 2018-2022 show that 57% of Washington kids aged 3-4 were not in school compared to 54% nationally. Additionally, data from 2020-2021 show that 18% of Washington high school students were not graduating on time compared to 14% nationally. Moreover, the percentage of Washington eighth graders not proficient in math (72%) is only slightly better than the national average (74%), and Washington eighth graders experienced a significant decline in math proficiency during pandemic, going from 60% of eighth graders not proficient in math in 2019 to 72% in 2022.

“Access to high quality early learning and K-12 education sets our children up for future success,” said **Dr. Stephan Blanford, executive director of Children's Alliance**, Washington state's member of the KIDS COUNT network “But right now many kids in Washington are not getting the support and resources they deserve. Now is the time for lawmakers to step up and identify sources of progressive revenue that will allow for increased investments in our education system.”

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 Data Book include:

- **Washington ranks 28th in economic well-being:** 2022 data show that 31% of Washington kids lived in households with a high housing cost burden compared to 30% of kids nationally. Importantly, Washington's 31% figure is up from 29% in 2019 whereas the national percentage stayed the same between 2019 and 2022.



- **Washington ranks 4th** in health, but important indicators have worsened **between 2019 and 2022**. The percentage of babies born with low birth weight rose from 6.4% to 7.0%; and child and teen deaths per 100,000 rose from 21 to 26.0%; and child and teen deaths per 100,000 rose from 21 to 26.
- **Washington ranks 11th in family and community**: Notably, children living in high poverty areas was down to 2% according to data from 2018-2022, compared to 8% nationally.

It is important to note that state averages mask disparities that affect students of color, kids in immigrant families and children from low-income families or attending low-income schools.

“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.

However, some states have [delayed spending their share of the \\$190 billion critical federal pandemic funding](#) (Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief, or ESSER) that could help boost achievement. According to the U.S. [Department of Education](#), Washington had spent 89.8% (\$2.59B) of its total ESSER funds (\$2.89B) as of March 2024. This is more than the [national spending average of 78.2%](#). Importantly, however, these percentages only include money actually spent; they do not include “funds allocated, obligated, or planned for within state and school district budgets.” 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 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 CHILDREN'S ALLIANCE**

[Children's Alliance](#) is Washington's statewide, nonpartisan child advocacy organization. We help people tap into their personal political power so they can advocate for change in their communities. We partner with families, lawmakers, community leaders, service providers and policy experts to develop antiracist policy solutions that improve the lives of Washington kids and build a better shared future for all.

#### **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.