



## **West Virginia Ranks 44th in Overall Child Well-being But Makes Strides in Health Metrics in 2024 *KIDS COUNT Data Book***

### **For Immediate Release**

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*50-State Data Show Academic Outcomes, Absence are Linked to Poverty, Trauma: West Virginia Policymakers Must Prioritize Education and Mental Health Supports to Promote Kids' Future Success*

**CHARLESTON, WEST VIRGINIA** – West Virginia improved its children’s health ranking compared with recent years, coming in at 35th among the states 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 the importance of policy in improving child health, with just 3 percent of West Virginia children lacking health insurance in 2022, amidst pandemic-era continuous coverage Medicaid and CHIP rules and the most recent year of data available.

West Virginia ranked 44th in overall child well-being, ranking near the bottom of states in indicators of economic well-being (47th) and education (48th). The *Data Book* highlights the link between poverty and trauma and educational outcomes. In West Virginia, 45 percent of children face one or more Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) compared with 40 percent of children nationwide. Thirty-five percent of West Virginia children were chronically absent from school during the 2021-22 school year, worse than the national average of 30 percent of children.

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

“The *Data Book* reinforces the importance of policy decisions on the well-being of West Virginia’s children, particularly as we deal with the ongoing impacts of the pandemic,” said Kelly Allen, executive director of the West Virginia Center on Budget and Policy, West Virginia’s member of the KIDS COUNT network. “State and federal policymakers have prioritized child and family health during and following the pandemic, and our

health indicators have slowly improved as a result. On the other hand, policies that would increase economic stability and improve educational outcomes for all children have not adequately been prioritized. West Virginia’s policymakers must recognize the inherent link between poverty and educational outcomes to truly address the needs of our state’s children and families.”

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 2024 Data Book include troubling increases in the percentage of fourth graders not proficient in reading and eighth graders not proficient in math at both the state and national levels.

- In 2022, fewer than one in four (22 percent) fourth graders were proficient in reading, compared with 30 percent prior to the pandemic (2019). Nationally 32 percent of fourth graders met proficiency benchmarks.
- In 2022, only 15 percent of West Virginia eighth graders were proficient in math, compared with 24 percent prior to the pandemic (2019). Nationally, 26 percent of eighth graders met proficiency benchmarks.
- West Virginia saw an increase in the amount of three- and four-year olds not in school, up from 64 percent prior to the pandemic to 71 percent in 2022.

Find the full report here:

<https://assets.aecf.org/m/databook/aecf-2024kidscountdatabook-embargoed.pdf>.

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.

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 THE WEST VIRGINIA CENTER ON BUDGET AND POLICY

The West Virginia Center on Budget and Policy is an independent, nonprofit policy research organization dedicated to advancing policies and budgets that improve the economic mobility and quality of life for all West Virginians. We work to advance public

policies that increase opportunity and eliminate inequities through credible and accessible research and community-rooted advocacy.

### **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.