



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

Contact: Micah Richardson | micah@wycf.org | 307-.721.8300

Wyoming Ranks 18th in 2024 KIDS COUNT Data Book, but Struggles Persist

50-State Data From Annie E. Casey Foundation Finds Education a Major Concern for the Nation and Wyoming

LARAMIE, WY — 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, Wyoming ranks in the top-20 for overall child well-being in the United States.

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.

The *Data Book* ranks Wyoming 41st in the health domain this year, an improvement from its rank of 46th in last year’s *Data Book*. Associate Director of Policy at the Wyoming Women’s Foundation at the Wyoming Community Foundation, Micah Richardson, says while progress is always welcome, greater improvement must be made.

“Wyoming has consistently scored low in the health domain,” says Richardson. “And while we are seeing some positives in this year’s data, including a decrease to kiddos who are uninsured, our legislature’s continued choice to deny Medicaid Expansion means families will continue to postpone getting the care they need or face medical debt.”

2021 data showed 16,000 children in Wyoming were without health coverage, while the 2022 data shown in this year’s *Data Book* indicates 11,000 are without coverage. This could be reflective of the positive impacts of expanded post-pandemic supports, notes Richardson.

Wyoming also saw a decrease in child and teen deaths from 68 deaths of children aged 1-19 in the 2023 *Data Book*, to 58 in this year’s edition. It’s important to acknowledge Wyoming has one of the highest suicide rates in the nation, and some of these were deaths by suicide.

"We have been very encouraged by the amount of attention Wyoming has given in recent years to mental health and Adverse Childhood Experiences", says Lindsay Simineo, legislative advocate for the Wyoming Counseling Association. "The recent improvement in ranking is more evidence of that. However, Wyoming residents know there is still work to be done. I hope these rank improvements serve as a reminder to Wyoming officials that increased resources do produce results and will continue to highlight this important issue."

Domain	Wyoming Ranking
Economic Well-Being	11
Education	14
Health	41
Family and Community	13
Overall Ranking	18

In its 35th year of publication, the *KIDS COUNT® Data Book* puts a large focus on students' lack of basic reading and math skills, a problem decades in the making (U.S. scores in reading and math have barely budged) 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.

Wyoming's education domain ranking improved this year, but Wyoming data is also moving in the wrong direction. For example, Wyoming ranked 3rd in the percent of 4th graders who scored below proficient in reading. This may seem like reason to celebrate, however, the percentage of children not reading at grade level in Wyoming rose from 59 percent in 2019 to 62 percent in 2022. This is better than the national average of 68 percent, but there is still a lot of work left to be done.

Additionally, 69 percent of Wyoming 8th graders scored below proficiency in math, up from 63 percent in 2019. Again, this is better than the national average of 74 percent, but at stake when considering numbers like these, is a prepared workforce who can benefit our community and 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.

Director of the Wyoming Afterschool Alliance at the Wyoming Community Foundation, Michelle Sullivan, believes programming outside of the school day can play a positive role toward making gains. "High quality out of school time programs can have an outsized effect in helping young people to hone their skills. By creating a more cohesive fabric of community partners that support young people who might not see themselves as excelling in math or science, we can illuminate avenues to economic prosperity and mobility for all Wyoming youth," she says. "Out of school time programs can give youth an opportunity to be their best selves outside of the school day."

The educational investments we make in all Wyoming youth today, even our youngest citizens, is an investment in the future of Wyoming. For example, the number of three- and four-year-olds who are not attending pre-kindergarten is one indicator of success. In Wyoming, that percentage was 58 in 2018-22. Data show that access to quality early education impacts future success, says Richardson. She says she'd like to see more focus on the topic. "I've been pleased to see the legislature working to tackle the issue of early care and would love to see them expand their focus to ensure we're addressing the needs of our youngest learners."

The Annie E Casey 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** and out of school time opportunities 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](#).

###

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 THE WYOMING COMMUNITY FOUNDATION

The [Wyoming Community Foundation](#) (WYCF) is a grantmaking organization established in 1989 which connects people who care with causes that matter to build a better Wyoming. WYCF and its priority funds, the [Wyoming Women's Foundation](#) and [Wyoming Afterschool Alliance](#), work to support Wyoming communities in good times and in bad and granted over \$8 million to nonprofits in 2023. WYCF has been the Kids Count network member for Wyoming since 2014.