

UNDER EMBARGO Until June 9, 2025 at 12:01 a.m. ET

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Kentucky Ranks 36th in 2025 KIDS COUNT Data Book as Kentucky Youth Advocates Urges Focus on Supporting Thriving Kids and Families

Data shows that too many Kentucky kids are falling behind on key indicators of child well-being, the Annie E. Casey Foundation finds

LOUISVILLE, KY — Kentucky has made progress in half of 16 indicators of child well-being, according to the **2025 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. However, the data show Kentucky kids still fall behind in reading and math scores, are more likely to experience poverty than peers in other states, and more likely to experience early death.

State and community leaders must do more to ensure the best possible outcomes for every child, no matter where they grow up in the Commonwealth.

“Each year, this annual report card on kids gives policymakers, advocates, and communities the data they need to make policy and budget recommendations and set priorities,” said **Dr. Terry Brooks, executive director of Kentucky Youth Advocates, Kentucky’s member of the Casey Foundation’s KIDS COUNT network**. “The reality is, however, that we are at an inflection point in Frankfort. Kentucky’s kids will remain at the bottom of the pack among peer states unless the General Assembly and Governor take definitive action. For instance, there are a myriad of moves the Beshear Administration can make immediately and there are commonsense policies and budget priorities around which House and Senate leadership can act come the 2026 session to improve family economic stability, student achievement, and child health and safety across our Commonwealth. The haunting question is not, ‘Can we improve our kids’ well-being?’ but rather, ‘Will we?’”

The *Data Book* annually 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. Since 2019, Kentucky has made progress on eight child well-being indicators, regressed on six, and remained steady on two.

Here are a few data highlights on how Kentucky kids fare from the report:

- While slightly improved since 2019, one in five children live in poverty – ranking the Commonwealth 44th among states.
- Sixty-three percent of young children were not in school in 2019-2023, compared to 58% in 2014-2018, demonstrating a continued need for a robust early childhood education infrastructure that prioritizes early learning and care for our youngest learners.
- Over two-thirds of 4th graders scored below proficient in reading and over three in four 8th graders scored below proficient in math, which continues the trends highlighted in the [2024 Data Book](#) looking at the unprecedented learning loss following the pandemic and the toll of chronic absenteeism on academic performance.
- Just 3% of children were without health insurance in 2023, ranking Kentucky 3rd best among states, emphasizing the need to protect the gains made in child health coverage.
- The child and teen (age 1-19) death rate climbed to 37 per 100,000 children in 2023 from 29 per 100,000 children in 2019, which is a 28% increase that is attributed in other reports to unsafe access to deadly means, such as firearms, illicit substances, or medications, as well as due to physical abuse or youth suicide.
- The percentage of children in homes in which the household head lacks a high school diploma continues to fall, 9% in 2023 compared to 11% in 2019.
- The teen birth rate also continues to fall, currently at a rate of 21 per 1,000 females ages 15- 19 in 2023 – yet this remains the Commonwealth’s worst-ranked measure relative to other states at 46th in the nation.

In its 36th year of publication, the *KIDS COUNT® Data Book* provides reliable statewide numbers to help leaders see where progress is being made, where greater support is needed and which strategies are making a difference. Kentucky Youth Advocates encourages lawmakers as well as faith, school, and other community leaders to use this detailed information to make data-driven decisions that invest in young people and move the Commonwealth one step closer to being the best place in America to be a kid.

“We know what kids need to grow up healthy and connected so they can thrive as adults: stable homes, strong schools, nutritious food, meaningful relationships, and opportunities to learn, play, and grow. That calls for action from local community leaders ranging from the faith community to the business community, from neighbors and grandparents, from pediatricians and policeman. I have deep confidence that those community supports are happening in vibrant ways in every core of our state. But let me affirm – the seminal move ahead can come only if our elected leaders in Frankfort match their rhetoric with action,” said Brooks.

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RELEASE INFORMATION

The 2025 *KIDS COUNT Data Book* will be 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 Kentucky Youth Advocates

Kentucky Youth Advocates believes all children deserve to be safe, healthy, and secure. As THE independent voice for Kentucky's children, we work to ensure policymakers create investments and policies that are good for children. Learn more at www.kyyouth.org.