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2025 KIDS COUNT Data Book: Minnesota Ranks 5th Overall in Child Well-Being, but Black, Indigenous, Children of Color Still Experiencing Vast Disparities in Outcomes

St. Paul, MINNESOTA – *Children's Defense Fund-Minnesota (CDF-MN) welcomes recent news from the 2025 KIDS COUNT Data Book that Minnesota ranks as the fifth-best state in the nation for child well-being. However, while Minnesota ranks high in health and economic well-being of children and young people, the state continues to lose ground in educational outcomes.*

The 2025 KIDS COUNT Data Book is a 50-state report of recent data developed by the Annie E. Casey Foundation analyzing how kids are faring in post-pandemic America. 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.

Though the *Data Book* found Minnesota continues to make progress ensuring babies have healthy beginnings, significant racial disparities affecting child well-being exist in Minnesota. For example, research from 2023 showed that seven percent of all babies born in Minnesota had low birth weight. However, this rate was higher among Black or African American babies, with more than eleven percent born underweight, compared to only six percent of White babies.

CDF-MN is eager to see the impact Paid Family Medical Leave (PMFL), which Minnesota families will be able to access beginning on January 1, 2026, will have on children in the state. PFML has been associated with lower rates of premature births, low birth weight, and child hospital admissions in other states where it has been implemented. The Executive Director of the Minnesota Chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics, Jeff Bauer, said, "progress in reducing the percentage of babies born with low birth weight is encouraging, but the disparities by race remain deeply concerning. Pediatricians across the state, along with MNAAP, are committed to advancing policies that invest in maternal health, address systemic barriers, and help ensure every baby has the opportunity for a healthy start in life."

“While we are happy Minnesota maintained its ranking as the fifth best state in the nation for child well-being for the third year in a row, we remain concerned that our Black children, Indigenous children, and children of color are experiencing different childhoods in Minnesota,” said CDF-MN State Director Alisha Porter. “Our state has some of the most pronounced disparities in outcomes for children. We have an obligation to build a stronger and more equitable Minnesota where marginalized children can flourish, and policymakers place children at the center of their discussions, decisions, and budgets.” “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. Programs that meet these needs are smart investments, fostering long-term gains like employment and economic growth.”

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. CDF-MN encourages Minnesota’s lawmakers and officials to use this detailed information to unite across party lines and respond with initiatives that invest in young people. By offering a local road map, the *Data Book* equips policymakers, advocates and communities with the information they need to make decisions that help kids and young people thrive.

In particular, the *Data Book* shows state leaders should spend more time toward ensuring children and young people in Minnesota receive the financial support they need to thrive. In 2023, ten percent of Minnesota children, nearly 130,000 young people, were still living in poverty. Additionally, 28 percent of Black or African American children and 16 percent of Hispanic or Latino children were living in poverty, compared to just 6 percent of White children. Nearly one in four children in Minnesota lived in households burdened by high housing costs, reflecting significant financial pressure on families.

The education data from the *Data Book* show that more than half of 3- and 4- year-olds in Minnesota were not enrolled in preschool in 2019–23. Preschool provides numerous benefits for children - especially children experiencing poverty - including enhanced social-emotional development, improved academic outcomes, and increased opportunities. Additionally, preschool enrollment and participation are critical for literacy development. Early exposure to reading lays the foundation for reading success and is directly connected to reading proficiency in elementary school. “For over 13 years, Head Start programs in Minnesota have conducted research analyzing data on teachers, classrooms, and child outcomes. In partnership with MDE, we’ve linked this data to K-12 records. We’ve found that Head Start students achieve higher scores on MCA tests in reading and math compared to their peers in similar economic situations. Additionally, Head Start students attend school an average of 10 more days per year. Head Start effectively lays a foundation for future school success by building essential skills at an early age and supporting families, significantly impacting the growth and achievement of program participants,” said Minnesota Head Start Association Executive Director Kraig Gratke. More than two-thirds of Minnesota 4th graders scored below proficient in reading in 2024. Eighty-eight percent of Indigenous 4th graders, 84 percent of Hispanic or Latino 4th graders, and 83 percent of Black or African American 4th graders weren’t reading proficiently, compared to 62 percent of White 4th graders.

The *Data Book* also revealed the following data regarding the economic well-being of children in Minnesota:

- 130,000 children lived below the poverty line
- 250,000 children lived in families where no parent had full-time, year-round employment
- 299,000 children lived in unaffordable housing (more than 30% of household income spent on housing)
- 77,000, or more than half, of Minnesota 3- and 4-year-olds did not attend preschool (a rank of 18th)
- 46,000 children did not have health insurance

CDF-MN encourages policymakers to continue the extraordinary leadership and vital public investments in families necessary to meet this moment, and to support families going forward in the following ways:

- Connect families to the Minnesota Paid Family Medical Leave program when it launches on January 1, 2026.
- Guarantee all children have access to a high-quality continuum of early childhood programs, including Head Start, that address the healthy growth and development of infants, toddlers and preschoolers, and the needs of their families.
- Enhance the Child Care Assistance Program (CCAP), and ensure it's available and accessible to all eligible families.
- Extend health care coverage to uninsured children, while continuing coverage for young Minnesotans enrolled in essential programs.
- Expand tax credits for families while recognizing the financial strains on young families.

“While Minnesota is facing economic challenges and the uncertainty of the continuation of critical federal programs, Minnesota must continue to make meaningful and essential investments to support children. The benefits of these investments far outweigh the costs to ensure that every child in Minnesota has a healthy start in life and a joyful, playful, and nurturing childhood,” said Porter.

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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

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