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South Dakota Ranks 26th in Child Well-Being, Indicating Progress Needed to Better Support Children and Families

South Dakota continues to rank in the middle of the pack for children's 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.

Notably, South Dakota saw no change or worsening data in all of the indicators for the economic well-being and education domains. In 2024, only 28 percent of fourth grade students were reading at or above proficient levels, a drop from 32 percent in 2022 and placing the state 35th in this category. This shift marks a need for ongoing attention to education outcomes. Child poverty also continues to be a concerning measure of children's well-being, with more than 31,000 South Dakota children living below the poverty level.

Another key indicator for child well-being this year is the number of children who lack health insurance. The most recent data from 2023 shows an increase in uninsured children compared to 2022. While shocking, this trend was largely expected following the end of the continuous enrollment provision enacted during the pandemic. Starting in 2023, thousands of South Dakota children lost Medicaid throughout 2023, including children who were still eligible but fell through the cracks due to procedural or administrative reasons.

"Unfortunately, the reality in South Dakota is that the state is not making a lot of progress investing in children and families, and that really is showing up in the data," said Xanna Burg, Director of KIDS COUNT at South Dakota KIDS COUNT. "Other neighboring states are prioritizing children and families in their state budgets, and South Dakota should look to them for best practices to reverse course on some of these trends. I also worry the threats to federal funding have the potential to leave families without any support."

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. Additional highlights from the report findings for South Dakota include:

- **Economic:** The percentage of children living below poverty remained the same from 2019 to 2023. About 15 percent of children in South Dakota live in poverty. While it is encouraging that the poverty rate did not worsen, this means the economic situation for many families remains challenging.
- **Education:** The high school graduation rate slightly declined, with 82 percent of students graduating on time in the 2021-22 school year, giving South Dakota a rank of 40th in this

category. However, large disparities exist for students of color. Black, Indigenous, and other youth of color are less likely to graduate on time because of generations of added barriers and unequal access to high-quality education.

- **Health:** More than 16,000 children (7 percent) in South Dakota lack health insurance. Having access to health insurance ensures children can access preventative health visits and receive other care they need while growing up.

South Dakota should invest in children and families to ensure all children have what they need to thrive. **Investment in child care and early education** supports a family's economic well-being and access to early learning opportunities. Additionally, it is a critical moment to ensure federal funding is not cut for key programs that support families, like Head Start, the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program or SNAP, Medicaid, and many others.

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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 SOUTH DAKOTA KIDS COUNT

South Dakota KIDS COUNT is a leading resource for data on child and family well-being in the state and is dedicated to providing current, relevant, and reliable data to shape the issues affecting South Dakota children and families. More information can be found at sdkidscount.org. South Dakota KIDS COUNT is a project of the Montana Budget & Policy Center, a nonprofit, nonpartisan organization providing in-depth research and analysis on budget, tax, and economic issues. The Montana Budget & Policy Center also leads the KIDS COUNT work in Montana and North Dakota. More information can be found at www.montanabudget.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.