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Washington Falls in National Rankings for Overall Child Well-Being, Cuts to Early Learning Could Exacerbate Shortfalls

50-State data show many young children in WA are not in school, and on-time high school graduation is below national average

SEATTLE, WASHINGTON — Washington state has dropped to 16th in the nation for overall 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. The data show Washington leaders must do more to provide the support and resources children need to thrive in school and life.

As well as falling from 14th to 16th overall, Washington also dropped in education rankings from 26th to 27th this year. Data from 2024 shows that 68% of 4th graders scored below proficient in reading and 70% of 8th graders scored below proficient in math—only marginally better than the national averages of 70% and 73%, respectively. These troubling outcomes are part of a broader pattern that begins well before elementary school. Notably, Washington falls short in early learning participation, with 57% of children aged 3 and 4 not enrolled in preschool, compared to 54% nationally. Research consistently shows that early learning lays the foundation for later academic success, which may help explain why gaps persist through high school, where 16% of Washington students fail to graduate on time, compared to 13% nationally.

“Access to high-quality early learning sets our children up for success in kindergarten and beyond,” said **Dr. Stephan Blanford, executive director of Children’s Alliance**, Washington state’s member of the KIDS COUNT network “For too long, many kids in Washington have not been getting the support and resources they deserve. Unfortunately, due to cuts made to early learning at the state level, as well as threats to federally funded programs, I am concerned that our state’s performance will only worsen in the future.”

Research consistently shows that high-quality early learning has lasting benefits, including a [6% increase in high school graduation rates](#) and a reduction in opportunity gaps upon kindergarten entry. This year, facing a forecasted budget shortfall of \$16 billion over four years, Washington lawmakers approved funding cuts and delays to key early learning programs like the Early Childhood Education and Assistance Program and Working Connections Child Care—two programs that primarily support families with low incomes. To address this shortfall, legislators put forth several progressive revenue bills, but much of this work was stymied due to sustained objections from the Governor’s Office. The impact of these choices may affect efforts to improve educational outcomes statewide.



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 most recent *Data Book* include:

- **Washington ranks 9th in health**, down from 4th in the 2024 *Data Book*. Most concerning, child and teen death rates have risen to 29 per 100,000 – a 38% increase since 2019. However, our state continues to be a leader in health insurance coverage with 97% of children covered.
- **Washington ranks 30th in economic well-being**. The data show that 31% of Washington kids live in households with a high housing cost burden compared to 30% of kids nationally. Importantly, Washington's 31% figure is up from 29% in 2019.
- **Washington ranks 11th in family and community**: Notably, the percentage of children living in high-poverty areas was down to 2% according to data from 2019-23, compared to 8% nationally.

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. Children's Alliance encourages lawmakers and officials in Washington 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.

"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," said Dr. Blanford. "Programs that meet these needs benefit all of us. And all of us need to pitch in to fund them. It's time for Washington lawmakers and the Governor to work together to advance more progressive revenue measures to relieve the tax burden on working families and ensure we can make the necessary investments to improve outcomes for every child in our state."

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RELEASE INFORMATION

The 2025 *KIDS COUNT Data Book* will be available at www.aecf.org/databook. 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 CHILDREN'S ALLIANCE



[Children's Alliance](#) is Washington's statewide, nonpartisan child advocacy organization. We help people tap into their personal political power so they can advocate for change in their communities. We partner with families, lawmakers, community leaders, service providers and policy experts to develop antiracist policy solutions that improve the lives of Washington kids and build a better shared future for all.

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