



**UNDER EMBARGO Until June 8, 2026 at 12:01 a.m. ET**

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**Arkansas Ranks 43rd in 2026 KIDS COUNT Data Book as Arkansas Advocates for Children and Families Urges Focus on State Investments in Programs to Support Kids and Families**

*New Scoring Index from the Annie E. Casey Foundation to Increase Accountability by Showing How Arkansas's Policies and Investment Affect Children's Daily Lives*

LITTLE ROCK, AR — Sharp increases in the children's uninsured rate and the number of young children not in school have contributed to Arkansas's lower rankings, according to the **2026 KIDS COUNT Data Book**, a 50-state report of recent data developed by the Annie E. Casey Foundation analyzing how kids are faring nationwide. The data show Arkansas leaders must do more to invest in proven solutions to boost child well-being throughout the state.

For the first time, states receive a comprehensive score (from 0 to 1,000) in this year's *Data Book*, not just a ranking. The scores track 16 indicators in four domains — economic well-being, education, health, and family and community factors — over a five-year period from 2019 to 2024. The new scoring system shows whether policies and public investment are actually improving children's lives, not merely how states compare to each other. Arkansas received a score of 427, below the national score of 547, with the lowest score in the Education domain.

Our scores in the Education and Health domains have dropped considerably since 2019:

- In **Education**, our score has fallen by 150 points since 2019, to 318. A concerning indicator in this domain is the share of 3- and 4-year-old children not in school. In 2020–2024, 59% of our state's young learners weren't enrolled, up from 50% in 2015–2019. Arkansas was ranked 13th five years ago; the state now ranks 34th in this indicator.
- In **Health**, Arkansas's score has fallen almost 100 points to 382 since 2019. Our ranking is 48th, down from 42nd in 2019. The most significant factor in this decline is in children's uninsured rates. Arkansas went from 6% in 2019 to 8% in 2024, a 33% jump (and a doubling since our 4% rate in 2016).

"We are concerned by our low scores and poor rankings, especially in the Education and Health domains," said Keesa Smith-Brantley, Executive Director of Arkansas Advocates for Children and Families, Arkansas's member of the Casey Foundation's KIDS COUNT network. "Childhood health and early childhood education are foundational to success at the individual, community and state levels. This year's report demonstrates that our state must do more to improve outcomes for our children."

Smith-Brantley added, “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 37th 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. Arkansas Advocates for Children and Families encourages lawmakers and officials in Arkansas 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. Arkansas Advocates urges state lawmakers to reconsider their ongoing efforts to eliminate state income taxes.

The data presented in the *Data Book* clearly demonstrate the need for state-level investments in basic needs programs like public education and access to affordable health insurance, among others. With reduced state revenue due to continuous income tax cuts, Arkansas risks losing even more ground on critical child well-being indicators.

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#### **RELEASE INFORMATION**

The 2026 *KIDS COUNT Data Book* will be available at [www.aecf.org](http://www.aecf.org). Additional information is available at [www.aecf.org/databook](http://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](http://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](http://www.aecf.org). KIDS COUNT is a registered trademark of the Annie E. Casey Foundation.

#### **About Arkansas Advocates for Children and Families**

Arkansas Advocates for Children and Families is a statewide, nonprofit child advocacy organization established in 1977. Our mission is to ensure that all children and their families have the resources and opportunities to lead healthy and productive lives and to realize their full potential. For more information, visit [aradvocates.org](http://aradvocates.org)