



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

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**California Hits Fifteen Straight Years Ranking in Bottom Third of Country for Kids' Well-Being**  
*Consistent Poor Rankings Show California Must Do More to Prioritize Kids in State Budgets*

**OAKLAND, CA** — California ranks 33rd among all states in child well-being, 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. It marks the 15th straight year California has ranked in the bottom third of the country for supporting children.

“California consistently ranking worse than two-thirds of states in child well-being is unacceptable,” said Ted Lempert, President of Children Now, a member of the Casey Foundation’s KIDS COUNT network. “Given our state’s strong economy and relatively high tax burden, there is just no excuse for not providing better support for our kids.”

California ranks 34<sup>th</sup> among all states in education, largely due to continued abysmal student performance in math and reading. A full 75% of 8th graders in California are not proficient in math, while 71% of 4th graders are not proficient in reading. This coincides with data from Children Now’s [2026 California Children’s Report Card](#) showing 64% of 5th graders are not proficient in science.

“California has consistently failed to deliver high-quality education for all its kids, which can be attributed in part to both our state budgets underprioritizing children and an urgent need for governance reform,” said Lempert. “We simply need to prioritize kids more, and for whomever the next Governor of California is, improving our kids’ well-being has to be a top priority.”

One bright spot in the report was California improving three spots to 9th overall in kids’ health, largely due to ranking 3rd in the percent of kids with health insurance, with just 3% of kids in California uninsured in 2024. With the federal government cutting nearly \$1 trillion from Medicaid nationally and new federal policies set to take effect early next year, however, California must step up efforts to keep kids protected in the upcoming state budget to ensure kids continue to have health coverage.

For the first time this year, states received a comprehensive score (from 0 to 1,000) in the 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. California received a score of 532, below the national score of 547, with lowest scores in the education domain.

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**RELEASE INFORMATION**

The *2026 KIDS COUNT Data Book* is available at [www.aecf.org/databook](http://www.aecf.org/databook). Journalists interested in creating maps, graphs and rankings in stories 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 CHILDREN NOW**

By employing a game-changing, whole-child (pre-natal to age 26), antiracist, connector model [Children Now](#) harnesses collective power to achieve transformational and systemic results for California's kids, so that all children have the services and supports they need to reach their full potential. Children Now also coordinates [The Children's Movement of California](#), a kids' advocacy network with more than 6,200 organizations across the state that care about kids and help drive policy changes through collective action campaigns.