

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

Contact: Jackie Zubrzycki, Jackie@ColoradoKids.org

Colorado's Child Well-Being Rank Drops From 12th to 14th in Nation as Affordability, Education Challenges Increase

New Index Aims to Increase Accountability by Showing How Policies and Investments Affect Children's Lives

DENVER — Colorado ranks 14th in the country for 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. The data show Colorado leaders must do more to support children's academic outcomes and families' economic stability, particularly their ability to afford housing.

For the first time this year, states receive 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. Colorado received a score of 636, above the national score of 547. The state's lowest score was in the education domain.

How Colorado Compares

Category: Ranking (Score)

Overall: 14th (636)

Economic Well-Being: 21st (635)

Education: 8th (510)

Health: 24th (638)

Family and Community: 13th (762)

Colorado's ranking in this year's *Data Book* (14th), based on data from 2024, is unchanged from 2019. However, using the new scoring system, the state's score decreased by 27 points between 2019 and 2024, and several measures point to concerning trends in children's well-being.

For instance, Colorado's score in economic well-being (635) was 78 points lower in 2024 than in 2019, driven in part by an increase in the share of children in households that are housing cost burdened. In 2024, 32% of children lived in households spending more than 30% of their income on housing, up from 30% in 2019. The state's economic well-being score saw the biggest drop between 2019 and 2024.

Colorado's score in education (510) also dropped: It was 55 points lower in 2024 than in 2019. The share of Colorado 4th graders who were not proficient in reading increased from 60% in 2019 to 64% in 2024, part of a national decline in student performance on standardized tests.

The rankings included some bright spots across issue areas. The teen birth rate declined from 14 births per 1,000 teen girls ages 15 to 19 in 2019 to 11 births per 1,000 teen girls in 2024. And the state's high school graduation rate improved, with 16% of students not graduating on time in the 2023-24 school year, compared with 19% in 2018-19. These have been areas of policy focus at the state capitol and in communities across Colorado.

"When we invest in policies and programs that support children's well-being, we allow them to just be kids," said **Heather Tritten, President and CEO of the Colorado Children's Campaign**, Colorado's member of the Casey Foundation's KIDS COUNT network. "This year's KIDS COUNT rankings highlight the positive impact of Colorado's policy work in the past decade, including efforts to improve access to health care and the graduation rate at the state and district level."

The results also point us toward areas that need more attention. "Students need an education system that helps them reach their academic potential. And families need to be able to afford and access basic needs

Commented [GU1]: This sentence is mixing up the data years and the Data Book years. It might be best to cut out the middle point and rewrite as: Colorado's ranking in this year's *Data Book*, based on data from 2024, is unchanged from 2019, or something similar.

Commented [MS2]: Worth saying this is category had the worst decline? (i.e., affordability is the biggest growing problem)

like housing, health care, and child care,” Tritten said. “Programs and policies that meet those needs will help kids today and build a stronger Colorado tomorrow.” |

In its 37th year of publication, the national 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. The Colorado Children’s Campaign encourages lawmakers and officials to use this detailed information to unite across party lines and respond with initiatives that invest in young people. The Data Book equips policymakers, advocates and communities with the information they need to make decisions that help kids and young people thrive.

“Behind every number in this report is a child who is either hungry or fed, housed or homeless, progressing academically or falling behind. No state is consistently getting this right,” said **Lisa M. Lawson, president and CEO of the Annie E. Casey Foundation**. “The Data Book challenges us to follow the evidence and do what delivers results.”

The Colorado Children’s Campaign will also release the 2026 KIDS COUNT in Colorado! Data Book on June 10. The 2026 KIDS COUNT in Colorado! Data Book will include additional data and county fact sheets to help policymakers and community members understand trends in their local areas.

###

RELEASE INFORMATION

The 2026 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

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 THE COLORADO CHILDREN’S CAMPAIGN

The Colorado Children’s Campaign is a nonpartisan, nonprofit advocacy organization dedicated to improving the lives of Colorado’s children through research, policy development, and advocacy. Since 1985, the Campaign has worked to ensure every Colorado child has the opportunity to grow up healthy, educated, and economically secure. Learn more at coloradokids.org.

Commented [GU4]: As this release is focused on the 2026 KIDS COUNT Data Book, the emphasis should remain on those findings. It’s fine to briefly reference the 2026 Colorado release, as reflected in my edits, but it should not be positioned as a standalone section or secondary focus of the announcement. --January Payne, Annie E. Casey Foundation

Commented [JZ4R2]: These edits work for us - thank you!