

Georgia Ranks 39th in the Nation for Child and Family Well-Being

Health Setbacks Overshadow Economic Gains as Georgia Slips in New Index

Child and teen deaths surge faster than the national rate; low birthweight ticks up again; and population of uninsured children rise—even as fewer children are living in poverty and economic conditions improve

ATLANTA—Georgia ranks 39th out of 50 states for overall child and family well-being, according to the *2026 KIDS COUNT® Data Book*, released today by the Annie E. Casey Foundation. This is a drop from recent years when Georgia ranked 37th and 38th.

For the first time, the *2026 Data Book* includes both scores and rankings for each state, overall and by domain. Scores are reported on a 0 – 1,000 scale, where higher values indicate better outcomes for children. They're anchored to 2019, the last full year before the COVID-19 pandemic, and are given for the subsequent years through 2024. This allows comparisons over time—not just across states in a single year, but also in whether outcomes are improving or declining.

Scores show how far apart states really are in their outcomes for child and family well-being, and the level of progress each state has made since 2019. The U.S. received an overall score of 547 out of 1,000. Georgia's 2024 score is 466, below the national average. The scores make clear that Georgia has room for improvement in every domain, particularly health, and that the state's plateau in rankings masks underlying ground lost since 2019 in areas like education.

Georgia ranked 48th in the inaugural *KIDS COUNT Data Book*, released in 1990, and has not been among the bottom 10 states since 2017—but recent progress has stalled. The state reached its highest-ever ranking of 37th in the 2023 and 2024 *Data Books*.

"When we dig into the data and look at how states are clustered, Georgia can either take action and make meaningful gains or maintain the status quo and regress further—dropping us into the bottom 10," said Georgia Family Connection Partnership (GaFCP) Data Manager Jacquan Jordan. "Given this data story and how quickly our state is evolving, our call to action is clear. We must look beyond the surface, because when we peel back the layers of the data, we discover hard-working Georgians who are living on the edge."

The *KIDS COUNT® Data Book* uses 16 indicators to rank each state across four domains—health, education, economic well-being, and family and community—to assess child and family well-being.

Georgia's story is one of contrasts. Comparing data from 2019 to the most recently available in 2024, the state made its most significant gains in economic well-being, improving two spots to 34th in that domain—with child poverty falling and stable parental employment improving. However, those gains were overshadowed by a sharp regression in health outcomes, where Georgia fell five spots to 45th, and continued struggles in

education. Trends in family and community show modest improvement, though Georgia remains entrenched near the bottom of national rankings in that domain.

Health | Ranked 45th (down from 40th)

Georgia's sharpest setback is in the health domain, where the state fell five places to 45th—our state's lowest health ranking in recent years. The drivers are consistent and alarming: a persistently high low-birthweight rate, an accelerating child and teen death rate, and a growing population of uninsured children.

The most alarming trend in Georgia's health data is the rising child and teen death rate. Georgia recorded 151 more deaths of children ages 1 to 19 in 2024 than in 2019, which translates to a 17% increase in the child and teen death rate. The national child and teen death rate also increased, but at a slower pace of 8%. Georgia's death rate rose at more than twice the national rate of increase.

After a brief dip in 2023, Georgia's low-birthweight rate climbed back to 10.3% in 2024—a 3% increase in the percent of low-birthweight babies from 2019. Georgia continues to rank among the worst states nationally on this indicator and remains well above the national average of 8.6%. Low birthweight is the strongest predictor of infant mortality and a leading indicator of women's overall health.

The number of children in Georgia without health insurance increased by 43,000 in 2024 compared to the previous year—reversing years of progress. Since 2019, Georgia has seen a 14% increase in its uninsured child population.

Georgia's rate of teens ages 10 to 17 who are overweight or obese remained stable at 31% in 2023 – 2024 (as compared to 2018 – 2019.) This indicator is tracked through the National Survey of Children's Health and reflects longer-term trends in physical health and nutrition for Georgia's young people.

Economic Well-Being | Ranked 34th (up from 36th)

Georgia saw its strongest improvement in the economic well-being domain, improving three spots from 36th to 34th—driven primarily by a significant reduction in child poverty.

The percentage of children living in poverty in Georgia fell to 16% in 2024, down from 19% in 2019—a decline that represents 56,000 fewer children living in poverty over five years. This brings Georgia in line with the national average of 15% and marks one of the most meaningful improvements the state has recorded on any indicator.

Georgia also held ground on parental employment: the share of children in families where no parent has full-time, year-round employment remained at 25% in 2024, a slight improvement from 2023, 2022, and the 2019 baseline of 26%. Georgia continues to track closely with the national rate.

The share of Georgia teens ages 16 to 19 not in school and not working was 8% in 2024, unchanged from 2019. This runs counter to the national trend, where this share increased by 17%—representing 103,000 additional youth disconnected from school and the workforce nationwide in the same time span.

Housing costs remain a persistent challenge. The number of children in households spending more than 30% of income on housing increased by 74,000 children between 2019 and 2024, reaching 785,000 children (31%—an 11% increase in the share of children over five years.)

Education | Ranked 32nd (Up from 37th)

Georgia's education ranking remained steady compared to 2023, holding at 32nd, and improved from 37th in 2019. However, that recent stability masks continued and, in some cases, worsening performance on underlying indicators. Georgia's plateau in education reflects a broader national trend of post-pandemic learning loss.

The percentage of fourth graders scoring below proficient in reading was 70% in 2024, representing a 3% increase from the 2019 baseline of 68%. While Georgia's rate aligns with the national average, it underscores the urgency of early literacy intervention. Research consistently links fourth-grade reading proficiency to high school graduation, future earning potential, and long-term health outcomes.

Access to preschool showed a slight decline. The percentage of children ages 3 and 4 not attending preschool increased to 53% in the 2020–24 school year, up 50% from 2015 to 2019 and ranking Georgia 14th nationally.

Math proficiency continues to deteriorate. The percentage of Georgia's eighth graders scoring below proficient in math reached 76% in 2024, compared to 73% nationally and up from 69% in 2019—a 10% increase over five years. This is among the most concerning trends in Georgia's education data.

Georgia made measurable progress in high school graduation rates. The percentage of students not graduating on time fell from 18% in the 2018–19 school year to 15% in 2023–24—a 17% improvement. The national rate declined from 14% to 13% over the same period. Georgia improved faster than the nation but continues to lag the national benchmark.

Family and Community | Ranked 40th (up from 39th)

Georgia improved one spot in the family and community domain, rising from 39th to 40th. While the state remains in the bottom 20 nationally, this modest progress reflects movement on a few indicators—particularly an ongoing decline in the teen birth rate.

The teen birth rate in Georgia fell to 16 births per 1,000 females ages 15 to 19 in 2024, down from 17 in 2023. Georgia has recorded a 20% reduction in the teen birth rate since 2019, representing 990 fewer teen births in 2024 compared to 2019. This is a meaningful public health win, though Georgia's rate still exceeds the national average.

The percentage of children living in single-parent families in Georgia was 37% in 2024, continuing to outpace the national rate of 34%. This indicator has shown little change in recent years and remains a challenge for Georgia families.

The percentage of children in families where the household head lacks a high school diploma fell to 10% in 2024, representing 29,000 fewer children in that setting compared to the previous year. This percentage has improved 23% since 2019.

The share of children living in high-poverty areas (census tracts with poverty rates of 30% or more) held steady at 9%, unchanged between the 2015 – 2019 and 2020 – 2024 estimates. Georgia has made no progress on concentrated poverty over five years—a challenge that disproportionately affects black and Latino children in urban and rural communities.

“Georgia is at a crossroads,” said GaFCP Executive Director Gaye Smith. “We have an opportunity to make significant gains—or risk falling further behind. The path we take depends on the choices we make today. We’ve seen that Georgians can reap benefits when public and private partners work together and make significant investments like those we’ve made in education. Now it’s time to expand that work to other areas of family and community well-being so we can build a Georgia that will prosper for generations to come.”

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RELEASE INFORMATION

Download the *2026 KIDS COUNT® Data Book* and explore the interactive report at aecf.org/resources/2026-kids-count-data-book. Journalists interested in creating maps, graphs, and rankings in stories about the *Data Book* can use the KIDS COUNT® Data Center at datacenter.kidscount.org. Download [An Updated Methodology for the KIDS COUNT® Index](#).

About Georgia Family Connection Partnership (GaFCP) is a public-private partnership created by the State of Georgia and investors from the private sector to assist communities in addressing the serious challenges facing children and families. GaFCP also serves as a resource to state agencies across Georgia that work to improve the conditions of children and families. Georgia KIDS COUNT provides policymakers and citizens with current data they need to make informed decisions regarding priorities, services, and resources that impact Georgia’s children, youth, families, and communities. Georgia KIDS COUNT is funded, in part, through a grant from The Annie E. Casey Foundation, a private charitable organization dedicated to helping build better futures for disadvantaged children in the United States. Visit gafcf.org.

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