

EMBARGOED until June 7, 2026 at 6:01 p.m. HST

Contact: Julie Estrella, jestrella@hawaii-can.org, 808-531-5502 ext. 122

Hawai'i's Keiki Rank in Bottom Third of Nation for Children's Economic Well-Being and Educational Outcomes

New State Scoring Index in 2026 KIDS COUNT® Data Book Shows How Hawai'i's Policies and Investments Affect Keiki's Daily Lives

HONOLULU — Hawai'i continues to lag behind much of the nation when it comes to children's economic well-being and educational outcomes, according to the *2026 KIDS COUNT® Data Book*, a 50-state report of recent data developed by the Annie E. Casey Foundation analyzing how children and families are faring nationwide.

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. **Hawai'i received a score of 584, above the national score of 547, and an overall rank of 25th in the nation.**

The report highlights troubling educational trends. **Hawai'i's education domain score fell from 452 in 2019 to 365 in 2024, a decline of 87 points, and well below the national score of 417.**

Reading proficiency among fourth graders was low. **In 2024, more than two-thirds (68%) of Hawai'i fourth graders scored below proficient in reading.** A disproportionately large share of Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander fourth graders struggled with reading proficiency in 2024: 87% scored below proficient, compared to 56% of White students and 63% of Asian students..

Math proficiency among eighth graders worsened significantly. **In 2024, more than three-quarters (77%) of Hawai'i eighth graders scored below proficient in math, worsening from 72% in 2019.** Although Hawai'i's national ranking improved slightly because many other states also experienced declines, the state still ranked in the bottom third nationally, at 38th.

Disparities in math outcomes were severe. Ninety-three percent of Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander eighth graders scored below proficient in math in 2024, compared to 60% of White students and 65% of Asian students.

"Our children cannot thrive when longstanding inequities continue to shape their educational outcomes," said John-Paul Chaisson-Cardenas, executive director of Hawai'i Children's Action Network (HCAN), Hawai'i's member of the Casey Foundation's KIDS COUNT network. "The disparities we see for Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander students underscore the urgent need for investments that support students both inside and outside the classroom, including stable housing, economic security and access to high-quality early learning opportunities."

While Hawai'i improved its overall standing in the economic well-being domain over the past five years, significant challenges remain — especially around housing affordability and employment stability. **Hawai'i's economic well-being score improved from 442 in 2019 to 518 in 2024, while the state's ranking rose from 44th to 35th in the nation.** Despite this progress, Hawai'i still ranks in the bottom third of states for children's economic well-being, driven largely by the state's persistent housing affordability crisis.

Nearly four in ten Hawai'i keiki lived in households burdened by high housing costs in 2024. The share of children living in housing cost-burdened households remained unchanged at 38%, with **Hawai'i ranked in the bottom three states for housing cost burden — improving only slightly from 49th in 2019 to 48th in 2024.**

The *Data Book* also found worsening employment instability for Hawai'i families. **Hawai'i's ranking for the percentage of children whose parents lacked secure employment dropped sharply from 16th in the nation in 2019 to 37th in 2024.** This indicator jumped from 24% in 2019 to 27% in 2024.

This burden is not shared equally. A supplemental analysis found that more than one-third of Native Hawaiian children (34%) and nearly two-fifths of Other Pacific Islander children (39%) lived in families where parents lacked secure employment, compared to one-quarter of White children (25%) or Asian (excluding Filipino) children (26%), in 2020–24.

“These data show that too many Hawai'i families continue to struggle with the high cost of living and unstable employment,” said Hua Zan, associate researcher in family economics at the University of Hawai'i Center on the Family, HCAN's state partner in the KIDS COUNT network. “Even as some economic indicators improve, housing remains unaffordable for so many families and far too many parents lack stable, secure work. Potential cuts to programs like SNAP and Med-QUEST could deepen hardship for keiki and families who are already stretched thin by rising costs.”

These findings demonstrate the need for Hawai'i policymakers to prioritize investments in economic and housing supports for working families, health care access and educational programs that help students recover academically and thrive long term.

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. HCAN encourages lawmakers and officials in Hawai'i to use this detailed information to respond with initiatives that invest in children. 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.

###

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 HAWAII CHILDREN'S ACTION NETWORK

Hawai'i Children's Action Network (HCAN) is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit and the only one in the state of Hawai'i solely committed to advocating for children. We address the root causes of poverty and inequity and develop public

policies that help children and their families. For more information, visit hawaii-can.org. A summary of Hawai'i's rankings in the 2026 KIDS COUNT® Data Book will be available at www.hawaii-can.org/kidscount.

ABOUT THE CENTER ON THE FAMILY

The Center is a unit within the College of Tropical Agriculture and Human Resilience (CTAHR) at the University of Hawai'i at Mānoa. Our faculty and staff work to create and share knowledge that supports and improves family well-being via interdisciplinary research, education, and community outreach. For more information, visit uhfamily.hawaii.edu.

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.