

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

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Illinois Ranks 20th in 2026 KIDS COUNT Data Book as YWCA Metropolitan Chicago Calls for Continued Investment in Children and Families

New child well-being scoring system shows Illinois outperforming the national average while warning signs emerge in education and child health

CHICAGO, Illinois — Illinois ranks 20th in overall child well-being, according to the 2026 KIDS COUNT *Data Book*, a 50-state report developed by the Annie E. Casey Foundation that analyzes how children and families are faring nationwide. While Illinois continues to rank in the top half nationally across most indicators, the latest data reveals concerning declines in education and health outcomes that demand continued attention and investment.

For the first time this year, states received a comprehensive child well-being score ranging from 0 to 1,000 in addition to their ranking. **Illinois earned a score of 615, above the national average of 547.** The score reflects performance across 16 indicators in four domains: economic well-being, education, health, and family and community context between 2019 and 2024. **Illinois ranked highest in education, ranking 7th nationally, while ranking 23rd in health, 24th in economic well-being, and 25th in family and community context.**

The report highlights several areas where Illinois continues to outperform much of the nation. **Illinois ranks 7th nationally in preschool enrollment and 8th grade math proficiency. The state also experienced a large decline in teen birth rates during the period examined in the report.**

At the same time, the data points to troubling trends that could impact long-term outcomes for children and families across the state. Child and teen mortality remains significantly higher than pre-pandemic levels, with Illinois experiencing a sharper increase than the national average. In 2019, Illinois recorded 23 deaths per 100,000 children and teens ages 1 to 19. By 2024, that rate rose to 27 deaths per 100,000.

Educational recovery also remains uneven. Seven in 10 Illinois fourth graders were not proficient in reading in 2024, up from 66% in 2019, reflecting learning setbacks that emerged following the COVID-19 pandemic. Preschool enrollment also declined compared to pre-pandemic levels, despite Illinois maintaining a top-10 national ranking in the category.

In addition, one in four Illinois children now live in families where no parent has full-time, year-round employment, underscoring the continued economic pressure facing working families amid rising costs for housing, food, transportation, and childcare.

“While Illinois continues to demonstrate strengths in areas like early childhood education and academic achievement, these findings also make clear that too many children and families are still navigating instability and barriers that impact long-term well-being,” said Loukisha Pennix, Chief Youth & Family Potential Officer at YWCA Metropolitan Chicago, Illinois’ member of the Annie E. Casey Foundation’s KIDS COUNT network. “The data reinforces what communities and families have been telling us for years: investments in children cannot stop at access alone. Families need sustained support systems that strengthen economic stability, educational opportunity, health outcomes, and community safety.”

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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. Illinois leaders should use this year's findings as a call to deepen investment in the systems that help children thrive, including early childhood education, family economic stability, youth health and safety, and community-based supports. YWCA Metropolitan Chicago urges policymakers, public agencies, philanthropy, and community partners to move beyond short-term interventions and invest in coordinated solutions that support children and families from early learning through adolescence.

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 YWCA METROPOLITAN CHICAGO Founded in 1876, YWCA Metropolitan Chicago is a social enterprise committed to eliminating racism, empowering women, and promoting peace, justice, freedom, and dignity for all. As a leading association among a national network of more than 200 YWCAs, YWCA Metropolitan is committed to advancing safety, wellness and belonging; unleashing youth and family potential; and driving economic equity. Among a diverse and broad portfolio of services, YWCA Metropolitan Chicago is a leading provider in the areas of sexual violence and community violence support services, early childhood and childcare provider services, family support services, youth STEM programming, and economic empowerment services. Learn more at www.ywcachicago.org.