



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

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Mississippi Ranks 50th in 2026 *KIDS COUNT Data Book* as the Children's Foundation of Mississippi Urges Focus on Supporting Thriving Kids and Families

Mississippi score of 271 is below national score of 547.

JACKSON, MS — Mississippi ranks 16th in education among U.S. states but 50th overall, 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. Mississippi made noteworthy progress for children from 2019 to 2024, with scores improving overall and in three domains: Family and Community, Economic Well-Being and Education.

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. **Mississippi** received a score of **271, below** the national score of 547, with its lowest score in the **health domain**.

Mississippi ranks 50th in Health with a score of 122. Comparatively, Louisiana, ranked 49th, scored 376 and Arkansas, ranked 48th, scored 382. Though the 2026 Data Book doesn't shy away from the challenges Mississippi faces, such as the highest percentage of low birth weight babies and percentage of children in families where the head of household lacks a high school diploma, we know improvement is possible when schools, families, healthcare providers, and communities work together on behalf of children.

Several actions contributed to the state's higher ranking and progress in Education, including passing the Literacy-Based Promotion Act focused on reading proficiency by third grade and making consistent investments in public schools. Additionally, leaders across sectors have collaborated and invested in training teachers on effective reading instruction and strengthening the early childhood education infrastructure.

"Across Mississippi, the commitment to early learning opportunities is evident in our expanding public pre-K models: Early Learning Collaboratives and State Invested Pre-K programs. These programs are guided by state standards but built within communities. During the 2024–25 school year, more than 8,700 children in 50 counties participated. Along with expanding access to pre-K, our pre-K programs are a national model for quality. The National Institute of Early Education Research consistently names Mississippi as one of only six states in the nation that meet all quality standards for pre-K," said Dr. Lance Evans, Mississippi State Superintendent of Education.

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. The Children's Foundation of Mississippi believes that for Mississippi to reach its potential, our children must reach theirs. 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.

“At the Children’s Foundation of Mississippi, we are committed to using data to facilitate conversation, strengthen collaboration, increase program engagement, and guide decisions that best serve children. Equally important is our responsibility to support program providers, nonprofits, state agencies, community members, and all stakeholders working to ensure that children and youth have access to every resource they need. We encourage all leaders and stakeholders to use this data as a call to action to invest in solutions that prioritize our children and families,” says Dr. Ashley Sheils, Chief Executive Officer of the Children’s Foundation of Mississippi.

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RELEASE INFORMATION

The 2026 *KIDS COUNT Data Book* will be available at www.aecf.org/databook. Additional information is 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.