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Nebraska Ranks 9th in 2026 KIDS COUNT Data Book as Voices for Children in Nebraska Urges Focus on Supporting Thriving Kids and Families

Nebraska's New Index Score Declined 63 points from 2019 to 2024, the Second Largest Decline Among the 50 States.

Omaha, Nebraska — Nebraska ranks ninth in overall 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. This good overall ranking, however, masks concerning declines Nebraska has experienced, particularly in economic well-being since 2019. The data show Nebraska's leaders must do more to help families who are struggling to meet the basic needs their children need to thrive.

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. Nebraska received a score of **669, above the national score of 547**, with its highest score of **816** in the economic well-being domain and its lowest score of **439** in education.

Although Nebraska still ranked well overall in child well-being (9th), and specifically in the domain of economic well-being (8th), the new data book shows Nebraska is trending in the wrong direction. Nebraska's economic well-being index score fell 93 points since 2019, the second-largest decline in the nation. As recently as 2021, Nebraska ranked first in economic well-being. The rising cost of housing was the main culprit behind the decline. In 2019, Nebraska had the third-lowest percentage of children experiencing housing cost burden (family spends more than 30% of income on housing). By 2024, that ranking fell to 14th due to a 20% increase in the share of children experiencing housing cost burden. In addition, the percent of children living in families where no parent has full-time, year-round employment rose 11% from 2019 to 2024, which led Nebraska's ranking in this indicator to go from first to 10th.

Overall, Nebraska's child well-being ranking dropped only two spots, from 7th in 2019 to 9th in 2024. However, the new scoring index shows Nebraska's overall score dropped from 732 to 669. This 63-point drop was the second largest decline over this period. If Nebraska experiences another 63-point drop in the next five years, its ranking will fall into the 20s.

"There is much to celebrate in this year's new report," said Josh Shirk, Research Coordinator of Voices for Children in Nebraska. "Nebraska still ranks well in many of the key indicators of child well-being. However, the new index scoring shows us that we have been trending in the wrong direction since 2019. Big budget items like housing and child care have ballooned, while access to consistent, good paying jobs has not expanded enough to help families cover the increased costs."

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. Voices for Children in Nebraska encourages lawmakers and officials in Nebraska to



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use this detailed information to unite across party lines and respond with initiatives that invest in young people. 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.

“We know what kids need to grow up healthy and connected so they can thrive as adults: Stable homes, strong schools, nutritious food, meaningful relationships and opportunities to learn, play and grow,” said Juliet Summers, Executive Director of Voices for Children in Nebraska. “Programs that meet these needs are smart investments, fostering long-term gains like employment and economic growth.”

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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.

ABOUT VOICES FOR CHILDREN IN NEBRASKA

Voices for Children in Nebraska is a nonprofit, nonpartisan organization dedicated to building pathways to opportunity for all children. Our mission is to advocate for equitable opportunity for children in Nebraska through research, policy, and community engagement.