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Contact: Heather O'Loughlin | holoughlin@montanabudget.org | 406-868-3438

South Dakota Ranks 38th in the Nation for Education Metrics, Indicating Progress Needed to Better Support Children and Families

South Dakota continues to rank in the middle of the pack for children's 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 in post-pandemic America.

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 improving children's lives, not merely how states compare to each other. South Dakota received an overall score across all four domains of 602, above the national score of 547. However, South Dakota's score in the education domain was 325, which was 92 points below the national education score of 417.

In 2024, only 28 percent of fourth grade students were reading at or above proficient levels, a drop from 32 percent in 2022 and placing the state 35th in this category. Similarly, only 33 percent of South Dakota eighth grade students scored proficient in math, a 10 percent decline over the past five years. This shift marks a need for ongoing attention to education outcomes. This past year, South Dakota KIDS COUNT highlighted the importance of equitable teacher representation to improve education outcomes for all children in the state.

Another key indicator for child well-being this year is the number of children who lack health insurance. The most recent data from 2024 shows another increase in uninsured children compared to the year before. While shocking, this trend was largely expected following the end of the continuous enrollment provision and continued changes to the overall health insurance landscape.

"Unfortunately, South Dakota continues to experience education outcomes below national averages, a key indicator that the state should be doing more to support children in early ages to ensure they have the tools they need to succeed in the future," said Xanna Burg, Director of KIDS COUNT at South Dakota KIDS COUNT. "South Dakota should be making targeted investments in education, child care, and health, to support families struggling to afford basic necessities."

Additional highlights from the report findings for South Dakota include:

- **Economic:** The percentage of children living below poverty decreased in 2024. About 11 percent of children in South Dakota live in poverty.

- **Education:** The high school graduation rate declined slightly, with 84 percent of students graduating on time in the 2023-2024 school year, giving South Dakota a rank of 34th in this category. However, large disparities exist for students of color. Black, Indigenous, and other youth of color are less likely to graduate on time because of generations of added barriers and unequal access to high-quality education.
- **Health:** More than 18,000 children (8 percent) in South Dakota lack health insurance. Having access to health insurance ensures children can access preventative health visits and receive other care they need while growing up.

South Dakota should invest in children and families to ensure all children have what they need to thrive. **Investment in child care and early education** supports a family's economic well-being and access to early learning opportunities. Additionally, it is a critical moment to ensure federal funding is not cut for key programs that support families, like Head Start, the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program or SNAP, Medicaid, and many others.

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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 SOUTH DAKOTA KIDS COUNT

South Dakota KIDS COUNT is a leading resource for data on child and family well-being in the state and is dedicated to providing current, relevant, and reliable data to shape the issues affecting South Dakota children and families. More information can be found at sdkidscount.org. South Dakota KIDS COUNT is a project of the Montana Budget & Policy Center, a nonprofit, nonpartisan organization providing in-depth research and analysis on budget, tax, and economic issues. The Montana Budget & Policy Center also leads the KIDS COUNT work in Montana and North Dakota. More information can be found at www.montanabudget.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.