

2026

KIDS COUNT[®] DATA BOOK

State Trends in Child Well-Being



THE ANNIE E. CASEY
FOUNDATION

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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JoAnna Caywood contributed her expertise on child and youth well-being to this year's publication.

In addition, the KIDS COUNT Network — with members representing every state, the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands (see pages 48–49) — is instrumental in making the *Data Book* available to national, state and local leaders across the country.



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FOREWORD

A LETTER FROM OUR PRESIDENT



Measuring What Matters: A New Lens on Progress for Children Across the United States

Data are not abstract numbers. They represent real people and real communities. Reliable federal data illuminate the lives of children and families, grounding us in a shared set of facts about who they are and where they are thriving or struggling.

When data are missing or unreliable, decision-makers lack adequate information and are left guessing as they try to identify children's needs, direct resources effectively and track progress. Leaders at every level need meaningful, regularly collected measures of well-being to reliably assess what's working, set priorities and budgets, plan services and develop policy solutions. Without such data, even well-intended decisions risk missing the mark.

Federal data systems are a critical part of our country's 250-year history: The first census took place in 1790, under President George Washington. These data help us compare what's happening in different places, track changes over time and get reliable information even for small communities. The breadth and depth of our national data infrastructure ensures that every person, every issue and every place matters. Federal agencies — such as the U.S. Department of Education, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and the U.S. Census Bureau, among others — produce data that underpin the work of policymakers, funders, advocates and communities nationwide, including our own work at the Annie E. Casey Foundation. The *KIDS COUNT® Data Book* and scores of other decision-making tools could not be produced without federal data.

Preserving these federal sources is imperative, as they are central to strengthening the well-being of kids and families across regions and over time.

For nearly four decades, the annual *KIDS COUNT Data Book* has drawn on these vital data to provide leaders and the public with a trusted, consistent snapshot of how children are faring, nationally and in every state. Since 1990, it has also ranked states on overall child well-being using the KIDS COUNT index — a tool we developed to combine and track key indicators of child well-being, each measured in different ways, into one clear, comparable measure. The index makes it easier to see how states are performing over time and how they compare to others.

Since its inception, the KIDS COUNT index has had only one major methodological change. In 2012, we increased the total number of indicators from 10 to 16 and organized them into thematic areas or domains: Economic Well-Being, Education, Health and Family and Community.

This 37th *Data Book* marks an important step forward in how states can see and strengthen the progress they are making for children with an expanded KIDS COUNT index. In addition to showing where states stand compared with each other, the new index shows how they are moving — offering clear, year-to-year scores within each state that reveal whether children's lives are truly getting better.

Informed by the latest research and feedback from experts and partners, the updated index makes it easier to see where kids are falling behind, where progress is happening and where targeted policy action can make the biggest difference. The result is an even more robust, useful data tool to guide action and investment that support kids and families.

The 2026 Enhanced KIDS COUNT Index — What Changed and Why?

The updated index now includes a score in addition to a rank for each state, overall and in the four domains. The domains and the 16 underlying indicators remain unchanged, with each indicator contributing equally to a state's ranking. What's new is a score between 0 and 1,000 showing how far apart states really are, where all states have opportunities for improvement and whether outcomes are improving or declining. Scores are anchored to a baseline year to allow comparisons across time. We chose 2019 — the last full year before the pandemic disrupted children's lives — as the anchor so we can clearly see how well-being has changed nationally and in each state since then. (Learn more about the new methodology at www.aecf.org/resources/the-new-kids-count-index-methodology and find state and national baseline scores at datacenter.aecf.org.)

The KIDS COUNT rankings show where states stand relative to one another in a single year, and they remain an important tool in enabling quick comparisons and promoting public discussion. Adding scores will provide essential context by showing whether a state is actually making progress, regardless of how other states are performing. A state can improve outcomes for children even if its rank does not change, and scores make that movement visible. They also reveal the pace and depth of change — clarifying gains among higher-ranked states and highlighting meaningful improvements in lower-ranked ones. By capturing both progress and position relative to other states, scores will give leaders a fuller picture of how children are truly faring.

What's New in the 2026 Enhanced KIDS COUNT Index?

- View measurable state progress or decline on child outcomes since 2019, overall and in four domains of well-being
- Track meaningful shifts within each state to gauge where it is improving or falling behind
- Compare important and measurable differences between states, beyond rankings
- See where states could improve outcomes, even in top-ranked states
- Identify where targeted resources could produce the greatest gains and where policies and investments may be paying off

What the 2026 Index Findings Reveal

Across the nation, this year's *Data Book* findings, largely comparing 2024 to 2019, show the nation continues to achieve uneven progress for children. On its 0-to-1,000 range, the new index scoring system puts the U.S. as a whole at 547. Just seven of 16 indicators improved, while another seven worsened and two held steady. These mixed results generally follow trends that have been evolving for years.

The most progress was made in reducing teen births and the share of children living in high-poverty areas. Improvements were also seen in the percentages of children living in poverty;¹ children living with heads of households with at least a high school diploma; children living with parents who are stably employed; youth graduating from high school on

time; and children and teens ages 10 to 17 who were overweight or obese. These encouraging shifts reflect a combination of post-pandemic economic recovery, strong policies for families and effective public health efforts.

Consistent with the past two *Data Books*, the greatest number of setbacks occurred in the Education domain, with three of its four indicators losing ground: math and reading proficiency and preschool attendance. These declines underscore that our nation has yet to fully recover from the pandemic.

Challenges persist in the Health and Economic Well-Being domains as well, including our country's continued high rates of child and teen deaths and low birth-weight babies; the 1.2 million teens who need support reconnecting with school or work; and families with high housing cost burdens.

State findings in the enhanced index reinforce the fact that where children live matters. Outcomes vary widely across the country because states and communities differ in ways that affect kids — from economic conditions and policies to infrastructure and resources.

The new scores range from 271 in Mississippi (ranked 50th) to 838 in New Hampshire (ranked 1st) on overall child well-being. This shows that even the top-ranked state still has room to improve. Among the five highest-ranked states, two have nearly identical scores — Utah ranks 3rd with 759 and Vermont 4th with 756 — illustrating how narrow gaps can be between very different states. In other cases, a one-place difference reflects wider gaps, such as the 72-point spread between 47th and 48th place (Alaska at 385 and Louisiana at 313).

Every region of the country includes states with stronger and weaker outcomes, and all

states show areas for growth. Eleven of the 15 lowest-scoring states (below 500) fall in the Southern region,² while the Northeast is home to five of seven states scoring above 700. Variation within regions is also substantial. Western states, for instance, show the most uneven outcomes for kids, with scores ranging from 281 in New Mexico to Utah at the top of the region.

How have outcomes changed over time? The new scores show that in 29 states, kids fared worse overall in 2024 than in 2019. Losses in education since the pandemic drove much of these declines. At the same time, 15 states improved children's well-being and six remained stable. Regionally, the largest overall declines for kids occurred in Northeastern and Midwestern states, while Southern states demonstrated the greatest gains.

Nationwide, Maine saw the biggest drop in child well-being since 2019, followed by four Midwestern states: Nebraska, North Dakota, Iowa and Minnesota. Of the 15 states that improved from 2019 to 2024, eight are in the Southern region. South Carolina's overall score improved by 38 points, the largest jump of any of the states.

Scores reveal widespread challenges in the Education domain: nearly all states (47) fared worse in 2024 compared to 2019. The steepest losses were in North Dakota, Maine, Delaware, Iowa and Oklahoma. Louisiana and Mississippi were the only states to make progress in Education, and South Carolina was stable.

More setbacks than progress occurred in child health outcomes, with 26 states showing declines since 2019 and 10 moving in a positive direction. Maine and Mississippi had the sharpest drops, while Virginia, Indiana and New Jersey had the largest improvements.



More progress was made in the Economic Well-Being domain for kids, with 29 states performing better in 2024 versus 2019, and 13 losing ground. Rhode Island experienced the steepest decline by a wide margin, with its score plummeting by 161 points. The second-largest decline occurred in Nebraska, with a 93-point drop. At the other end of the spectrum, the greatest improvements were made by Delaware, New Mexico and New Hampshire.

The Family and Community domain tells a different story: the vast majority of states (45) made progress and the rest remained stable. This was largely fueled by reductions in teen birth rates and shares of children living in high-poverty areas. Arizona saw the most gains in this domain, with an increase of 204 points.

These scores remind us that progress is possible — and every state can do more to support children and families, even states that are performing relatively well. The updated

index preserves the state rankings while offering a clearer view of gaps between states, individual state performance on child outcomes and changes over time.

While these findings reflect the latest available data up to 2024, we know the current realities for children and families are affected by factors such as higher costs of living, reduced public assistance and a changing job market. Future *Data Books* will track how these evolving conditions impact the lives of kids and families.

Taking Action to Improve Conditions for Kids

Leaders and advocates across the country have used KIDS COUNT data to guide decisions and build stronger programs and policies that make a difference in children's daily lives. Here are ways two historically low-ranking states have

worked to strengthen family economic stability and improve children’s education.

- **New Mexico:** Although this state ranks 49th overall in this year’s *Data Book*, scores show that child well-being improved in New Mexico in 2024 compared to 2019, driven by progress on Economic Well-Being and Family and Community measures. One recent example of the state’s action to invest in families: Advocates in New Mexico used KIDS COUNT data on persistently high child poverty and gaps in economic security to make the case for increasing the state child tax credit. Lawmakers responded by expanding this state policy in 2023, helping families with children better afford essentials such as housing, food and childcare.
- **Mississippi:** This state ranks 50th overall in the *2026 Data Book*, but 16th in Education. Mississippi made noteworthy progress for kids from 2019 to 2024, with scores improving overall and in three domains — Family and Community, Economic Well-Being and Education. 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.

Preserving the Data Behind the Work

The *2026 Data Book* underscores a fundamental point: None of this work is possible without strong federal data systems. All indicators in the KIDS COUNT index come from these sources. The U.S. statistical infrastructure is the backbone of efforts at the national, state and local levels to improve the

lives of children and families. For decades, federal data have offered a trusted window into what children and families need, where disparities persist and what solutions can make a difference. These data help ensure that scarce resources are directed where they can have the greatest impact and expand opportunity for every child.

Over the past two years, that backbone has weakened.³ Cuts to data collection, access, funding and staffing threaten the quality of core federal datasets and, in some cases, their ability to continue at all. When we lack independent, high-quality federal data that are consistent across states, we lack a shared base of facts. We force leaders to make pivotal decisions about public funds, policies and programs in the dark — guided by assumptions instead of evidence and constrained by incomplete information. In doing so, we weaken our capacity to lead with clarity, steward resources responsibly and deliver results that truly serve communities.

Children live the daily realities behind the data — whether that means stability or hardship, opportunity or barriers, security or uncertainty. This enhanced index strengthens our ability to understand those realities and respond with urgency and purpose. Millions of children are counting on the adults who shape policy and investment to do their very best to build a strong future for our country. We must not let them down.

Lisa M. Lawson

*President and Chief Executive Officer
The Annie E. Casey Foundation*

NATIONAL TRENDS IN CHILD WELL-BEING



Since 1990, the Casey Foundation has ranked states annually on overall child well-being using a selection of indicators. Called the KIDS COUNT index, these indicators capture what children and youth need most to thrive in four domains: (1) Economic Well-Being, (2) Education, (3) Health and (4) Family and Community. Each domain has four indicators, for a total of 16. These indicators represent a selection of the best available data to measure the status of child well-being at the state and national levels. Trends help us look beyond a single point in time to understand how children are faring over time — nationally, within states and across different groups.

For a more thorough description of the KIDS COUNT index, visit www.aecf.org/resources/the-new-kids-count-index-methodology. And for the latest data on these and other indicators, explore the KIDS COUNT Data Center at datacenter.aecf.org.

Table 1 on pages 10–11 reveals how the status of children has changed, comparing data before the pandemic to the latest available figures, largely 2019 to 2024. Child well-being trends remain on a fragmented path — only seven of 16 indicators improved, while another seven worsened and two measures remained stable. Although results are mixed, the patterns reflect larger trends that have been unfolding for years if not decades.

Of course, the latest data through 2024 do not reflect today’s realities for families and children, such as higher living costs, reduced public support and a shifting labor market. As new data

become available, we will see how post-2024 conditions are affecting the lives of children.

Across the index, the most progress continues to occur in the Family and Community domain, with three of its four measures improving since 2019. In fact, two of these indicators showed the largest gains of all 16 indicators in the index: the teen birth rate fell by 24% and the share of children living in high-poverty areas dropped by 22% over the years shown in Table 1. The decline in the percentage of kids residing in high-poverty neighborhoods represents about 1.3 million fewer children in these communities in 2020–24 compared with 2015–19. This progress continues a decade-plus trend.⁴ The decline in the teen birth rate is even more striking, plummeting for decades — down nearly 80% since 1990 and holding at 13 births per 1,000 females ages 15 to 19 in 2023 and 2024.⁵ This is primarily due to progress in effective contraception use and decreased youth sexual activity; however, the U.S. rate remains above that of most peer nations.⁶

Another bellwether Family and Community indicator — the share of children whose household head lacks a high school diploma — improved by 8% between 2019 and 2024, although it has not changed since 2021, staying at just above 1 in 10 kids. For nearly two decades, though, this measure has generally moved in a positive direction.⁷ Meanwhile, the share of children in single-parent families has remained stable, at just greater than 1 in 3 from 2019 to 2024.⁸ Overall, the stable trends and enduring progress in this domain are heartening. Families and neighborhoods are integral to shaping children’s lives.

TABLE 1: NATIONAL TRENDS

16 Key Indicators of Child Well-Being by Domain

National Overall Index Score: 547(worse)

ECONOMIC WELL-BEING

SCORE
557
STABLE

UNITED STATES

Children in poverty US 11,117,000	17% 2019	15% 2024	↓ BETTER
Children whose parents lack secure employment US 18,420,000	26% 2019	25% 2024	↓ BETTER
Children living in households with a high housing cost burden US 22,385,000	30% 2019	31% 2024	↑ WORSE
Teens not in school and not working US 1,218,000	6% 2019	7% 2024	↑ WORSE

SCORE

EDUCATION

417
WORSE

UNITED STATES

Young children (ages 3 and 4) not in school US 4,277,000	52% 2015-19	54% 2020-24	↑ WORSE
Fourth graders not proficient in reading US N.A.	66% 2019	70% 2024	↑ WORSE
Eighth graders not proficient in math US N.A.	67% 2019	73% 2024	↑ WORSE
High school students not graduating on time US N.A.	14% 2018-19	13% 2023-24	↓ BETTER

N.A.: Not available

HEALTH

SCORE
607
WORSE

UNITED STATES

Low birth-weight babies US 308,966	8.3% 2019	8.5% 2024	↑ WORSE
Children without health insurance US 4,648,000	6% 2019	6% 2024	STABLE
Child and teen deaths per 100,000 US 21,189	25 2019	27 2024	↑ WORSE
Children and teens (ages 10 to 17) who are overweight or obese US N.A.	31% 2018-19	30% 2023-24	↓ BETTER

FAMILY AND COMMUNITY

SCORE
608
BETTER

UNITED STATES

Children in single-parent families US 23,472,000	34% 2019	34% 2024	STABLE
Children in families where the household head lacks a high school diploma US 7,868,000	12% 2019	11% 2024	↓ BETTER
Children living in high-poverty areas US 5,419,000	9% 2015-19	7% 2020-24	↓ BETTER
Teen births per 1,000 US 137,273	17 2019	13 2024	↓ BETTER

N.A.: Not available

Note: Scores range from 0 (worst) to 1,000 (best) and reflect child well-being relative to a 2019 baseline; changes over time indicate progress or decline. Scores are not percentages or a finish line; higher scores indicate better outcomes. National baseline scores are available at datacenter.aecf.org.



The Education domain, on the other hand, had the most setbacks, with three of four indicators moving in the wrong direction. Student reading and math proficiency lost the most ground in this domain. As reported in last year's *Data Book*, in 2024, 70% of fourth graders were not reading proficiently, worsening from 66% in 2019 — essentially undoing a decade of progress.⁹ Similarly, in 2024, 73% of eighth graders scored below proficient in math, substantially worse than 67% in 2019 but a slight improvement from 74% in 2022.¹⁰ This is even more troubling when we consider that these indicators are strongly tied to future academic achievement, workforce readiness and economic success.¹¹

Preschool attendance is another measure of concern within Education, with 54% of young children ages 3 and 4 not enrolled in 2020–24, worsening from 52% in 2015–19. Although this figure has hovered in the 52% to 54% range for more than 10 years,¹² a 2 percentage-point shift is important, as early childhood education is strongly linked to positive academic and life outcomes.¹³ Access to high-quality preschool remains a serious challenge for many in this country.¹⁴

High school students graduating on time is the only Education measure that has not lost ground in recent years, with 87% of high school students graduating within four years in

2023–24, up 1 percentage point from 2018–19. This continues a 10-year trend and is especially noteworthy after the pandemic’s significant disruptions for students.¹⁵

Trends in the Economic Well-Being domain are split, with two measures improving and two worsening. The official child poverty rate fell by 2 percentage points between 2019 and 2024, to 15%, as part of a downward pattern since 2012.¹⁶ While this is good news, it reflects just part of the picture and more context can deepen our understanding of this issue:

- The Census Bureau’s Supplemental Poverty Measure shows that when we account for noncash benefits like public assistance, major family expenses such as housing, healthcare and childcare, as well as regional variation in living costs, a different trend emerges — in 2024, child poverty returned to its 2019 rate of 13%, after reaching a historic low of 5% in 2021 due to highly effective public programs that reduced poverty and subsequently expired.¹⁷
- Although the official child poverty measure (based on cash income only) has declined, the latest rate still represents more than 11.1 million kids living below the federal poverty threshold (\$31,812 for a family of four in 2024); we know families can earn above this amount and still not meet their basic needs.¹⁸
- Children in the United States continue to be more likely to live in poverty than the population as a whole.¹⁹

In a sign of post-pandemic economic recovery, the share of kids whose parents lack stable employment improved by 1 percentage point compared with 2019, holding steady at 25% in 2023 and 2024 — the lowest level in more than 15 years.²⁰ However, current realities are different from 2024 and as new data become available, this trend may shift.

Unfortunately, housing affordability for families is not improving, with the share of children living in households burdened by high housing costs rising from 30% in 2019 to 31% in 2024. In the decade before the pandemic, this figure had gradually improved, and 2024 marks the first increase in this measure since 2010.²¹

While the share of teens ages 16 to 19 who are disconnected from school and work was marginally worse in 2024 (7%) compared to 2019 (6%), this percentage has remained at 7% in nine of the last 10 years.²² It also improved from its peak of 9% in the previous decade. Still, the current figure represents 1.2 million young people who need support reengaging in education and work settings.



The Health domain shows mixed findings, with one indicator improving, two worsening and one remaining the same. The only progress occurred in the proportion of young people ages 10 to 17 who were overweight or obese. This figure initially rose from 31% in 2018–19 to 33% in the pandemic years of 2020–21, but it has since fallen to 30% as of 2023–24. Obesity and overweight are complex chronic conditions influenced by biological, socioeconomic and environmental issues, and the current rate is still too high.²³

In more concerning news, the child and teen death rate rose by 8% between 2019 and 2024.

However, it has improved two years in a row, in a hopeful sign that the trend may be reversing.²⁴ In 2024, there were 27 deaths in every 100,000 young people ages 1 to 19, equating to 21,189 young lives lost in that year. Increases in this rate since 2019 have been largely attributed to rising deaths due to firearms, motor vehicles and drug overdoses, particularly among teens ages 15 to 19.^{25,26}

The rate of babies born at a low weight (less than 5.5 pounds) has been going in the wrong direction for decades, and although it worsened in 2024 (8.5%) compared to 2019 (8.3%), the



latest figure is a slight improvement from 2022 and 2023 (both 8.6%).²⁷ Low birth weight is a key health indicator and a leading cause of death for infants.²⁸

Health insurance coverage held steady at 94% of children in both 2019 and 2024, compared with 95% in the intervening years of 2021–2023. Pandemic-era healthcare policies are credited for boosting children’s coverage during this period.²⁹ Having insurance is critical for children to access care to meet their health needs.

The *2026 Data Book* points to concerning needs among the nation’s young people, from too many students struggling with reading and math proficiency, high death rates and more than a million disconnected from school or work. We know from other data, too, that youth mental health remains a crisis.³⁰ In 2023, for example, nearly 1 in 5 high schoolers experienced major depression and 1 in 10 attempted suicide.³¹ At the same time, we continue to see progress in key areas, such as teen births, children living in high-poverty neighborhoods and high school graduation. And, if we compare the *2025 Data Book* to this one, two indicators went in the wrong direction in the most recent year — children without health insurance and kids in households with high housing cost burdens.

Disaggregating Data on Child Well-Being

To improve well-being, we must ensure progress reaches all children. Table 2 on page 16 sheds further light on the status of children’s well-being by disaggregating the index’s 16 indicators by race and ethnicity. This deeper look uncovers widespread disparities that have been entrenched for years. A single measure illustrates this clearly: In 2024, the poverty rate for Black children (29%) and American Indian



or Alaska Native children (26%) was roughly twice the national rate of 15%. Latino (21%) and multiracial (17%) kids also had a higher likelihood of living in poverty than children overall, and white and Asian and Pacific Islander children were less likely to live in poverty (10%).

American Indian or Alaska Native children experienced worse outcomes compared to the national average on all but one measure — the child and teen death rate, which matched the U.S. rate in 2024. In 2020–24, nearly 1 in 5 (19%) American Indian or Alaska Native children lived in high-poverty communities, more than twice the national average (7%).

TABLE 2: NATIONAL TRENDS

National Key Indicators by Race and Hispanic Origin

ECONOMIC WELL-BEING							
	National Average	American Indian or Alaska Native	Asian and Pacific Islander	Black	Latino	White (non-Hispanic)	Two or More Races
Children in poverty 2024	15%	26%	10%	29%	21%	10%	17%
Children whose parents lack secure employment 2024	25%	42%	18%	39%	30%	19%	27%
Children living in households with a high housing cost burden 2024	31%	34%	30%	45%	40%	22%	34%
Teens not in school and not working 2024	7%	11%	3%	9%	8%	5%	8%
EDUCATION							
	National Average	American Indian or Alaska Native	Asian and Pacific Islander	Black	Latino	White (non-Hispanic)	Two or More Races
Young children (ages 3 and 4) not in school 2020-24	54%	61%	53%	53%	61%	52%	56%
Fourth graders not proficient in reading 2024	70%	85%*	50%*	84%*	80%	61%	65%*
Eighth graders not proficient in math 2024	73%	88%*	43%*	90%*	86%	63%	70%*
High school students not graduating on time [^] 2023-24	13%	24%*	N.A.	18%*	16%	10%	N.A.
HEALTH							
	National Average	American Indian or Alaska Native	Asian and Pacific Islander	Black	Latino	White (non-Hispanic)	Two or More Races
Low birth-weight babies 2024	8.5%	8.7%	9.5%	14.4%	7.8%	7.0%	9.2%
Children without health insurance 2024	6%	12%	4%	6%	10%	4%	7%
Child and teen deaths per 100,000 2024	27	27	15	47	24	24	18
Children and teens (ages 10 to 17) who are overweight or obese 2023-24	30%	39%*	21%*	37%*	37%	25%	28%*
FAMILY AND COMMUNITY							
	National Average	American Indian or Alaska Native	Asian and Pacific Islander	Black	Latino	White (non-Hispanic)	Two or More Races
Children in single-parent families 2024	34%	50%	16%	63%	42%	23%	38%
Children in families where the household head lacks a high school diploma 2024	11%	20%	10%	9%	24%	5%	14%
Children living in high-poverty areas 2020-24	7%	19%	3%	20%	10%	3%	8%
Teen births per 1,000 2024	13	14	3	18	20	8	12

*Data are for non-Hispanic children.

N.A.: Not available

[^]Due to data release delays from the National Center for Education Statistics, the U.S. estimate was derived by weighting state-provided rates by 12th grade enrollment. Enrollment data are from the U.S. Department of Education's Common Core of Data.

Black and Latino children have not fared as well as their counterparts nationwide on most of the index indicators. Black children are, however, more likely than the U.S. average to be enrolled in preschool and living with a household head with a high school diploma. Tragically, the death rate for Black children and youth remains far higher than the U.S. average, and this rate worsened more for this group than others. Latino children saw better-than-average results on two key health measures: low birth-weight babies and child and teen deaths. While the share of Latino kids whose household head lacks a high school degree improved markedly between 2019 and 2024, this figure remains a concern, at more than twice the U.S. average.

Multiracial children fared worse than children overall on 10 of the 15 indicators with comparable data. Their death rate (18 per 100,000) remained below the U.S. average (27 per 100,000). White and Asian and Pacific Islander children fared better than national averages on all indicators with only one exception: Asian and Pacific Islander mothers had a higher share of low birth-weight babies, which worsened from 8.6% to 9.5% between 2019 and 2024 — the largest increase of all groups.

It's important to note that many data sources combine Asian and Pacific Islander children into a single group, masking large disparities and suggesting outcomes that not all subgroups

experience equally. For example, the official poverty rate for Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander children (20%) is twice that of Asian kids (10%), based on 2020–24 data. Among specific Asian and Pacific Islander populations, child poverty ranges from a low of 5% for Asian Indian kids to 20% or more for Bangladeshi (20%), Samoan (26%) and Burmese (28%) children.³² These findings demonstrate how combining Asian and Pacific Islander groups can conceal important disparities, and they reinforce the need for disaggregated data to effectively identify and address children's needs.

What trends were shared by all racial and ethnic groups? On the positive side, all groups in Table 2 saw reductions in teen birth rates (2019 to 2024) and those with available data saw progress on high school graduation rates (2018–19 to 2023–24). Conversely, all groups experienced losses in reading and math proficiency (2019 to 2024), lower preschool enrollment (2015–19 to 2020–24), worsening rates of low birth-weight babies and kids in households with high housing cost burdens (2019 to 2024).³³

Together, the findings underscore that while many children in America are doing well, too many are not thriving and significant challenges remain. Leaders have an opportunity to make kids a priority, act on what works and build a stronger future for children and our nation.

National and State Data Profiles Online

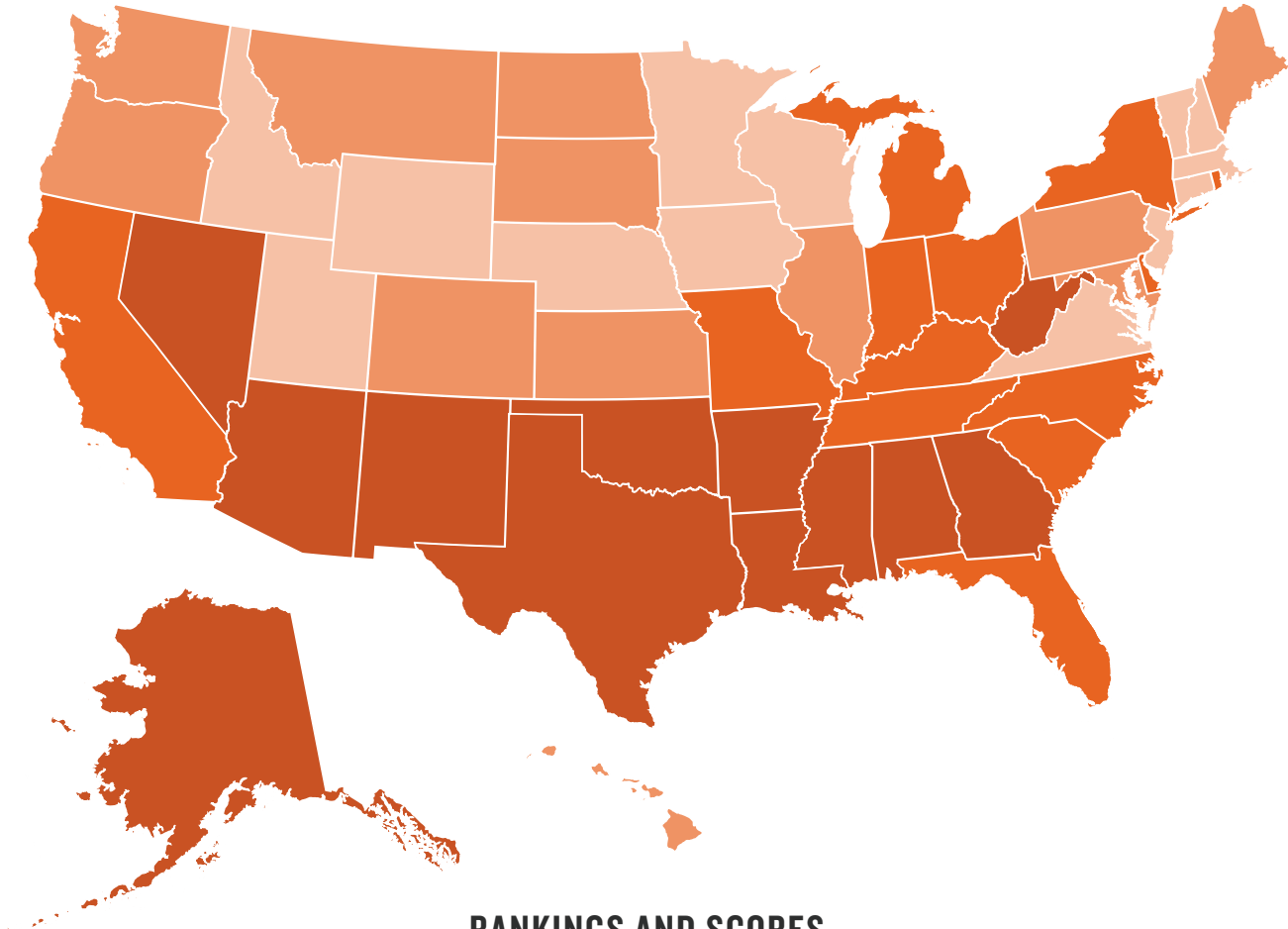
National and state profiles providing current and trend data for all 16 indicators, as well as an interactive look at the *Data Book*, are available at www.aecf.org/databook. In addition, thousands of child and family well-being indicators, including those cited in the *Data Book*, are available in the KIDS COUNT Data Center at datacenter.aecf.org.

OVERALL WELL-BEING



The Foundation derives a composite index of overall child well-being for each state by combining data across four domains: (1) Economic Well-Being, (2) Education, (3) Health and (4) Family and Community. Beginning in 2026, the composite index was updated to provide both scores and rankings for states. The new scores show how far apart states are, where states can make improvements and whether outcomes in each state are improving or declining over time.

A 2026 STATE-TO-STATE COMPARISON OF OVERALL CHILD WELL-BEING



RANKINGS AND SCORES

BEST		Scores 638–838	BETTER		Scores 584–636	WORSE		Scores 468–583	WORST		Scores 271–466				
1.	New Hampshire	838	↑	14.	Colorado	636	↓	26.	Rhode Island	583	↓	39.	Georgia	466	→
2.	Massachusetts	775	↓	14.	Kansas	636	↓	27.	Ohio	569	↑	40.	Arizona	446	↑
3.	Utah	759	→	14.	North Dakota	636	↓	28.	Missouri	567	↑	41.	West Virginia	443	↑
4.	Vermont	756	↓	17.	Washington	634	↓	29.	Indiana	566	↑	42.	Alabama	435	↑
5.	Minnesota	743	↓	18.	Pennsylvania	626	↓	30.	New York	558	↓	43.	Arkansas	427	↓
6.	New Jersey	715	↓	19.	Maryland	616	↑	31.	Delaware	554	→	44.	Oklahoma	425	→
7.	Connecticut	708	↓	20.	Illinois	615	↓	32.	North Carolina	537	↑	44.	Texas	425	→
8.	Wisconsin	692	↓	21.	Maine	613	↓	33.	California	532	→	46.	Nevada	398	↓
9.	Nebraska	669	↓	22.	South Dakota	602	↓	34.	Michigan	527	↓	47.	Alaska	385	↓
10.	Iowa	667	↓	23.	Oregon	592	↓	35.	Florida	519	↓	48.	Louisiana	313	↑
11.	Virginia	661	↓	24.	Montana	590	↓	36.	Kentucky	498	↑	49.	New Mexico	281	↑
12.	Wyoming	654	↑	25.	Hawaii	584	↓	37.	Tennessee	475	↓	50.	Mississippi	271	↑
13.	Idaho	638	↓					38.	South Carolina	468	↑				

↑ Index score improved relative to 2019 by at least 5 points.
 ↓ Index score declined relative to 2019 by at least 5 points.
 → Index score remained stable relative to 2019.

District of Columbia and Puerto Rico are not ranked or scored.

While national data are important for tracking major trends in U.S. children’s well-being, state data tell us how conditions vary for kids across the country. Drilling down to the state level sheds light on the geographic areas where children, youth and families face heightened challenges and where additional attention is warranted.

Where children live shapes their health and quality of life. Data from the KIDS COUNT Data Center (datacenter.aecf.org) show persistent disparities across states and communities, driven by differences in policy, economic conditions, infrastructure, resources and neighborhood characteristics. These factors influence access to essentials like healthy food, healthcare, education, housing, clean air and safe, supportive environments.³⁴ Even within communities, conditions such as poverty and safety can vary widely by neighborhood. Individual and family circumstances also play an important role in shaping outcomes.

The 2026 KIDS COUNT index adds scores alongside rankings for each state, using the same 16 indicators from previous years weighed equally across four domains. Together, scores and rankings offer a more complete picture of how kids are doing and where action is most needed. (Learn more about the updated methodology at www.aecf.org/resources/the-new-kids-count-index-methodology.)

Using the KIDS COUNT Index Scores

The new scores are shown on a scale of 0 to 1,000, where higher scores mean better outcomes for kids. Scores are anchored to the baseline year of 2019 — the last full year before the pandemic — to allow comparisons over time. A score of 1,000 represents the best outcomes

observed among states in 2019, rather than a finish line. A state with a score of 1,000 still has room for improvement. Likewise, a score of 500 does not mean a state is doing half as well as one scoring 1,000, but it does indicate substantial room for improvement. Changes in scores over time — up to the latest available data, largely 2024 — reflect real changes in child outcomes, not shifts in how states compare to one another (like rankings). The new scores allow states to see their own progress or decline, in addition to how they compare to others. The rankings are based on the scores.

What Does the Enhanced Index Tell Us?

The *2026 KIDS COUNT Data Book* reinforces a consistent finding from past years: large regional differences persist in how children are faring, visualized by the map on page 19. This year, eight Southern states and four Western states ranked the lowest on overall child well-being: Mississippi (50th), New Mexico, Louisiana, Alaska, Nevada, Oklahoma, Texas, Arkansas, Alabama, West Virginia, Arizona and Georgia.

At the upper end, the Northeast is home to five of the top-ranked states overall: New Hampshire (first), Massachusetts (second), Vermont (fourth), New Jersey (sixth) and Connecticut (seventh). Another region with consistently high-ranking states is the Midwest, with four states placing in the top tier for overall well-being: Minnesota (fifth), Wisconsin (eighth), Nebraska (ninth) and Iowa (10th). In the Western region, one Mountain state continues to stand out — Utah, holding third place this year.

On a 0-to-1,000 scale, state scores range from 271 in Mississippi to 838 in New Hampshire on overall child well-being, showing that even



the top-ranked state has room to improve. The overall U.S. score is 547.

Among the five highest-ranked states, two scores are almost tied — Utah (third) with 759 and Vermont (fourth) with 756. This shows how small gaps can be between states with markedly different geographies, demographics and governing approaches. In other cases, a one-rank difference means wider gaps, such as the 72-point distance between Alaska (47th) at 385 and Louisiana (48th) at 313.

Regionally, all areas of the country have states with stronger and weaker child outcomes, and every state has opportunities to improve. Most states with the lowest overall scores are in the

southern half of the United States — among the 15 lowest-scoring states (below 500), 11 fall in the South and three are in the southern portion of the West. Conversely, as reflected in the rankings, the Northeast has a concentration of the highest-scoring states, with five of the seven scoring above 700 located in that region.

The scores also reveal substantial variation within each region, as shown in Table 3 on page 22. Western states show the most uneven outcomes for kids, with overall scores ranging from 281 to 759. The Southern region has the second largest gap between low- and high-performing states, but all regions show a range of outcomes for kids. Even higher-scoring Northeastern states are still separated by 280 points.

TABLE 3: OVERALL WELL-BEING

States With Lowest and Highest Scores on Overall Well-Being by Region³⁵

National Overall Index Score: 547

Region	Lowest Score (Rank)	Highest Score (Rank)	Gap in Scores
All States	Mississippi: 271 (50th)	New Hampshire: 838 (1st)	567
Midwest	Michigan: 527 (34th)	Minnesota: 743 (5th)	216
Northeast	New York: 558 (30th)	New Hampshire: 838 (1st)	280
South	Mississippi: 271 (50th)	Virginia: 661 (11th)	390
West	New Mexico: 281 (49th)	Utah: 759 (3rd)	478
Pacific	Alaska: 385 (47th)	Washington: 634 (17th)	249

Scores by domain — detailed on page 36 — echo these results, with some notable differences:

- Of all domains, Health scores show the widest gap in state performance, with a 761-point spread between the lowest (122) and highest (883) scores. But the U.S. as a whole scores better on children's health, at 607, than overall well-being.
- State Education scores are the lowest of the four domains, ranging from 1 to 731, with the U.S. averaging 417.
- On the other hand, Family and Community scores generally are the strongest of all domains, with states spanning 260 to 937 and a national average of 608.
- With a U.S. score of 557 in Economic Well-Being, this domain more closely mirrors the overall index, though state economic performance is more uneven — from a low of 246 to a high of 933.

Findings by domain also illuminate regional strengths and areas of concern. In Education

and Health, for instance, Northeastern states hold four of the five top scores, whereas the Midwestern region tends to perform well in Economic Well-Being, with seven of the 11 states scoring above 800. While Southern states hold a majority of the lowest scores in Economic Well-Being, Health and Family and Community, the same is not true for Education. Western states, on the other hand, hold four of the five lowest scores in Education, but generally have stronger performance in Family and Community.

Delving deeper into domain results, the following example in the West illustrates how scores can uncover important nuances. Among Pacific states in this region, Alaska (ranked 47th) faces more challenges than its peers, scoring 385 overall compared to California, Hawaii, Oregon and Washington, which all score above 500 or 600. By domain, the picture is more complex: Alaska scores low in Education (63) and Economic Well-Being (341), but it performs better in Health (494) and much better in Family and Community (640). Although



other Pacific states have higher scores across the board, this bifurcated pattern extends to them, too, with children faring better in Health and Family and Community versus the other two domains. Further, Oregon (23rd overall) and California (33rd) each have one very low-performing domain: Oregon scores 233 in Education, ranking 44th, and California scores 425 in Economic Well-Being, at 45th.

In the Southern region, some states show areas of promise even when they score poorly overall. Mississippi, for example, scores at or near the bottom overall and in Health, Economic Well-Being and Family and Community, yet it performs much better in Education — scoring 448 and ranking 16th. Similarly, Texas scores toward the bottom in all domains except Education, where its relatively better score earns a 28th ranking.

The opposite also is true, with high-performing areas still showing critical needs for kids. In the

Northeast, for instance, New York scores well in Health (768, ranked eighth) and in Education (509, ranked ninth) but falls close to last in Economic Well-Being, scoring 406 and placing 46th. Maine, on the other hand, faces hurdles in Education — scoring 312, ranking 41st — far below any other state in this region, and a sharp contrast to its strong score and rank in Family and Community (833, sixth place).

Along the same lines, North Dakota had the most uneven performance of any state, scoring 848 (sixth) in Economic Well-Being but 218 (45th) in Education. In the Midwest, only one other state performs close to North Dakota in Education: Michigan, with a score of 248 (42nd).

This geographic variation reflects wide-ranging conditions and opportunities for children, youth and families across the country. The new scores tell us that leaders can do more to ensure that all young people have the support they need to thrive.

How Has Child Well-Being Changed Over Time?

While a majority of states with the lowest overall scores are in the South, trends from 2019 to 2024 show that Southern states achieved the greatest gains of any region in the country.

In 29 states and the United States as a whole, overall child well-being was worse in 2024 compared to 2019, due in large part to education losses since the pandemic.



At the same time, 15 states saw improvements in child well-being during this period and six held steady.³⁶ Regionally, Northeastern and Midwestern states experienced the largest decreases, while Southern states gained the most ground.

At the state level, Maine had the steepest decline in child well-being since 2019, followed by four Midwestern states: Nebraska, North Dakota, Iowa and Minnesota. Among the 15 states with progress from 2019 to 2024, eight were in the South, led by gains in South Carolina, Louisiana and Kentucky.

By domain, Education trends were the most concerning, with 47 states faring worse in 2024 than in 2019. The biggest drops were in North Dakota, Maine, Delaware, Iowa and Oklahoma. This underscores the pandemic's lingering effects on student learning, particularly reading and math proficiency. Louisiana and Mississippi were the only states in the nation to see growth in Education, while South Carolina remained stable.

Health outcomes also revealed more setbacks than progress for young people, with declines in 26 states and progress in only 10 states since 2019. Maine and Mississippi lost the most ground on children's health, and Virginia, Indiana and New Jersey made the greatest gains.

Progress in Economic Well-Being was more encouraging, with 29 states performing better since 2019, and 13 states faring worse. Rhode Island saw the largest decline, followed by Nebraska and Tennessee. At the other end of the spectrum, Delaware, New Mexico and New Hampshire made the greatest improvements. New Mexico's economic progress stands out, as a historically lower-ranked state achieving significant advances for kids. (See page 7 of the President's Letter for a spotlight on New Mexico's recent policy initiatives.)



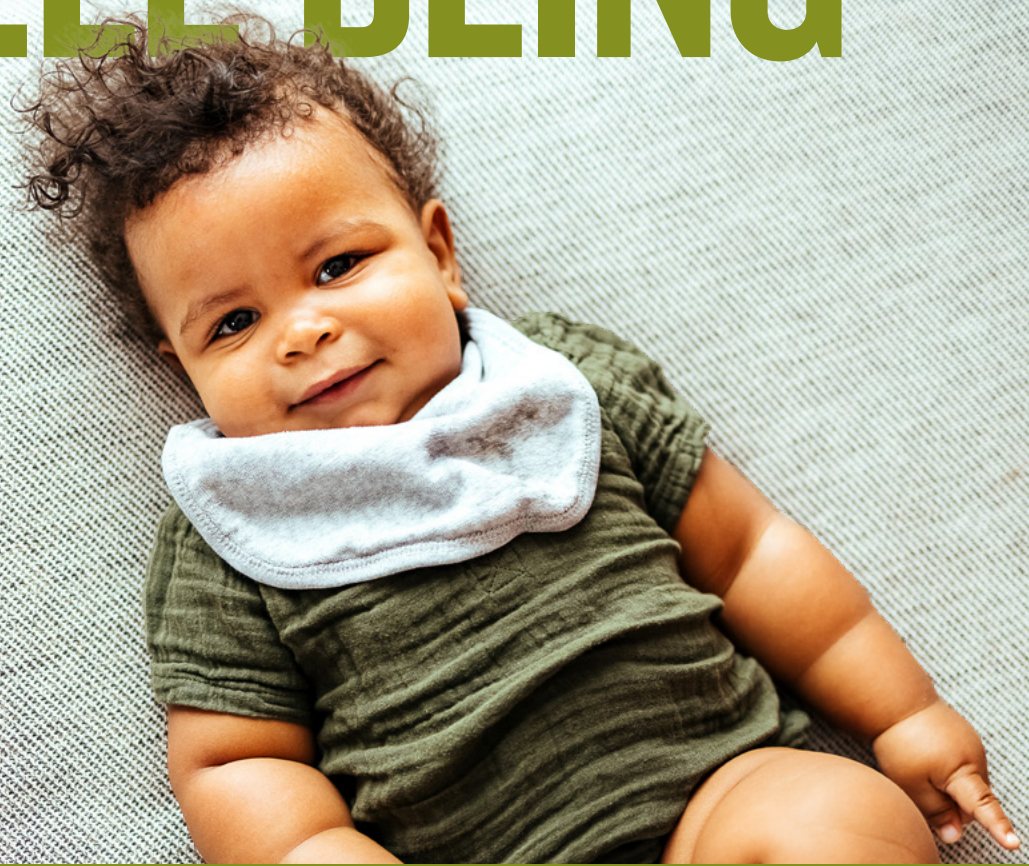
The Family and Community domain stands in contrast to others: most states (45) improved and the rest were steady. None declined. Arizona saw the greatest gains by a large margin. State improvements in this domain were largely driven by reductions in teen birth rates and shares of children living in high-poverty areas.

As a nation, these trends from 2019 to 2024 show widespread progress in Family and Community, moderate success in Economic Well-Being, limited steps forward in Health and almost no advances in Education. At the same time, the new scores reinforce that *all* states can do more to support children — from economic and educational opportunities to healthcare access and adequate family and community resources. Additionally, we know that challenges for children and families have evolved since 2024 that are not yet reflected in available data, underscoring the need to continue monitoring and supporting their well-being.

Overall, the new scores detailed on the following pages make state progress and setbacks more visible, clarify the gaps between states and illuminate where targeted policy and program action can have the greatest impact. The indicator data in the Appendices (see pages 38–41) offer additional insight into state needs, strengths and what’s behind these trends.

While index rankings and scores are not provided for the District of Columbia and Puerto Rico, children and youth in both places face significant challenges — and often fare worse than their peers in the states — based on data provided in the Appendices. Additionally, the index does not include the U.S. Virgin Islands because the American Community Survey is not conducted there; however, the KIDS COUNT Data Center includes other statistics for children and families in this territory, which also has its own dedicated data book and dashboard.³⁷

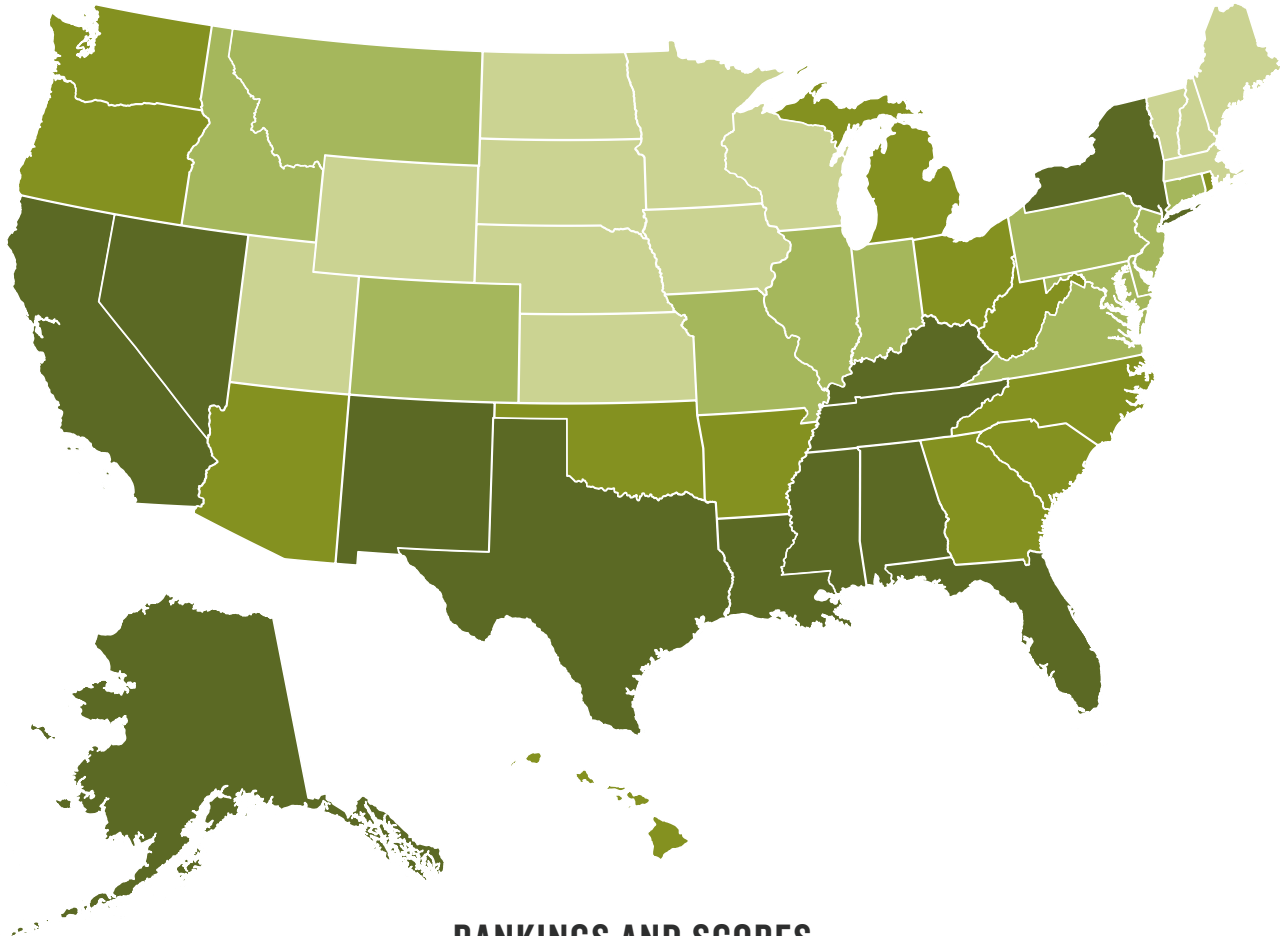
ECONOMIC WELL-BEING



Indicators: child poverty; stable parental employment; high housing cost burdens; teens not in school or working

Family financial stability provides a critical foundation for healthy child and youth development. Adequate economic resources enable kids to get life's essentials — such as stable housing, nutritious food, accessible healthcare, quality education and supportive neighborhoods — and grow into strong teens and adults. When parents lack affordable housing, steady employment or adequate wages, their ability to meet basic family needs and access resources to promote their kids' well-being is limited. Poverty can disrupt children's cognitive, mental and physical health, and reverberate across their lifespan, increasing the risk of poor school, work and health outcomes in adolescence and adulthood. Kids in families living just above the poverty line often struggle, too, and tend to fare worse than kids in higher-income families. The impact goes well beyond individuals: The U.S. cost of child poverty alone is estimated at up to \$1 trillion annually due to lower productivity and higher medical and other expenditures.³⁸

A 2026 STATE-TO-STATE COMPARISON OF ECONOMIC WELL-BEING



RANKINGS AND SCORES

BEST		Scores 730–933	BETTER		Scores 625–704	WORSE		Scores 509–621	WORST		Scores 246–507				
1.	New Hampshire	933	↑	14.	Delaware	704	↑	26.	Washington	621	↓	39.	Kentucky	507	↑
2.	Minnesota	899	↑	15.	Idaho	700	↓	27.	Ohio	618	→	40.	Alabama	486	↑
3.	Wyoming	873	↑	15.	Missouri	700	↑	28.	North Carolina	599	↑	41.	Texas	476	↓
4.	Vermont	870	↑	17.	Virginia	696	↓	29.	Oregon	571	↑	42.	Tennessee	454	↓
5.	Kansas	849	↑	18.	Maryland	685	↑	30.	Oklahoma	556	↑	43.	Florida	446	→
6.	North Dakota	848	↓	19.	Pennsylvania	674	↑	31.	Arizona	552	↑	44.	Nevada	437	→
7.	Utah	817	→	20.	Connecticut	645	↑	32.	Michigan	549	↓	45.	California	425	↓
8.	Nebraska	816	↓	21.	Colorado	635	↓	33.	Arkansas	536	↑	46.	New York	406	↓
9.	Wisconsin	814	↑	22.	New Jersey	629	→	34.	Georgia	522	↑	47.	New Mexico	399	↑
10.	Iowa	813	↑	23.	Indiana	627	→	35.	Hawaii	518	↑	48.	Alaska	341	↓
11.	South Dakota	806	↑	24.	Illinois	625	→	36.	Rhode Island	515	↓	49.	Mississippi	252	↑
12.	Maine	732	↑	24.	Montana	625	↑	37.	South Carolina	509	↑	50.	Louisiana	246	→
13.	Massachusetts	730	↑					37.	West Virginia	509	↑				

↑ Index score improved relative to 2019 by at least 15 points.
 ↓ Index score declined relative to 2019 by at least 15 points.
 → Index score remained stable relative to 2019.

District of Columbia and Puerto Rico are not ranked or scored.

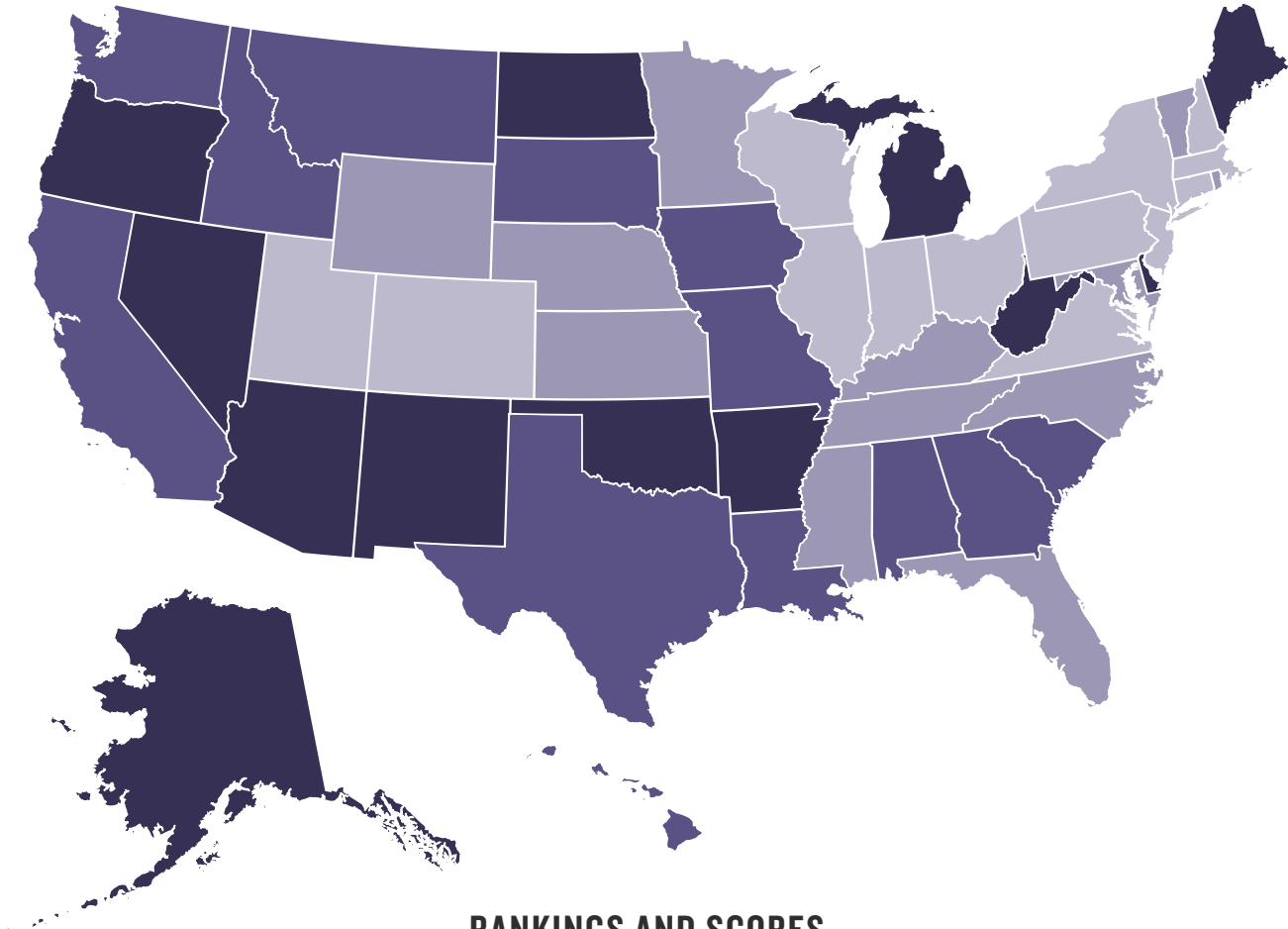
EDUCATION



Indicators: young children not in school; fourth grade reading; eighth grade math; high school graduation

The roots of educational achievement and overall well-being are established at the beginning of a child's life. Early experiences are formative in preparing kids for lifelong learning, and quality early childhood education is strongly linked to long-term student success and positive health outcomes.³⁹ Early learning opportunities, including preschool, improve school readiness, which is important given that kids who enter kindergarten behind their peers may not catch up. As students reach higher grades, fourth grade reading and eighth grade math proficiency are key milestones predictive of later education, work and economic success.⁴⁰ Likewise, high school graduation expands access to higher education and career pathways, and it is linked to better health and economic well-being in adulthood.⁴¹ Quality education in high school is vital not only for academic success but also because adolescence is another formative phase of development, when youth are navigating profound physiological and life transitions, with potentially lasting impacts. Unfortunately, access to quality education is uneven, and disparities in student achievement exist by income status, race and ethnicity, and other characteristics.⁴² Since school performance is affected by issues such as whether students feel safe, healthy, hungry, depressed or worried about their families, strategies to improve academic success require working across sectors to promote student well-being.

A 2026 STATE-TO-STATE COMPARISON OF EDUCATION



RANKINGS AND SCORES

BEST		Scores 470–731		BETTER		Scores 408–463		WORSE		Scores 325–399		WORST		Scores 1–322	
1.	New Jersey	731	↓	14.	Vermont	463	↓	26.	Montana	399	↓	39.	Delaware	322	↓
2.	Massachusetts	722	↓	15.	Florida	457	↓	27.	Iowa	394	↓	40.	Arkansas	318	↓
3.	Connecticut	664	↓	16.	Mississippi	448	↑	28.	Texas	390	↓	41.	Maine	312	↓
4.	New Hampshire	600	↓	17.	Wyoming	440	↓	29.	Missouri	383	↓	42.	Michigan	248	↓
5.	Utah	563	↓	18.	Nebraska	439	↓	30.	South Carolina	375	→	43.	West Virginia	242	↓
6.	Wisconsin	546	↓	18.	Tennessee	439	↓	31.	Washington	374	↓	44.	Oregon	233	↓
7.	Illinois	518	↓	20.	Maryland	438	↓	32.	Georgia	369	↓	45.	North Dakota	218	↓
8.	Colorado	510	↓	21.	Minnesota	437	↓	33.	Hawaii	365	↓	46.	Nevada	167	↓
9.	New York	509	↓	22.	Kentucky	429	↓	34.	California	363	↓	47.	Arizona	141	↓
10.	Pennsylvania	491	↓	23.	Kansas	416	↓	35.	Louisiana	349	↑	48.	Oklahoma	126	↓
11.	Indiana	479	↓	24.	North Carolina	409	↓	36.	Idaho	339	↓	49.	Alaska	63	↓
12.	Ohio	473	↓	25.	Rhode Island	408	↓	37.	Alabama	330	↓	50.	New Mexico	1	↓
13.	Virginia	470	↓					38.	South Dakota	325	↓				

↑ Index score improved relative to 2019 by at least 15 points.
 ↓ Index score declined relative to 2019 by at least 15 points.
 → Index score remained stable relative to 2019.

District of Columbia and Puerto Rico are not ranked or scored.

HEALTH



Indicators: low birth weight; health insurance coverage; child and teen deaths; youth obesity or overweight

Good health begins before birth, and experiences during childhood, particularly the first years of life, provide the underpinnings for future health and well-being. Many chronic diseases in adults have origins in childhood. While U.S. children's health has improved in some ways in recent decades, our country is facing a child health crisis, marked by high rates of chronic disease, mental illness and deaths from firearms, drug overdoses and suicides.⁴³ Efforts to address these issues begin by improving maternal health so babies are born healthy and by ensuring kids and youth have affordable, high-quality health insurance and care, including mental and behavioral healthcare. Setting kids on a path toward optimal health from the start — which can improve their educational attainment and their ability to become healthy, self-sufficient adults — has clear implications for the nation's future workforce and economy.

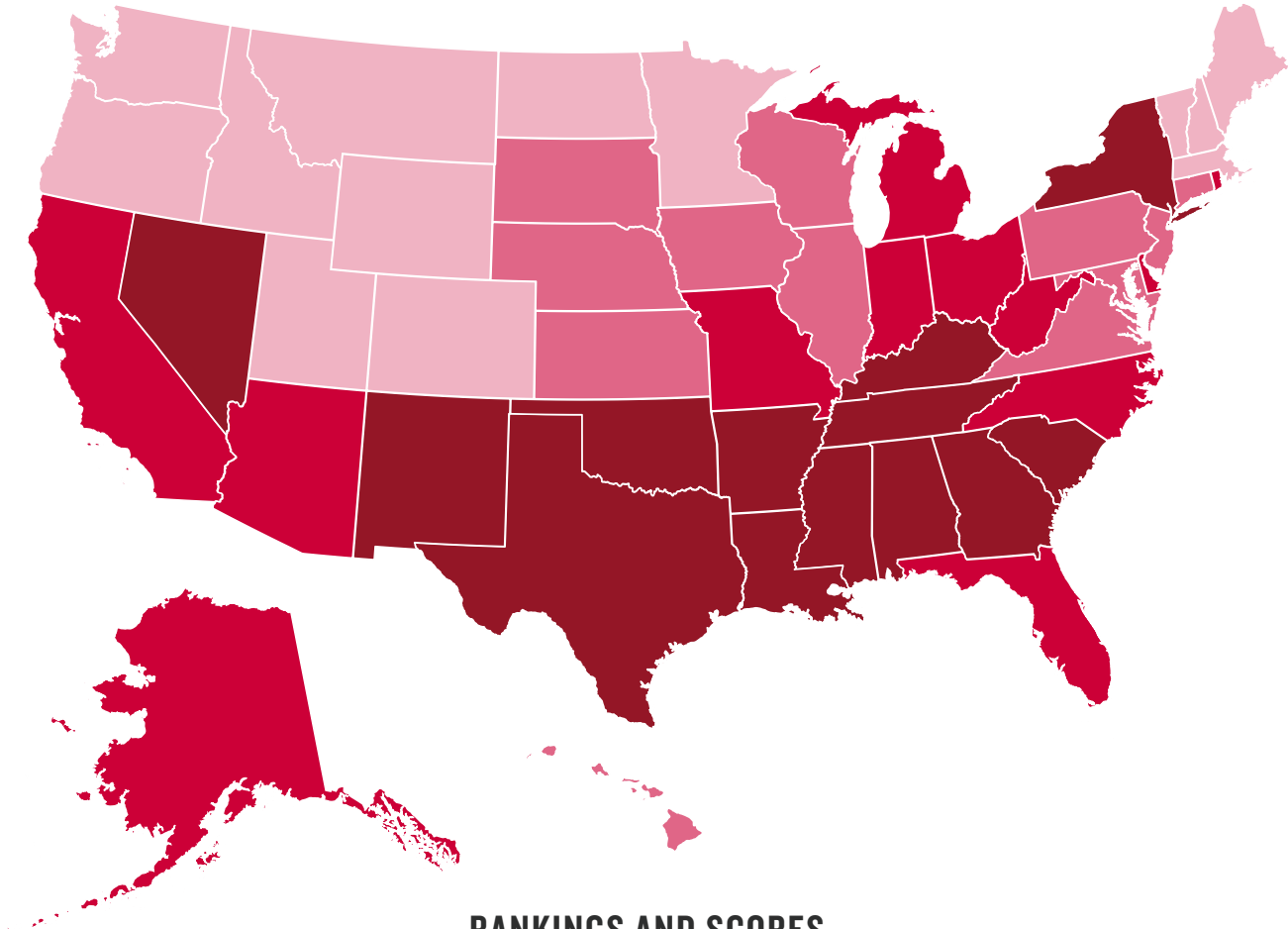
FAMILY AND COMMUNITY



Indicators: single-parent families; household heads lacking high school diplomas; high-poverty areas; teen births

Kids grow up in the context of families and communities, which powerfully shape their experiences and influence their development and life opportunities. Children are more likely to thrive when they have access to stable, nurturing relationships and environments — and adequate resources and sources of support. Some parents and caregivers face greater risks of experiencing poverty and high stress, which can increase parenting strain and limit access to resources that support their kids. Among those with higher chances of facing poverty are single parents, those lacking a high school diploma and teen parents. Children growing up in these circumstances, including living in high-poverty neighborhoods, are more likely to have reduced academic achievement and a host of adverse long-term outcomes. Though teen births are at historic lows, these young parents and their kids commonly face unique life obstacles as well.⁴⁴ Efforts to strengthen children's lives benefit from including their families and communities, ensuring that parents and kids have safe neighborhoods with access to quality healthcare, education, healthy food, job opportunities and other services. These types of supportive environments enrich children's lives, relationships and chances for success.

A 2026 STATE-TO-STATE COMPARISON OF FAMILY AND COMMUNITY



RANKINGS AND SCORES

BEST		Scores 762–937	BETTER		Scores 671–750	WORSE		Scores 564–670	WORST		Scores 260–548
1.	New Hampshire	937	↑	14.	Virginia	750	↑	26.	Rhode Island	670	↑
2.	Utah	922	↑	15.	South Dakota	738	↑	27.	Michigan	651	↑
3.	Vermont	882	↑	16.	Wisconsin	737	↑	27.	Missouri	651	↑
4.	Minnesota	846	↑	17.	Iowa	732	→	29.	Florida	644	↑
5.	Idaho	842	↑	18.	Connecticut	731	→	30.	Alaska	640	→
6.	Maine	833	↑	19.	Hawaii	730	↑	31.	Delaware	629	↑
7.	Wyoming	821	↑	20.	New Jersey	724	↑	32.	North Carolina	601	↑
8.	North Dakota	799	↑	21.	Nebraska	706	→	33.	Ohio	599	↑
9.	Washington	788	↑	22.	Kansas	690	↑	34.	California	586	↑
10.	Oregon	787	↑	23.	Maryland	684	↑	35.	West Virginia	583	↑
11.	Massachusetts	771	→	24.	Pennsylvania	674	↑	36.	Indiana	582	↑
12.	Montana	767	↑	25.	Illinois	671	↑	37.	Arizona	564	↑
13.	Colorado	762	↑								
				38.	New York	548	↑				
				38.	South Carolina	548	↑				
				40.	Georgia	534	↑				
				41.	Nevada	533	↑				
				42.	Tennessee	524	↑				
				43.	Oklahoma	516	↑				
				44.	Kentucky	501	↑				
				45.	Arkansas	472	↑				
				46.	Alabama	465	↑				
				47.	Texas	431	↑				
				48.	Louisiana	282	↑				
				49.	Mississippi	263	↑				
				50.	New Mexico	260	↑				

↑ Index score improved relative to 2019 by at least 15 points.
 ↓ Index score declined relative to 2019 by at least 15 points.
 → Index score remained stable relative to 2019.

District of Columbia and Puerto Rico are not ranked or scored.

ENDNOTES

- 1 While the official child poverty rate fell by 2 percentage points between 2019 and 2024, the Census Bureau's Supplemental Poverty Measure — which factors in noncash benefits, major family expenses and regional differences in living costs — shows that child poverty nearly tripled between 2021 and 2024. Learn more in the Foundation's KIDS COUNT data snapshot: [Measuring Access to Opportunity in the United States: A 10-Year Update](#).
- 2 Regions are defined according to the U.S. Census Bureau: https://www2.census.gov/geo/pdfs/maps-data/maps/reference/us_regdiv.pdf. *Data Book* findings are also presented by these regions in the interactive version at www.aecf.org/interactive/databook.
- 3 American Statistical Association. (2025, December). *The nation's data at risk: 2025 report*. <https://www.amstat.org/policy-and-advocacy/the-nations-data-at-risk--2025-report>
- 4 The Annie E. Casey Foundation, KIDS COUNT Data Center. (2026, March). *Children living in high-poverty areas in United States* [Table]. <https://datacenter.aecf.org/data/tables/6795-children-living-in-high-poverty-areas?loc=1&loct=1#detailed/1/any/false/2675,1983,1485,11/any/13892>
- 5 The Annie E. Casey Foundation, KIDS COUNT Data Center. (2026, April). *Total teen births in United States* [Table]. <https://datacenter.aecf.org/data/tables/6053-total-teen-births?loc=1&loct=1#detailed/1/any/false/1096,2545,1095,2048,574,1729,573,133,11,1/any/12722>
- 6 Mickler, A. K., & Tollestrup, J. (2025, April 17). *Teen births in the United States: Overview and recent trends*. Congress.gov. <https://www.congress.gov/crs-product/R45184>
- 7 The Annie E. Casey Foundation, KIDS COUNT Data Center. (2026, March). *Children living in families where the household head lacks a high school diploma in United States* [Table]. <https://datacenter.aecf.org/data/tables/7751-children-in-families-where-the-household-head-lacks-a-high-school-diploma-by-race-and-ethnicity?loc=1&loct=1#detailed/1/any/false/1096,2545,1095,2048,1729,573,133,16/1353/14939>
- 8 The Annie E. Casey Foundation, KIDS COUNT Data Center. (2025, September). *Children in single-parent families in United States* [Line graph]. <https://datacenter.aecf.org/data/line/106-children-in-single-parent-families?loc=1&loct=1#1/1/false/1096,2545,1095,2048,1729,37,871,870,573,869/asc/any/430>
- 9 The Annie E. Casey Foundation, KIDS COUNT Data Center. (2025, January). *Fourth grade reading achievement levels in United States* [Line graph]. <https://datacenter.aecf.org/data/line/5116-fourth-grade-reading-achievement-levels?loc=1&loct=1#1/1/true/1096,1095,1729,871,573,36,867,38,18,16/asc/1187/11560> Note: The National Assessment of Educational Progress updates these data every other year.
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APPENDIX A

SCORES FOR CHILD WELL-BEING

Location	OVERALL SCORE	ECONOMIC WELL-BEING SCORE	EDUCATION SCORE	HEALTH SCORE	FAMILY AND COMMUNITY SCORE
United States	547	557	417	607	608
Alabama	435	486	330	458	465
Alaska	385	341	63	494	640
Arizona	446	552	141	528	564
Arkansas	427	536	318	382	472
California	532	425	363	755	586
Colorado	636	635	510	638	762
Connecticut	708	645	664	793	731
Delaware	554	704	322	560	629
District of Columbia	N.A.	N.A.	N.A.	N.A.	N.A.
Florida	519	446	457	529	644
Georgia	466	522	369	440	534
Hawaii	584	518	365	724	730
Idaho	638	700	339	671	842
Illinois	615	625	518	646	671
Indiana	566	627	479	577	582
Iowa	667	813	394	729	732
Kansas	636	849	416	588	690
Kentucky	498	507	429	556	501
Louisiana	313	246	349	376	282
Maine	613	732	312	576	833
Maryland	616	685	438	659	684
Massachusetts	775	730	722	877	771
Michigan	527	549	248	662	651
Minnesota	743	899	437	792	846
Mississippi	271	252	448	122	263
Missouri	567	700	383	534	651
Montana	590	625	399	569	767
Nebraska	669	816	439	716	706
Nevada	398	437	167	457	533
New Hampshire	838	933	600	883	937
New Jersey	715	629	731	776	724
New Mexico	281	399	1	464	260
New York	558	406	509	768	548
North Carolina	537	599	409	541	601
North Dakota	636	848	218	678	799
Ohio	569	618	473	587	599
Oklahoma	425	556	126	502	516
Oregon	592	571	233	777	787
Pennsylvania	626	674	491	667	674
Puerto Rico	N.A.	N.A.	N.A.	N.A.	N.A.
Rhode Island	583	515	408	737	670
South Carolina	468	509	375	442	548
South Dakota	602	806	325	540	738
Tennessee	475	454	439	484	524
Texas	425	476	390	404	431
Utah	759	817	563	734	922
Vermont	756	870	463	808	882
Virginia	661	696	470	730	750
Washington	634	621	374	753	788
West Virginia	443	509	242	440	583
Wisconsin	692	814	546	673	737
Wyoming	654	873	440	484	821

N.A.: Not available

STATE RANKINGS FOR CHILD WELL-BEING

Location	OVERALL RANK	ECONOMIC WELL-BEING RANK	EDUCATION RANK	HEALTH RANK	FAMILY AND COMMUNITY RANK
Alabama	42	40	37	42	46
Alaska	47	48	49	38	30
Arizona	40	31	47	36	37
Arkansas	43	33	40	48	45
California	33	45	34	9	34
Colorado	14	21	8	24	13
Connecticut	7	20	3	4	18
Delaware	31	14	39	30	31
District of Columbia	N.R.	N.R.	N.R.	N.R.	N.R.
Florida	35	43	15	35	29
Georgia	39	34	32	45	40
Hawaii	25	35	33	15	19
Idaho	13	15	36	19	5
Illinois	20	24	7	23	25
Indiana	29	23	11	27	36
Iowa	10	10	27	14	17
Kansas	14	5	23	25	22
Kentucky	36	39	22	31	44
Louisiana	48	50	35	49	48
Maine	21	12	41	28	6
Maryland	19	18	20	22	23
Massachusetts	2	13	2	2	11
Michigan	34	32	42	21	27
Minnesota	5	2	21	5	4
Mississippi	50	49	16	50	49
Missouri	28	15	29	34	27
Montana	24	24	26	29	12
Nebraska	9	8	18	16	21
Nevada	46	44	46	43	41
New Hampshire	1	1	4	1	1
New Jersey	6	22	1	7	20
New Mexico	49	47	50	41	50
New York	30	46	9	8	38
North Carolina	32	28	24	32	32
North Dakota	14	6	45	17	8
Ohio	27	27	12	26	33
Oklahoma	44	30	48	37	43
Oregon	23	29	44	6	10
Pennsylvania	18	19	10	20	24
Puerto Rico	N.R.	N.R.	N.R.	N.R.	N.R.
Rhode Island	26	36	25	11	26
South Carolina	38	37	30	44	38
South Dakota	22	11	38	33	15
Tennessee	37	42	18	39	42
Texas	44	41	28	47	47
Utah	3	7	5	12	2
Vermont	4	4	14	3	3
Virginia	11	17	13	13	14
Washington	17	26	31	10	9
West Virginia	41	37	43	45	35
Wisconsin	8	9	6	18	16
Wyoming	12	3	17	39	7

N.R.: Not ranked

APPENDIX B

ECONOMIC WELL-BEING INDICATORS

Location	Children in poverty (2024)		Children whose parents lack secure employment (2024)		Children living in households with a high housing cost burden (2024)		Teens not in school and not working (2024)	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
United States	11,117,000	15	18,420,000	25	22,385,000	31	1,218,000	7
Alabama	226,000	20	312,000	28	293,000	26	22,000	8
Alaska	22,000	13	60,000	34	52,000	29	4,000	11
Arizona	228,000	15	406,000	26	467,000	29	30,000	7
Arkansas	138,000	20	176,000	25	176,000	25	13,000	7
California	1,208,000	15	2,354,000	28	3,432,000	41	142,000	7
Colorado	137,000	11	267,000	22	386,000	32	21,000	7
Connecticut	96,000	13	174,000	24	236,000	32	9,000	5
Delaware	26,000	13	52,000	25	53,000	25	3,000	5
District of Columbia	37,000	28	48,000	37	53,000	41	2,000	6
Florida	685,000	15	1,144,000	25	1,762,000	39	81,000	7
Georgia	405,000	16	624,000	25	785,000	31	49,000	8
Hawaii	33,000	12	79,000	27	111,000	38	4,000	6
Idaho	51,000	11	101,000	22	111,000	24	9,000	8
Illinois	375,000	14	677,000	25	736,000	27	42,000	6
Indiana	254,000	16	369,000	23	369,000	23	29,000	8
Iowa	98,000	14	143,000	20	157,000	21	9,000	5
Kansas	87,000	13	127,000	19	140,000	20	9,000	5
Kentucky	192,000	19	287,000	28	232,000	23	20,000	8
Louisiana	264,000	25	354,000	33	315,000	30	22,000	9
Maine	30,000	13	63,000	26	54,000	22	3,000	5
Maryland	143,000	11	301,000	22	414,000	30	20,000	6
Massachusetts	149,000	11	317,000	23	433,000	32	13,000	3
Michigan	373,000	18	536,000	26	532,000	25	40,000	8
Minnesota	121,000	10	251,000	20	257,000	20	14,000	4
Mississippi	166,000	25	219,000	33	187,000	28	18,000	10
Missouri	207,000	15	315,000	23	306,000	22	20,000	6
Montana	25,000	11	58,000	25	54,000	23	5,000	9
Nebraska	57,000	12	99,000	21	116,000	24	5,000	4
Nevada	99,000	15	164,000	24	252,000	37	15,000	10
New Hampshire	16,000	7	41,000	17	61,000	25	3,000	4
New Jersey	236,000	12	475,000	23	675,000	33	29,000	6
New Mexico	95,000	22	138,000	31	118,000	27	9,000	8
New York	697,000	18	1,181,000	30	1,457,000	37	63,000	6
North Carolina	382,000	17	604,000	26	654,000	28	33,000	6
North Dakota	23,000	13	36,000	20	37,000	21	2,000	4
Ohio	417,000	16	661,000	26	632,000	25	38,000	6
Oklahoma	179,000	19	258,000	27	245,000	26	15,000	6
Oregon	106,000	13	210,000	26	254,000	31	15,000	7
Pennsylvania	396,000	15	631,000	24	687,000	26	36,000	5
Puerto Rico	248,000	52	219,000	45	122,000	25	17,000	11
Rhode Island	33,000	16	56,000	27	73,000	36	3,000	5
South Carolina	208,000	18	318,000	28	310,000	27	22,000	7
South Dakota	24,000	11	46,000	21	46,000	21	3,000	6
Tennessee	297,000	19	441,000	28	459,000	29	29,000	8
Texas	1,354,000	18	1,891,000	25	2,541,000	33	144,000	8
Utah	79,000	9	170,000	18	234,000	25	15,000	7
Vermont	10,000	9	23,000	20	20,000	18	2,000	6
Virginia	216,000	12	399,000	21	533,000	28	31,000	7
Washington	185,000	11	392,000	24	511,000	31	27,000	7
West Virginia	73,000	22	100,000	29	72,000	21	7,000	8
Wisconsin	148,000	12	251,000	20	266,000	22	16,000	5
Wyoming	12,000	10	21,000	17	31,000	25	2,000	5

EDUCATION INDICATORS

Location	Young children (ages 3 and 4) not in school (2020–24)		Fourth graders not proficient in reading (2024)		Eighth graders not proficient in math (2024)		High school students not graduating on time (2023–24)	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
United States	4,277,000	54	N.A.	70	N.A.	73	N.A.	13
Alabama	73,000	57	N.A.	72	N.A.	82	N.A.	10
Alaska	12,000	64	N.A.	78	N.A.	78	N.A.	22
Arizona	111,000	65	N.A.	74	N.A.	74	N.A.	22
Arkansas	44,000	59	N.A.	72	N.A.	80	N.A.	11
California	503,000	55	N.A.	71	N.A.	75	N.A.	14
Colorado	66,000	51	N.A.	64	N.A.	68	N.A.	16
Connecticut	30,000	40	N.A.	64	N.A.	68	N.A.	11
Delaware	13,000	55	N.A.	74	N.A.	81	N.A.	11
District of Columbia	3,000	21	N.A.	70	N.A.	80	N.A.	24
Florida	245,000	51	N.A.	67	N.A.	79	N.A.	10
Georgia	142,000	53	N.A.	70	N.A.	76	N.A.	15
Hawaii	19,000	56	N.A.	68	N.A.	77	N.A.	14
Idaho	30,000	62	N.A.	68	N.A.	69	N.A.	18
Illinois	141,000	49	N.A.	70	N.A.	68	N.A.	12
Indiana	103,000	60	N.A.	66	N.A.	69	N.A.	11
Iowa	44,000	57	N.A.	71	N.A.	73	N.A.	13
Kansas	40,000	55	N.A.	72	N.A.	74	N.A.	11
Kentucky	70,000	63	N.A.	67	N.A.	76	N.A.	8
Louisiana	60,000	51	N.A.	68	N.A.	79	N.A.	17
Maine	16,000	60	N.A.	74	N.A.	75	N.A.	12
Maryland	81,000	55	N.A.	66	N.A.	75	N.A.	12
Massachusetts	65,000	45	N.A.	60	N.A.	63	N.A.	12
Michigan	127,000	56	N.A.	75	N.A.	76	N.A.	17
Minnesota	75,000	55	N.A.	69	N.A.	66	N.A.	16
Mississippi	37,000	51	N.A.	68	N.A.	78	N.A.	11
Missouri	84,000	56	N.A.	73	N.A.	77	N.A.	9
Montana	15,000	62	N.A.	68	N.A.	68	N.A.	15
Nebraska	29,000	57	N.A.	72	N.A.	68	N.A.	12
Nevada	49,000	67	N.A.	70	N.A.	80	N.A.	18
New Hampshire	13,000	48	N.A.	64	N.A.	68	N.A.	11
New Jersey	85,000	38	N.A.	62	N.A.	63	N.A.	12
New Mexico	28,000	60	N.A.	80	N.A.	86	N.A.	22
New York	183,000	40	N.A.	69	N.A.	74	N.A.	14
North Carolina	151,000	60	N.A.	70	N.A.	69	N.A.	13
North Dakota	15,000	71	N.A.	71	N.A.	71	N.A.	18
Ohio	165,000	59	N.A.	68	N.A.	68	N.A.	12
Oklahoma	61,000	60	N.A.	77	N.A.	83	N.A.	18
Oregon	51,000	58	N.A.	73	N.A.	76	N.A.	18
Pennsylvania	157,000	56	N.A.	67	N.A.	69	N.A.	12
Puerto Rico	19,000	43	N.A.	N.A.	N.A.	>99.5	N.A.	N.A.
Rhode Island	12,000	52	N.A.	67	N.A.	74	N.A.	16
South Carolina	66,000	56	N.A.	68	N.A.	76	N.A.	15
South Dakota	15,000	64	N.A.	72	N.A.	67	N.A.	16
Tennessee	104,000	62	N.A.	68	N.A.	69	N.A.	11
Texas	460,000	57	N.A.	72	N.A.	76	N.A.	9
Utah	55,000	57	N.A.	64	N.A.	65	N.A.	11
Vermont	5,000	40	N.A.	69	N.A.	71	N.A.	18
Virginia	110,000	55	N.A.	69	N.A.	71	N.A.	10
Washington	104,000	57	N.A.	68	N.A.	70	N.A.	17
West Virginia	24,000	68	N.A.	75	N.A.	82	N.A.	7
Wisconsin	78,000	58	N.A.	69	N.A.	63	N.A.	9
Wyoming	7,000	52	N.A.	64	N.A.	70	N.A.	18

N.A.: Not available

HEALTH INDICATORS

Location	Low birth-weight babies (2024)		Children without health insurance (2024)		Child and teen deaths per 100,000 (2024)		Children and teens (ages 10 to 17) who are overweight or obese (2023–24)	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Rate	Number	Percent
United States	308,966	8.5	4,648,000	6	21,189	27	N.A.	30
Alabama	5,856	10.1	52,000	4	473	39	N.A.	33
Alaska	620	6.9	16,000	9	81	44	N.A.	31
Arizona	6,193	7.9	157,000	9	517	30	N.A.	31
Arkansas	3,375	9.5	57,000	8	260	35	N.A.	37
California	29,730	7.4	280,000	3	1,862	21	N.A.	31
Colorado	6,120	9.5	77,000	6	374	29	N.A.	24
Connecticut	2,801	8.1	20,000	3	129	16	N.A.	29
Delaware	997	9.5	13,000	6	63	27	N.A.	31
District of Columbia	837	11.0	4,000	3	57	40	N.A.	36
Florida	20,222	9.0	403,000	8	1,331	28	N.A.	30
Georgia	12,972	10.3	214,000	8	918	34	N.A.	31
Hawaii	1,341	9.0	9,000	3	63	20	N.A.	28
Idaho	1,643	7.1	40,000	8	137	27	N.A.	27
Illinois	10,778	8.6	104,000	4	778	27	N.A.	31
Indiana	6,825	8.5	102,000	6	549	32	N.A.	30
Iowa	2,657	7.3	30,000	4	177	22	N.A.	31
Kansas	2,654	7.8	51,000	7	236	32	N.A.	30
Kentucky	4,640	8.8	54,000	5	335	31	N.A.	33
Louisiana	6,194	11.6	46,000	4	440	39	N.A.	35
Maine	875	7.5	12,000	5	92	34	N.A.	35
Maryland	5,870	8.9	67,000	5	354	24	N.A.	29
Massachusetts	5,161	7.6	31,000	2	229	15	N.A.	25
Michigan	8,951	9.0	79,000	4	547	24	N.A.	30
Minnesota	4,632	7.5	51,000	4	328	24	N.A.	25
Mississippi	4,249	12.7	42,000	6	362	50	N.A.	42
Missouri	5,979	8.8	95,000	7	498	34	N.A.	30
Montana	865	7.6	19,000	8	87	35	N.A.	29
Nebraska	1,985	8.0	27,000	5	125	24	N.A.	26
Nevada	3,144	9.7	58,000	8	234	32	N.A.	32
New Hampshire	781	6.6	6,000	2	57	21	N.A.	25
New Jersey	7,931	7.8	102,000	5	355	16	N.A.	27
New Mexico	1,970	9.2	29,000	6	178	37	N.A.	34
New York	17,262	8.4	113,000	3	850	20	N.A.	27
North Carolina	11,345	9.2	137,000	6	846	33	N.A.	31
North Dakota	680	7.1	13,000	7	55	27	N.A.	28
Ohio	11,158	8.8	152,000	6	756	28	N.A.	31
Oklahoma	3,923	8.2	87,000	9	364	35	N.A.	31
Oregon	2,746	7.1	24,000	3	230	26	N.A.	28
Pennsylvania	10,594	8.3	153,000	5	622	22	N.A.	30
Puerto Rico	1,970	10.9	13,000	2	116	22	N.A.	N.A.
Rhode Island	778	7.8	8,000	4	42	18	N.A.	31
South Carolina	5,716	9.7	72,000	6	452	36	N.A.	34
South Dakota	833	7.3	18,000	8	96	41	N.A.	29
Tennessee	7,340	8.8	109,000	7	633	38	N.A.	33
Texas	33,367	8.5	1,100,000	14	2,318	28	N.A.	32
Utah	3,380	7.2	65,000	7	252	25	N.A.	25
Vermont	362	7.2	3,000	3	32	25	N.A.	26
Virginia	7,928	8.4	103,000	5	498	25	N.A.	24
Washington	5,785	7.0	68,000	4	417	24	N.A.	29
West Virginia	1,704	10.0	11,000	3	125	33	N.A.	40
Wisconsin	4,628	7.8	55,000	4	333	25	N.A.	32
Wyoming	589	9.7	12,000	9	42	31	N.A.	29

N.A.: Not available

FAMILY AND COMMUNITY INDICATORS

Location	Children in single-parent families (2024)		Children in families where the household head lacks a high school diploma (2024)		Children living in high-poverty areas (2020–24)		Teen births per 1,000 (2024)	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Rate
United States	23,472,000	34	7,868,000	11	5,419,000	7	137,273	13
Alabama	413,000	39	107,000	9	129,000	11	3,287	19
Alaska	53,000	33	14,000	8	14,000	8	317	15
Arizona	531,000	36	190,000	12	115,000	7	3,410	14
Arkansas	233,000	36	71,000	10	70,000	10	2,273	22
California	2,752,000	34	1,389,000	17	418,000	5	11,164	9
Colorado	321,000	28	117,000	10	19,000	2	2,057	11
Connecticut	231,000	33	58,000	8	50,000	7	782	7
Delaware	78,000	39	22,000	10	4,000	2	437	13
District of Columbia	63,000	51	16,000	13	26,000	20	250	12
Florida	1,557,000	37	405,000	9	241,000	6	7,822	12
Georgia	889,000	37	263,000	10	220,000	9	6,100	16
Hawaii	99,000	36	18,000	6	9,000	3	416	11
Idaho	107,000	24	38,000	8	5,000	1	767	10
Illinois	872,000	34	239,000	9	182,000	7	4,228	10
Indiana	513,000	34	170,000	11	114,000	7	3,468	15
Iowa	217,000	31	58,000	8	24,000	3	1,359	12
Kansas	183,000	28	66,000	10	31,000	4	1,515	15
Kentucky	316,000	34	103,000	10	109,000	11	2,975	20
Louisiana	444,000	45	111,000	10	211,000	20	3,244	21
Maine	70,000	31	14,000	6	5,000	2	310	8
Maryland	447,000	34	139,000	10	48,000	3	2,045	10
Massachusetts	434,000	33	101,000	7	69,000	5	1,247	5
Michigan	667,000	33	160,000	8	232,000	11	3,255	10
Minnesota	346,000	28	82,000	6	33,000	3	1,395	7
Mississippi	278,000	45	76,000	11	128,000	19	2,388	23
Missouri	416,000	32	111,000	8	78,000	6	3,168	16
Montana	57,000	27	17,000	7	13,000	5	373	11
Nebraska	126,000	27	45,000	9	23,000	5	970	14
Nevada	259,000	39	99,000	14	33,000	5	1,211	12
New Hampshire	66,000	28	10,000	4	<500	<.5	185	5
New Jersey	615,000	31	203,000	10	115,000	6	2,115	7
New Mexico	182,000	44	63,000	14	93,000	20	1,280	18
New York	1,290,000	34	505,000	13	567,000	14	4,766	8
North Carolina	782,000	35	247,000	11	138,000	6	5,168	14
North Dakota	42,000	25	14,000	8	5,000	3	325	12
Ohio	852,000	35	207,000	8	253,000	10	5,267	14
Oklahoma	308,000	34	100,000	10	89,000	9	2,746	20
Oregon	238,000	30	66,000	8	16,000	2	1,133	9
Pennsylvania	829,000	33	232,000	9	206,000	8	4,034	10
Puerto Rico	281,000	61	44,000	9	406,000	78	1,000	11
Rhode Island	74,000	38	19,000	9	11,000	6	273	8
South Carolina	400,000	37	107,000	9	90,000	8	3,072	17
South Dakota	56,000	27	9,000	4	17,000	8	469	15
Tennessee	501,000	34	154,000	10	141,000	9	4,489	20
Texas	2,547,000	35	1,143,000	15	823,000	11	20,206	18
Utah	177,000	20	62,000	7	10,000	1	1,158	8
Vermont	31,000	30	5,000	5	1,000	1	128	6
Virginia	550,000	31	141,000	8	71,000	4	2,985	11
Washington	435,000	28	153,000	9	30,000	2	2,163	9
West Virginia	113,000	35	27,000	8	28,000	8	939	18
Wisconsin	375,000	32	97,000	8	59,000	5	1,851	10
Wyoming	34,000	28	5,000	4	<500	<.5	288	15

ABOUT THE KIDS COUNT INDEX

The KIDS COUNT index* reflects child health and educational outcomes as well as risk and protective factors, such as economic well-being, family structure and community context. The index incorporates a developmental perspective on childhood and includes experiences across life stages, from birth through the late teens. The indicators are consistently and regularly measured, which allows for legitimate comparisons across states and over time.

Organizing the index into domains provides a more nuanced assessment of child well-being in each state that can inform policy solutions by helping policymakers and advocates better identify areas of strength and weakness. For example, a state may score well above average in overall child well-being, while showing the need for improvement in one or more domains. Domain-specific data can strengthen decision-making efforts by providing multiple data points relevant to specific policy areas.

The 16 indicators of child well-being are derived from federal government statistical agencies** and reflect the best available state and national data for tracking yearly changes. Many of the indicators are based on samples, and, like all sample data, they contain some random error. Other measures (such as the child and teen death rate) are based on relatively small numbers of events in some states and may exhibit some random fluctuation from year to year.

The Foundation urges readers to focus on relatively large differences across states, as small differences may simply reflect small fluctuations, rather than real changes in the well-being of children. Assessing trends by looking at changes over a longer period is more reliable. State data for past years are available in the KIDS COUNT Data Center at datacenter.aecf.org.

The *KIDS COUNT Data Book* uses rates and percentages because they are the best way to compare states and to assess changes over time within a state. However, the focus on rates and percentages may mask the magnitude of some of the problems examined in this report. Therefore, data on the actual number of children or events are provided on pages 38–41 and in the KIDS COUNT Data Center.

The Foundation includes data for the District of Columbia and Puerto Rico in the appendices, but not in the state rankings because they are significantly different from states, and comparisons are not instructive. It is more useful to look at changes for these geographies over time or to compare the District of Columbia with other large cities. Data for many child well-being indicators for the 50 largest cities (including the District of Columbia) are available in the KIDS COUNT Data Center, which also contains statistics for children and families in the U.S. Virgin Islands.

* To learn more about the updated KIDS COUNT index methodology, including technical details and examples, read the full methodology report at www.aecf.org/resources/the-new-kids-count-index-methodology.

** State-level data for the 2023–24 school year were collected directly from individual state's education report cards: www.ed.gov/birth-to-grade-12-education/elementary-and-secondary-education/where-can-i-find-my-state-report-card-website. This approach was necessary because of reporting delays at the U.S. Department of Education's National Center for Education Statistics.



DEFINITIONS AND DATA SOURCES

DEFINITIONS

Domain scores for each state are the values between 0 and 1,000, based on the four key indicators within every domain. To construct these scores, the Foundation converted the state numerical values for the most recent year for each of the four key indicators within every domain into standard scores. The standard scores were calculated using this formula: $1,000 - [(Value - Minimum Value) / (Maximum Value - Minimum Value)] * 1,000$. The minimum value was set as the best state value for each indicator based on data from 2019 and the maximum value was set as the worst state value for each indicator based on data from 2019. The indicator scores were then averaged to produce a domain score for each state in each of the four domains. All measures were given the same weight in calculating the domain score. Lower values represent worse well-being for children, while higher values represent more positive well-being. Anchoring the scores to a fixed timepoint makes changes over time easier to see.

Overall score for each state also range from 0 to 1,000 and are based on all 16 key indicators across the four domains. Using the same standardization approach described above, each indicator score is calculated and then averaged to produce a single overall score for each state, with all measures equally weighted. As with domain scores, higher values indicate better outcomes for children, and the use of 2019 benchmarks allows for consistent tracking of progress over time.

Domain rank is based on the domain score. Casey ranked the states based on their domain score in sequential order from highest/best (1) to lowest/worst (50).

Overall rank is based on the overall score. The Foundation ranked the states based on their overall score in sequential order from highest/best (1) to lowest/worst (50).

Percentage change over time analysis was computed by comparing the most recent year's data for the 16 key indicators with the data for the base year. To calculate percentage change, the Foundation subtracted the rate for the most recent year from the rate for the base year and then divided that quantity by the rate for the base year. The results are multiplied by 100 for readability. The percentage change was calculated on rounded data, and the percentage-change figure has been rounded to the nearest whole number.



ECONOMIC WELL-BEING INDICATORS

Children in poverty is the percentage of children under age 18 who live in families with incomes below 100% of the U.S. poverty threshold, as defined each year by the U.S. Census Bureau. In 2024, a family of two adults and two children lived in poverty if the family's annual income fell below \$31,812. Poverty status is not determined for people living in group quarters (such as military barracks, prisons and other institutional settings) or for unrelated individuals under age 15 (such as children in foster care). The data are based on income received in the 12 months prior to the survey. *SOURCE: U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey.*

Children whose parents lack secure employment is the share of all children under age 18 who live in families where no parent has regular, full-time, year-round employment. For children in single-parent families, this means the resident parent did not work at least 35 hours per week for at least 50 weeks in the 12 months prior to the survey. For children living in married-couple families, this means neither parent worked at least 35 hours per week for at least 50 weeks in the 12 months before the survey. Children who live with neither parent are also listed as not having secure parental employment because they are likely to be economically vulnerable. *SOURCE: U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey.*

Children living in households with a high housing cost burden is the percentage of children under age 18 who live in households where more than 30% of monthly household pretax income is spent on housing-related expenses, including rent, mortgage payments, taxes and insurance. *SOURCE: U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey.*

Teens not in school and not working is the percentage of teenagers between ages 16 and 19 who are not enrolled in school (full or part time) and not employed (full or part time). *SOURCE: U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey.*



EDUCATION INDICATORS

Young children not in school is the percentage of children ages 3 and 4 who were not enrolled in school (e.g., nursery school, preschool or kindergarten) during the previous three months. *SOURCE: U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey.*

Fourth graders not proficient in reading is the percentage of fourth grade public school students who did not reach the proficient level in reading as measured by the National Assessment of Educational Progress. For this indicator, public schools include charter schools and exclude Bureau of Indian Education and Department of Defense Education Activity schools. *SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, National Assessment of Educational Progress.*

Eighth graders not proficient in math is the percentage of eighth grade public school students who did not reach the proficient level in math as measured by the National Assessment of Educational Progress. For this indicator, public schools include charter schools and exclude Bureau of Indian Education and Department of Defense Education Activity schools. *SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, National Assessment of Educational Progress.*

High school students not graduating on time is the percentage of an entering freshman class not graduating in four years. The measure is derived from the adjusted cohort graduation rate (ACGR). The four-year ACGR is the number of students who graduate in four years with a regular high school diploma divided by the number of students who form the adjusted cohort for the graduating class. Students who enter ninth grade for the first time form a cohort that is adjusted by adding any students who subsequently transfer into the cohort and subtracting any students who transfer out. Due to data collection issues during the COVID-19 pandemic, this indicator may not be comparable across time. *SOURCES: 2023–24: State estimates are from each state department of education’s official State Report Card. The national estimate was calculated using data provided by each state’s education agency and 12th grade enrollment data from the U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Common Core of Data. 2018–19: National and state estimates are from the U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Common Core of Data.*



HEALTH INDICATORS

Low birth-weight babies is the percentage of live births weighing less than 5.5 pounds (2,500 grams). The data reflect the mother's place of residence, not the place where the birth occurred. *SOURCE: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, National Center for Health Statistics, Vital Statistics.*

Children without health insurance is the percentage of children under age 19 not covered by any health insurance. The data are based on health insurance coverage at the time of the survey; interviews are conducted throughout the calendar year. *SOURCE: U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey.*

Child and teen deaths per 100,000 is the number of deaths, from all causes, of children between ages 1 and 19 per 100,000 children in this age range. The data are reported by the place of residence, not the place where the death occurred. *SOURCES: **Death statistics:** Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, National Center for Health Statistics, Vital Statistics. **Population statistics:** U.S. Census Bureau, Population Estimates.*

Children and teens who are overweight or obese is the percentage of children and teens ages 10 to 17 with a Body Mass Index (BMI)-for-age at or above the 85th percentile. These data are based on a two-year average of survey responses. *SOURCE: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Health Resources and Services Administration, Maternal and Child Health Bureau, National Survey of Children's Health.*



FAMILY AND COMMUNITY INDICATORS

Children in single-parent families is the percentage of children under age 18 who live with their own unmarried parents. Children not living with a parent are excluded. In this definition, single-parent families include cohabiting couples. Children who live with married stepparents are not considered to be in a single-parent family. *SOURCE: U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey.*

Children in families where the household head lacks a high school diploma is the percentage of children under age 18 who live in households where the head of the household does not have a high school diploma or equivalent. *SOURCE: U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey.*

Children living in high-poverty areas is the percentage of children under age 18 who live in census tracts where the poverty rates of the total population are 30% or more. In 2024, a family of two adults and two children lived in poverty if the family's annual income fell below \$31,812. The data are based on income received in the 12 months prior to the survey. *SOURCE: U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey.*

Teen births per 1,000 is the number of births to teenagers ages 15 to 19 per 1,000 females in this age group. Data reflect the mother's place of residence, not the place where the birth occurred. *SOURCES: Birth statistics: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, National Center for Health Statistics, Vital Statistics. Population statistics: U.S. Census Bureau, Population Estimates.*

STATE KIDS COUNT ORGANIZATIONS

ALABAMA

VOICES for Alabama's Children
alavoices.org
 334.213.2410

ALASKA

Alaska Children's Trust
www.alaskachildrenstrust.org
 907.248.7676

ARIZONA

Children's Action Alliance
azchildren.org
 602.266.0707

ARKANSAS

Arkansas Advocates for
 Children and Families
www.aradvocates.org
 501.371.9678

CALIFORNIA

Children Now (CA)
www.childrenow.org
 510.763.2444

COLORADO

Colorado Children's Campaign
www.coloradokids.org
 303.839.1580

CONNECTICUT

Connecticut Voices for Children
ctvoices.org
 203.498.4240

DELAWARE

University of Delaware
dekidscount.org
 302.831.4966

DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA

DC Action
wearedcaction.org
 202.234.9404

FLORIDA

Florida Policy Institute
www.floridapolicy.org
 407.440.1421

GEORGIA

Georgia Family
 Connection Partnership
gafcp.org
 404.527.7394

HAWAII

Hawaii Children's Action Network
www.hawaii-can.org
 808.531.5502

IDAHO

Idaho Voices for Children
www.idahovoices.org
 208.693.8580

ILLINOIS

YWCA Metropolitan Chicago
ywcachicago.org
 312.372.6600

INDIANA

Indiana Youth Institute
iyi.org
 317.396.2700

IOWA

Common Good Iowa
www.commongoodiowa.org
 515.280.9027

KANSAS

Kansas Action for Children
www.kac.org
 785.232.0550

KENTUCKY

Kentucky Youth Advocates
kyyouth.org
 502.895.8167

LOUISIANA

Agenda for Children
agendaforchildren.org
 504.586.8509

MAINE

Maine Children's Alliance
mekids.org
 207.623.1868

MARYLAND

Maryland Center on
 Economic Policy
www.mdeconomy.org
 410.412.9105

MASSACHUSETTS

Massachusetts Budget
 and Policy Center
massbudget.org
 617.426.1228

MICHIGAN

Michigan League for
 Public Policy
mlpp.org
 517.487.5436

MINNESOTA

Children's Defense
 Fund-Minnesota
www.cdf-mn.org
 651.227.6121

MISSISSIPPI

Children's Foundation
 of Mississippi
childrensfoundationms.org
 601.982.9050

MISSOURI

Family and Community Trust (FACT)
www.mokidscount.org
 573.636.6300

MONTANA

Montana Budget & Policy Center
montanabudget.org
 406.422.5848

NEBRASKA

Voices for Children in Nebraska
voicesforchildren.com
 402.597.3100

NEVADA

Children's Advocacy Alliance
www.caanv.org
 702.228.1869

NEW HAMPSHIRE

New Futures
new-futures.org
 603.225.9540

NEW JERSEY

Advocates for Children
 of New Jersey
acnj.org
 973.643.3876

NEW MEXICO

New Mexico Voices for Children
www.nmvoices.org
 505.244.9505

NEW YORK

Schuyler Center for Analysis
 and Advocacy
scaany.org
 518.463.1896

NORTH CAROLINA

NC Child
ncchild.org
 919.834.6623

NORTH DAKOTA

North Dakota KIDS COUNT
ndkidscount.org
 406.422.5848

OHIO

Children's Defense Fund-Ohio
cdfohio.org
 740.914.9020

OKLAHOMA

Oklahoma Policy Institute
okpolicy.org
 918.794.3944

OREGON

Our Children Oregon
ourchildrenoregon.org
 503.236.9754

PENNSYLVANIA

Pennsylvania Partnerships
 for Children
www.papartnerships.org
 717.236.5680

PUERTO RICO

Youth Development Institute
 (Instituto del Desarrollo
 de la Juventud)
www.juventudpr.org
 787.728.8500

RHODE ISLAND

Rhode Island KIDS COUNT
www.rikidscount.org
 401.351.9400

SOUTH CAROLINA

Children's Trust of South Carolina
scchildren.org
 803.733.5430

SOUTH DAKOTA

South Dakota KIDS COUNT
sdkidscount.org
 406.422.5848

TENNESSEE

The Sycamore Institute
www.sycamoretn.org
 615.680.0047

TEXAS

Every Texan
everytexan.org/kids-count
 512.320.0222

U.S. VIRGIN ISLANDS

St. Croix Foundation for
 Community Development
stxfoundation.org
 340.773.9898

UTAH

Voices for Utah Children
www.utahchildren.org
 801.364.1182

VERMONT

Voices for Vermont's Children
www.voicesforvtkids.org
 802.229.6377

VIRGINIA

Voices for Virginia's Children
vakids.org
 804.649.0184

WASHINGTON

Children's Alliance
www.childrensalliance.org
 206.324.0340

WEST VIRGINIA

West Virginia Center on
 Budget and Policy
wvpolicy.org
 304.720.8682

WISCONSIN

Kids Forward
kidsforward.org
 608.285.2314

WYOMING

Wyoming Community Foundation
wycf.org/wycountkids
 307.721.8300

ABOUT THE ANNIE E. CASEY FOUNDATION

The Annie E. Casey Foundation is a private philanthropy that creates a brighter future for the nation’s children and youth 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.

KIDS COUNT (LA INFANCIA CUENTA™) is the Foundation’s national and state effort to track the status of children in the United States. By providing policymakers and advocates with benchmarks of child and young adult well-being, the Foundation seeks to enrich local, state and national discussions concerning ways to enable all kids and youth to succeed.

Nationally, the Foundation produces publications on key areas of well-being, including the annual *KIDS COUNT Data Book*, *Race for Results®* and periodic reports on critical child and family policy and practice issues. In addition, through its Thrive by 25® briefs, it reports on the needs of young people ages 14 through 24. All the Foundation’s lessons are available at www.aecf.org/publications.

The Foundation’s KIDS COUNT Data Center — at datacenter.aecf.org — provides the best available data on child well-being in the United States. Additionally, the Foundation funds the KIDS COUNT Network — which counts members serving every state, the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands — to provide a more detailed, local picture of how children and youth are faring.

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THE ANNIE E. CASEY
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