



Children's Action Alliance

A Voice for Arizona's Children since 1988

NEWS RELEASE

CONTACT: Pati Urias

purias@azchildren.org

(602) 266-0707 x209 (office)

(480) 322-2270 (cell, text)

**EMBARGOED FOR RELEASE until
Monday, June 20, 2016 9:01p.m.**

Conditions for Arizona Kids Improve Slightly; Concerns with Poverty, Education Remain

PHOENIX - The ranking for conditions for Arizona children is slowly improving, moving from 46th in 2015 to 45th place this year, according to the Annie E. Casey Foundation's annual *KIDS COUNT® Data Book*. The yearly analysis evaluates data in 16 indicators, including education, health, poverty and family and community factors. Although Arizona remains among the lowest ten states, improvement in math proficiency nudged the state incrementally higher in the rankings.

Arizona's eighth grade students demonstrated great improvement in math proficiency on the *National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP)*, jumping from a ranking of 35th last year to 18th in this year's report. Thanks to an early emphasis on adopting rigorous math standards and preparing teachers and students to reach the standards, Arizona outperformed the nation on the 2015 test scores (68 percent of students scored below proficient nationally, compared with 65 percent in Arizona).

The report shows that many Arizona students continue to face huge challenges. Arizona ranks in the bottom 10 for both fourth grade reading and high school graduation. The educational gaps start even before kindergarten. Only one in three children participates in preschool, ranking Arizona 48th. That means many children start school already behind.

"K-12 public schools are trying to help kids do better with far fewer resources than they had before the recession," said Dana Wolfe Naimark, president and CEO of Children's Action Alliance. "This election season is going to be critical for the future of Arizona schools. It is a prime opportunity for legislative candidates to share commitments with voters to invest in extraordinary teachers, updated textbooks and technology, and school building maintenance and repair to give children safe and functional places to learn."

Achievement gaps loom especially large for children of color and those growing up poor. Since children of color disproportionately live in low-income neighborhoods, the schools they attend are more likely to be underfunded and they miss out on the community support and learning opportunities that other children have before and after school. It's not surprising then that in eighth grade math, for example, 51 percent of white (non-Latino) students scored at or above proficient compared to 23 percent of Latino students, 19 percent of black students, and 15 percent of American Indian students. Clearly, Arizona has a long way to go to help students succeed no matter what their zip code.

The high rate of childhood poverty contributes dramatically to Arizona's educational challenges. One out of four children in Arizona lives in a neighborhood with a poverty rate of 30 percent or higher. This lack of economic opportunity can affect childhood in many ways, including barriers to transportation, scarcity of healthy food and health care, a lack of quality child care and after-school activities, neighborhoods that are unsafe and parents who are struggling to provide a stable family life.

Children's Action Alliance is an independent voice for Arizona children at the state capitol and in the community. CAA works to improve children's health, education, and security through information and action. Visit us online at www.azchildren.org.



Children's Action Alliance

A Voice for Arizona's Children since 1988

Districts such as Cartwright Elementary, which has a high percentage of students who qualify for free and reduced lunch, see a large number of students who come to school without meals and struggle to understand their homework.

"Hunger is a real problem, so we serve them a well-balanced breakfast in the classroom, which saves time and helps them concentrate," said John Gomez, vice-president of the Cartwright School District Governing Board. "We also see a lot of parents who are not educated and don't know how to help their kids with school lessons at home. We have implemented a program that helps these parents learn the basics of being their child's first teacher and build skills they can use to help their kids learn."

The 2016 *KIDS COUNT Data Book* rankings are attached.

The 2016 *Data Book* will be available June 20 at 9:01 p.m. Arizona time at www.aecf.org. Additional information is available at <http://databook.kidscount.org>, which also contains the most recent national, state and local data on hundreds of indicators of child well-being. The Data Center allows users to create rankings, maps and graphs for use in publications and on websites, and to view real-time information on mobile devices.

Children's Action Alliance is an independent voice for Arizona children at the state capitol and in the community. CAA works to improve children's health, education, and security through information and action.

The Annie E. Casey Foundation creates a brighter future for the nation's children 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*[®] is a registered trademark of the Annie E. Casey Foundation. For more information, visit www.aecf.org.





Children's Action Alliance

A Voice for Arizona's Children since 1988

How Are Children Doing in Arizona?

2016 KIDS COUNT

	U.S. Rate	AZ Rate	Previous AZ Rank	New AZ Rank
Overall Rank			46	45
Children in households that spend more than 30% of their income on housing (2014)	35%	34%	34	36
Children living in poverty (income below \$21,834 for a family of two adults and two children in 2014)	22%	26%	41	41
Children living in families where no parent has full-time, year-round employment (2014)	30%	32%	29	33
Teens ages 16 to 19 not attending school and not working (2014)	7%	8%	40	32
4th graders who scored below proficient reading level (2015)	65%	70%	41	40
8th graders who scored below proficient math level (2015)	68%	65%	35	18
Children ages 3 to 4 not attending school (2012-14)	53%	65%	48	48
High school students not graduating on time (2012-13)	18%	24%	39	42
Child and teen death rate (deaths per 100,000 children ages 1 to 19) (2014)	24%	26%	33	27
Low birth weight babies (2014)	8%	7%	12	12
Children without health insurance (2014)	6%	10%	48	47
¹ Teens ages 12 to 17 who abused alcohol or drugs in the past year (2013-14)	5%	6%	17	35
Children in families where the household head lacks a high school diploma (2014)	14%	17%	47	46
Children in single-parent families (2014)	35%	37%	35	35
Children living in high-poverty areas (census tracts with poverty rates ≥ 30%) (2010-14)	14%	24%	48	48
Teen birth rate (births per 1,000 females ages 15 to 19) (2014)	24	30	40	39

#1 is the best state for kids and #50 is the worst.

For some indicators, a higher rate is better, while for others, a lower rate is better.

¹ Four states tied for the #1 ranking; 30 tied for the #5 ranking and 16 state, including Arizona, tied for the #35 ranking

Source: 2016 KIDS COUNT Data Book, The Annie E. Casey Foundation, Baltimore, Maryland