



UNDER EMBARGO Until 12:01 AM EDT June 27, 2018

CONTACT

Teresa Falgoust
(504) 586-8509, ext. 8697
tfalgoust@agendaforchildren.org

Undercount in 2020 U.S. Census Could Reverse Louisiana's Gains in Child Well-Being
2018 KIDS COUNT® Data Book shows Louisiana kids have seen progress in teen birth rates and high school graduation rates, but continue to struggle with poverty

NEW ORLEANS — With 36 percent of Louisiana young children at risk of not being counted in the upcoming 2020 census, federally-funded support critical to children's success are in jeopardy, according to the 2018 KIDS COUNT® Data Book, released today by the Annie E. Casey Foundation.

The latest *Data Book* ranked Louisiana 49th in overall child well-being, despite improvements since 2010 in nine of the 16 measures tracked in the annual report. Louisiana's advancements in child well-being have been relatively modest in recent years, and have not kept pace with most other states. In addition to examining data across a range of indicators of child well-being, this year's Data Book highlights the troubling consequences for the nation's kids with the likely undercount of about one million children under five in the 2020 census. Louisiana's children are particularly vulnerable to being undercounted, with 36 percent of children under the age of five living in "hard-to-count" census tracts compared to the national average of 23 percent of children in the same age range. Only six states have a greater percentage of kids at risk of being missed in the count.

"Federal funding for programs such as Medicaid, Head Start and K-12 education is essential for the healthy development of our children," said Dr. Anthony Recasner, CEO of Agenda for Children. "We need to make sure that every child is counted in the 2020 census so that Louisiana can maximize federal investments in its children over the next decade. With the right investments, we can build a more prosperous Louisiana where all children can thrive."

Louisiana children benefit from more than \$2.8 billion in federal funds that are directly tied to census data. This includes more than \$1.1 billion in funding for Medicaid and LaCHIP, almost \$206 million in funding for the Child Care and Development Fund and Early Head Start/Head Start, nearly \$35 million in funding for foster care and \$950 million in funding for nutrition programs (school lunch, SNAP and the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants and Children (WIC)).

The annual *KIDS COUNT Data Book* from the Annie E. Casey Foundation uses 16 indicators to rank each state across four domains — health, education, economic well-being and family and community — as an assessment of child well-being. Louisiana ranks:

- **50th in economic well-being.** Louisiana was one of just three states where the child poverty rate was higher in 2016 than in 2010. In Louisiana, 29 percent of children (314,000) lived in families with incomes below the poverty line in 2016, up from 27 percent (300,000) in 2010. Louisiana's biggest improvement on an economic indicator

was seen in the 3 percent drop in the percentage of teens who are neither in school nor working, from 14 percent in 2010 to 11 percent in 2016.

- **47th in education.** The percentage of Louisiana high school students who don't graduate on time fell by 28 percent, from 29 percent in 2010-2011 to 21 percent in 2015-2016, making it a bright spot for the state's education indicators. Despite this improvement, Louisiana ranked 43rd on this measure, reflecting the need to accelerate progress in this area.
- **48th in the family and community domain.** The percentage of Louisiana children living in high-poverty neighborhoods increased from 18 percent in 2008-2012 to 21 percent in 2012-2016.
- **44th in health.** Consistent with national trends, Louisiana continues to make steady progress in connecting children to health insurance. Between 2010 and 2016, the percentage of children who are uninsured in Louisiana fell by half, from 6 percent to 3 percent.

The 2018 *Data Book* shows that federal investments, when combined with state funding and commitment from state policymakers, can create significant improvements in the well-being of Louisiana's children. Louisiana outperformed the national average on two measures that are heavily impacted by federal and state funding — the percentage of young children not in school and the percentage of children without health insurance. While 49 percent of Louisiana's three- and four-year-olds still lack access to an early care and education program, the number would be far higher without federal funds and the state's commitment to expanding preschool through programs such as LA4 and NSECD. Likewise, historically low rates of uninsured children are a direct result of federal and state support for LaCHIP and Medicaid.

"The latest KIDS COUNT data show that some of our greatest successes for children are the result of federal investments and innovations at the state and local levels," said Teresa Falgoust, KIDS COUNT manager at Agenda for Children. "A census undercount of young children endangers those gains by reducing the amount of funding Louisiana has available for essential programs."

The Annie E. Casey Foundation offered the following recommendations to achieve a more accurate census:

- **Maximize the Census Bureau's capacity:** Federal legislators need to fully fund the census outreach effort, and the Trump administration needs to appoint a qualified and permanent director to lead the agency to provide support for a more accurate census than in 2010.
- **Fund state and local outreach:** State and local governments and community organizations need to invest in educational outreach around the census to ensure that the most vulnerable communities are counted.
- **Expand the pool of trusted messengers:** Broaden the circle of people (from child care providers to members of the clergy) and organizations (from public schools to libraries) who can provide outreach in their communities to reach hard-to-count households and encourage participation among people most likely to be missed.
- **Address the digital divide:** Provide online access for all families to participate in the census, either in local libraries or schools.

The Casey Foundation asserts that this will require a concerted effort by the federal executive branch, Congress, state and local officials, advocates, businesses, service providers, community leaders and philanthropy.

Release Information

The 2018 KIDS COUNT® Data Book will be available June 27 at 12:01 a.m. EDT at www.aecf.org. Additional information is available at www.aecf.org/databook, which also contains the most recent national, state and local data on hundreds of indicators of child well-being. Journalists interested in creating maps, graphs and rankings in stories about the *Data Book* can use the KIDS COUNT Data Center at datacenter.kidscount.org.

About Agenda for Children

Agenda for Children, a private non-profit organization, works to make Louisiana a state in which all children can thrive. Visit www.agendaforchildren.org to learn more.

About the Annie E. Casey Foundation

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. For more information, visit www.aecf.org. KIDS COUNT® is a registered trademark of the Annie E. Casey Foundation.

###