



EMBARGOED FOR RELEASE

Until 12:01 AM EDT

July 22, 2014

CONTACT:

Teresa Falgoust

(504) 586-8509, ext. 117

tfalgoust@agendaforchildren.org

Twenty-fifth Edition of *KIDS COUNT Data Book* Highlights Improvements in Health, Safety, Education and Decline in Teen Birth Rate Since 1990

Louisiana Ranks 47th in Overall Child Well-Being,

NEW ORLEANS — Demographic, social and economic changes combined with major policy developments have affected the lives of lower-income children in both positive and negative ways since 1990, according to the Annie E. Casey Foundation's 25th edition of its annual *KIDS COUNT Data Book*. The good news is that Louisiana has followed national trends and seen steady improvements in the numbers of children attending preschool and a decline in the number of schoolchildren not proficient in reading and math.

There also is a positive trend in parental education that benefits kids: the percentage of Louisiana children who live in families in which no parent has a high school diploma fell by almost half – from 30 percent in 1990 to 16 percent in 2012. In addition, the teen birth rate is at a historic low and the death rate for children and teens has fallen as a result of medical advances and increased usage of seat belts, car seats and bike helmets. Louisiana children are also far less likely to live in high-poverty neighborhoods today than they were 25 years ago—while 33 percent of Louisiana children lived in high-poverty neighborhoods in 1990, the same was true for 18 percent of Louisiana children in 2012. Louisiana was one of only ten states to experience an improvement on this measure between 1990 and 2012.

Worrisome trends include a rise in the percentage of children living in single-parent families. While this rate has been on the rise in every state, Louisiana has seen an especially large increase—between 1990 and 2012, the percentage of children in single parent families nationwide rose by 10 percentage points, from 25 percent to 35 percent, but Louisiana saw an increase of 15 percentage points, from 33 percent to 48 percent. Only New Mexico had a larger increase during this time period.

"We now know more than we ever have about what it takes to ensure that children grow up happy, healthy and ready to become productive adults," said Dr. Anthony Recasner, CEO of Agenda for Children. "This report shows that Louisiana has made some smart policy decisions and strong investments based on the latest research—we have one of the country's lowest rates of uninsured children and we ranked 8th in the nation in terms of the proportion of our young children who attend preschool."

“However, Louisiana’s ranking of 47th reveals that Louisiana still has a long way to go if we want Louisiana children to have the same chance to thrive as their peers in other states,” added Recasner. “We all have a role to play in improving the future for Louisiana’s children—voters need to advocate for policies and programs that help kids, businesses can implement policies that support working parents and pay living wages, and government needs to invest in policies and programs that promote positive development for our children.”

To examine the more recent trends between 2005 and 2012, the new *Data Book* uses 16 indicators across four areas – Economic Well-Being, Education, Health and Family and Community.

- **Children continue to progress in the areas of education and health.** All four education indicators covering milestones such as preschool attendance and high school graduation showed steady improvements both at the national level and in Louisiana. Louisiana achieved a five percentage point reduction in the percentage of eighth graders scoring below proficient in math between 2005 and 2013. Child health also improved across all four indicators, and more children have access to health insurance coverage than before the recession. Between 2005 and 2012, the percentage of babies born at low-birth weight in Louisiana decreased from 11.5 percent to 10.8 percent. During the same time period, the national average improved by a smaller margin—from 8.2 percent to 8 percent. Despite this improvement, Louisiana babies are still more likely to be born at low-birth weight than babies in any other state except for Mississippi. Louisiana’s child and teen death rate dropped by 30 percent between 2005 and 2010, from 53 deaths per 100,000 to 37 deaths per 100,000. This was one of the sharpest declines in the country and only two other states—Vermont and Rhode Island—saw a larger decrease.
- **Economic progress still lags, even after the end of the recession.** Louisiana’s child poverty rate is currently at the same level—28 percent—it was in 2005, and the national child poverty rate increased by 4 percentage points between 2005 and 2012. Additionally, more than a third (36 percent) of Louisiana children live in families where no parent has year-round, full-time employment. Not only is this rate five percentage points above the national average (31 percent), but Louisiana hasn’t experienced the same level of recovery as the nation as a whole. Where the national average declined from 33 percent in 2010 to 31 percent in 2012, Louisiana experienced no improvement on this measure during that time period.
- **Mixed picture on Family and Community indicators.** Both the national and Louisiana teen birth rates are at historic lows. However, Louisiana’s teen birth rate remains well above the national average (of 29 births per 1,000 females ages 15-19) and the state ranks 44th on this measure. If Louisiana had the same teen birth rate as New Hampshire—the best-ranked state—just 2,099 Louisiana babies would have been born to teen mothers in Louisiana in 2012, compared to the 6,458 who were actually born to teen mothers that year. Louisiana also has the nation’s second-highest rate of children living in single-parent families, with nearly half (48 percent) of children living in households headed by a single parent.

“Agenda for Children has proudly partnered with the Annie E. Casey Foundation for nearly 25 years now to raise awareness of the *KIDS COUNT Data Book* and the needs of children in our state,” said Dr. Recasner. “We have seen some truly stunning improvements for kids over the years, but Louisiana’s perennially low ranking in the *Data Book* proves that it is imperative that increase our investments in the programs and policies that show the most promise in building a stronger future for our children.”

The [KIDS COUNT Data Book](#) features the latest data on child well-being for every state, the District of Columbia and the nation. This information is available in the [KIDS COUNT Data Center](#), which also contains the most recent national, state and local data on hundreds of measures of child well-being. Data Center users can create rankings, maps and graphs for use in publications and on websites, and view real-time information on mobile devices.

#

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.