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# NEWS



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A growing number of New Jersey children live with parents who lack secure employment and who struggle to meet their children's basic needs, pushing the state to 26<sup>th</sup> place nationally for the economic well-being of families, according to the Annie E. Casey Foundation's 2015 *KIDS COUNT*<sup>®</sup> *Data Book*, released today.

The state maintained its overall KIDS COUNT ranking of 8<sup>th</sup> nationally, primarily because of improvements in child health, but the continued decline in families' fiscal health remains an area of critical concern, said Cecilia Zalkind, executive director of Advocates for Children of New Jersey, which produces state-level KIDS COUNT reports.

"The fact is that the economic recovery has bypassed thousands of families, leaving them without the means to provide for their children," Zalkind said. "This threatens nearly every aspect of child well-being."

Of the four measures of economic well-being, New Jersey's outlook worsened in three – the percent of children living in families earning below the meager federal poverty line of about \$23,500 for a family of four, children whose parents lack secure employment and children living in families paying too much for housing. The only economic area that showed improvement was teens not in school and not working, which dropped to 6 percent from 7 percent last year.

New Jersey mirrors national trends.

About 1.7 million more children live in low-income working families today than during the Great Recession, according to the *Data Book*. In 2013, one in four children, 18.7 million, lived in a low-income working family in the United States. Nearly a third of children are living in families where no parent has full-time employment. And even when parents are working full time, wages and benefits are often not sufficient to adequately support a family.

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Giving Every Child A Chance

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“Although we are several years past the end of the recession, millions of families still have not benefited from the economic recovery,” said Patrick McCarthy, president and CEO of the Casey Foundation. “While we’ve seen an increase in employment in recent years, many of these jobs are low-wage and cannot support even basic family expenses. Far too many families are still struggling to provide for the day-to-day needs of their children, notably for the 16 million kids who are living in poverty. We can and must do better: we can make policy choices to lift more families into economic stability.”

### **New Jersey 2<sup>nd</sup> in Education**

Despite increases in children not attending preschool and fourth graders not proficient in reading, New Jersey maintained 2<sup>nd</sup> place for education measures – behind Massachusetts. This was its best ranking in the four “domains,” which include economic well-being, education, health and family and community.

In the health arena, all four health measures improved since 2008 – low-birthweight babies, children without health insurance, child and teen deaths and teens who abuse alcohol or drugs. These improvements pushed New Jersey from 19<sup>th</sup> place last year to 6<sup>th</sup> this year.

But the state slipped in the “family and community” domain, which measures the environments and communities in which children are growing up. Two measures – children in single-parent families and children living in high-poverty areas – both worsened, moving the state from 10<sup>th</sup> to 12<sup>th</sup> in this area of child well-being. The one bright spot in this domain was teen birth, which continue to decline significantly. Children in families where the household head lacks a high school diploma remained the same at 10 percent.

The Casey Foundation offers a number of recommendations to make good on the American promise of opportunity for all children. The foundation promotes a two-generation strategy that simultaneously addresses the needs of children directly, while providing tools and resources to their parents. Three critical strategies include:

- Provide parents with multiple pathways to get family-supporting jobs and achieve financial stability.
- Ensure access to high-quality early childhood education and enriching elementary school experiences.
- Equip parents to better support their children socially and emotionally and to advocate for their kids' education.

The Casey Foundation recommends policies that result in higher pay, paid sick leave, flexible scheduling and expanded unemployment benefits that will result in higher family income, reduced parental stress and an increased capacity of parents to invest in their kids. Detailed recommendations can be found in the 2014 report, [Creating Opportunity for Families: A Two-Generation Approach](#).

The *KIDS COUNT Data Book* will be available July 21 at 12:01 a.m. EDT at [www.aecf.org](http://www.aecf.org) and 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.

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*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](http://www.aecf.org). KIDS COUNT® is a registered trademark of the Annie E. Casey Foundation.*

*Advocates for Children of New Jersey is a statewide, non-profit child research and action organization, committed to giving every child the chance to grow up safe, healthy and educated.*