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**Generation Z Breaks Records in Education and Health Despite  
Growing Economic Instability of their Families**

*2016 KIDS COUNT Data Book* finds youth are healthier and completing high school on time despite facing future limited by economic inequality, unaffordable higher education

ANCHORAGE – The teenagers of Generation Z – the rising cohort born after 1995 that follows the Millennials – broke records in education and health indicators despite growing up in the midst of the economic downturn, according to the national 2016 KIDS COUNT® Data Book from the [Annie. E. Casey Foundation](#).

Aided by federal, state and local policies and investments in prevention, a record number of teens have managed to avoid bad choices that could have derailed their future prospects. Comparing data between 2008 and 2014, teen birth rates fell 40 percent, drug and alcohol abuse dropped 38 percent, and the percent of teens graduating on time increased by 28 percent.

These improvements are remarkable given the economic challenges faced by far too many of their families. Despite rising employment numbers, 22 percent of children lived in poverty in 2014—the same rate as in 2013 and almost one in three children live in families where no member of the household has full-time, year-round employment. While navigating their own family challenges, an increasing number of our young people are also growing up in neighborhoods that lack the resources they need to thrive. Since 2006-2010, the number of children living in high poverty areas increased to 14 percent, up from 11 percent.

“This generation of teenagers and young adults are coming of age in in the wake of the worst economic climate in nearly 80 years, and yet they are achieving key milestones that are critical for future success,” said Patrick McCarthy, president and CEO of the Casey Foundation. “With more young people making smarter decisions, we must fulfill our part of the bargain, by providing them with the educational and economic

opportunity that youth deserve. We urge candidates in state and national campaigns to describe in depth their proposals to help these determined young people realize their full potential.”

Since 2008, teen drug and alcohol abuse has declined by double digits in every state except Louisiana and the District of Columbia; in 11 states it fell by 40 percent or more. The teen birth rate fell by more than 20 percent since 2008 in all but one state, North Dakota, where it fell by 14 percent. Child and teen death rates fell in all states except two, Utah and West Virginia, with a 66 percent drop in the District of Columbia. Only three states did not see a positive change in the percent of high school kids not graduating on time, with Nebraska and D.C. seeing a more than 50 percent decrease.

Yet despite their increasingly responsible choices, Generation Z teens growing up in low- to moderate-income households have fewer opportunities to move up the economic ladder compared to adults in the previous two generations. A college degree is now required to qualify for most middle income positions, but rising tuition costs and a shift in financial aid away from needs-based grants to loans has put a post-secondary education out of reach for most low-income students. Armed with only a high school degree, the future prospects for young adults are bleak. Among recent high school graduates, the unemployment rate was 28 percent for blacks, 17 percent for Latinos and 15 percent for whites. Those with jobs earned, on average, \$10.66 an hour, which was less than wages in 2000 when adjusted for inflation.

## **ALASKA**

The 2016 Data Book, which focuses on key trends in child well-being in the post-recession years, measures child well-being in four domains: economic well-being, education, health, and family and community.

Alaska fell 6 spots from #27 in 2008 to #33 in 2014. Greatest cause for this change was mainly the stagnation within our state. Other states put forth efforts that has led to systemic change and a positive change in the overall well-being of children and families. Overall, Alaska statistics remained the same or slightly improved or worsened. Overall, for the second year in a row, Minnesota holds the top spot, followed by Massachusetts, Iowa, New Hampshire and Connecticut. Mississippi remains the lowest ranked, with New Mexico, Louisiana, Nevada and Alabama rounding out the bottom five.

“As Alaska is struggling to balance their budget, institute justice reform and overhaul Medicaid, we have a great opportunity to make change that would improve the well-being of children and families”, says Trevor Storrs of the Alaska Children’s Trust. “By addressing the disparities among our communities and poverty, Alaska can begin to lay the foundation that promotes the importance of investing in our children and families.”

## **BIPARTISAN SOLUTIONS BASED ON AMERICAN VALUES**

In the Data Book, the Casey Foundation offers a number of recommendations for how policy makers can ensure all children are prepared for the future, based on this country’s shared values of opportunity, responsibility and security.

- **OPPORTUNITY:** Increase opportunity by expanding access to high-quality Pre-K and early childhood services so that all children are prepared to succeed in school. In addition, expand access to higher education and training so that every low-income child has a fair chance to develop his or her potential.
- **RESPONSIBILITY:** Increase the Earned Income Tax Credit for low-income workers who do not have dependent children. This strategy will bolster workers, who may in fact be helping to support children who do not live with them and who are struggling to get by on low wages.

- SECURITY: Policies can ensure American families have a measure of security, particularly low-income parents of young children, by providing paid family leave that helps them balance their obligations at home and in the workplace.

The 2016 Data Book will be available June 21 at 12:01 a.m. EDT at [www.aecf.org](http://www.aecf.org). Additional information is available at <http://datacenter.kidscount.org>, which also contains the most recent national, state and local data on hundreds of indicators of child well-being. KIDS COUNT® is a registered trademark of the Annie E. Casey Foundation. 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.

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*The KIDS COUNT Data Book with state-by-state rankings and supplemental data is embargoed until 12.01 a.m. EDT, June 21, 2016, and can be viewed at [www.aecf.org/2016db](http://www.aecf.org/2016db) at that time.*

*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 <http://www.aecf.org>.*

*Alaska Children's Trust improves the status of children in Alaska by generating funds and committing resources to eliminate child abuse and neglect. Established in 1997, ACT has granted over \$4 million dollars to organizations across the State of Alaska to prevent child abuse and neglect.*