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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 DE youth are healthier and completing high school on time despite facing future limited by economic inequality, unaffordable higher education

WILMINGTON, Del. June 21, 2016 – A new *KIDS COUNT® Data Book* report reveals that Delaware has maintained its ranking of 25th in the nation for overall child well-being, but that its teens are making smarter and healthier choices. This state-by-state report on children's well-being, issued by the Annie E. Casey Foundation, focuses on key trends in child well-being in the post-recession years, by measuring child well-being across four domains: economic well-being, education, health, and family and community. The report reveals that the teenagers of Delaware's 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.

Aided by federal, state and local policies and investments in prevention, Delaware teens have managed to avoid bad choices that could have derailed their future prospects. Comparing data between 2008 and 2014, Delaware's teen birth rate fell 45 percent, the percent of kids abusing drugs and alcohol dropped 29 percent and the percent of teens not graduating on time decreased by 18 percent.

These improvements are remarkable given the economic challenges faced by many families. Despite rising employment numbers, 18 percent of Delaware's children lived in poverty in 2014 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 percent of children living in high poverty areas increased to 6 percent, up from 4 percent.

“Despite growing up in a tough economy, today’s youth are making good choices that bode well for their future success,” said Janice Barlow, director of KIDS COUNT in Delaware. “One of the most important components to the continued improvement of adolescent well-being is to consider teens valuable resources and assets to be nurtured and supported, not problems to be fixed.”

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 nationally, 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.

Our country’s legacy of racial inequity means that children of color continue to face significant barriers to their success. Across our nation, African-American children are twice as likely as the average child to live in high-poverty neighborhoods and to live in single-parent families. American Indian children are twice as likely to lack health insurance coverage, and Latino children are the least likely to live with a household head who has at least a high school diploma. On a positive note, African-American children are more likely than the national average to have health insurance coverage, attend pre-school and Pre-K, and live in families where the household head had at least a high school diploma.

“Today, Delaware’s youngest residents are the most racially and ethnically diverse generation ever,” continued Barlow. “This shift mirrors a national trend. Understanding that we’re entering a time of rapid changes in the nation’s demographics makes it important to disaggregate data by race and ethnicity when possible. Only by identifying and measuring disparity will we be able to address it.”

In the *Data Book*, the Annie E. 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 been 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. 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. 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.

KIDS COUNT in Delaware is a collaborative effort of over forty organizations and is housed within the Center for Community Research and Service at the University of Delaware. By providing policymakers and citizens with benchmarks of child well-being, KIDS COUNT in Delaware seeks to enrich local and state discussion concerning ways to secure better lives of all of Delaware's children. Please visit our website www.dekidscount.org to learn more about our important work. Follow KIDS COUNT in Delaware and this issue on Twitter @dekidscount and on Facebook at <http://www.facebook.com/dekidscount>.

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