



**UNDER EMBARGO**

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## **Louisiana Teens Make Historic Gains in Graduation Rates and Teen Birth Rates**

*2016 KIDS COUNT Data Book Ranks Louisiana 48<sup>th</sup> in Overall Child Well-Being*

NEW ORLEANS— Louisiana's teenagers are now more likely to graduate from high school on time and less likely to become a parent, despite growing up in the midst of a recession, according to the Annie E. Casey Foundation's 2016 *KIDS COUNT*<sup>®</sup> *Data Book*.

After years of work to improve policies and practice, the percentage of Louisiana high school students who fail to graduate on time fell by a quarter between 2007/2008 and 2013/2014, from 36 percent to 27 percent of students. Louisiana's teen birth rate is also at a historic low. Between 2008 and 2014, Louisiana's teen birth rate fell by a third, from 54 to 36 births per 1,000 females ages 15-19.

"This year's *Data Book* shows that in many ways, more children are on the path to success than ever before in Louisiana," said Dr. Anthony Recasner, CEO of Agenda for Children. "However, Louisiana's perennially low ranking in the *Data Book* is a reminder that our children need us to fully commit to supporting the programs and policies they need in order to reach their full potential."

The annual *KIDS COUNT Data Book* compares states on 16 different measures of child well-being, and ranks them on four overall domains (Economic Security, Education, Health and Family and Community). Louisiana ranked 50<sup>th</sup> in both Health and Economic Well-Being and 48<sup>th</sup> in Family and Community. Louisiana's best ranking (45<sup>th</sup>) was in the Education domain.

### **Progress for Louisiana's children**

Despite the state's low ranking, Louisiana made significant progress in several indicators, and even outperformed the national average in some areas:

- **Fourth-grade reading proficiency improved significantly.** In 2015, 71 percent of fourth graders were not proficient readers, compared to 80 percent in 2007. Louisiana's percent change on this measure made it one of the most-improved in the nation—only North Carolina, Rhode Island and the District of Columbia experienced more improvement.
- **Preschool attendance continues to be a bright spot for Louisiana.** In 2012/2014, 49 percent of Louisiana children ages 3–4 were not attending school, compared to the national average of 53 percent. Louisiana was ranked seventh on this measure, alongside states with significantly more resources, such as Colorado, Hawaii and Vermont.

- **More children than ever have health insurance.** The number of children lacking health insurance fell to 5 percent in 2014 (from 8 percent in 2008), ranking the state 17<sup>th</sup> on this health indicator.

“Louisiana has been at the forefront of efforts to ensure that our children have access to health care and high quality early care and education,” said Dr. Recasner. “Even though we are a state with very limited resources, we have prioritized programs such as LaCHIP and LA4, which help children get the right start in life. Improvements in our state’s fourth-grade reading proficiency and graduation rates are signs that these investments are making real differences in outcomes for our children.”

### Conditions worsening for Louisiana’s children

Conditions worsened on seven different measures of child well-being, including three out of four measures of economic well-being.

- **More children live in families burdened by high housing costs.** Louisiana is one of just five states in which the percentage of children in households that spend more than 30 percent of their income on housing was higher in 2014 than in 2008. Almost a third of children (32 percent) in Louisiana live in housing-burdened families.
- **The number of children living in high-poverty neighborhoods is on the rise.** Louisiana has seen a concerning increase in the number of children who live in high-poverty neighborhoods. In 2010-2014, 21 percent of Louisiana children lived in a high-poverty neighborhood, a 24 percent increase in the percentage of children compared to 2006-2010.
- **Child poverty remains above 2008 levels.** 28 percent of Louisiana’s children are below the poverty line, compared to 25 percent in 2008. Louisiana’s child poverty rate has remained unchanged over the past three years.

### 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.

*Agenda for Children, a private non-profit organization, works to make Louisiana a state in which all children can thrive. Visit [www.agendaforchildren.org](http://www.agendaforchildren.org) to learn more.*

*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.*

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