



Giving Every Child A Chance

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New Jersey Ranks Second for Education Nationwide in 2016 *KIDS COUNT* Data Book

While state sees progress in education and health, serious racial and economic inequities need to be addressed

NEWARK, N.J.— According to the 2016 *KIDS COUNT*® *Data Book* from the Annie E. Casey Foundation, a significant number of teens took steps toward improving their future prospects. Comparing data between 2008 and 2014, the teen birth rate in New Jersey fell 46 percent and drug and alcohol abuse dropped 29 percent for the state of New Jersey. New Jersey's 2014 teen birth rate (13 births per 1,000 girls ages 15-19) fell below the national average (24 births per 1,000 girls ages 15-19), while posting stats equivalent to the nationwide percentage of teens abusing drugs or alcohol (5 percent).

These improvements are remarkable given the economic challenges faced by far too many of their families. In New Jersey, 16 percent of children lived in poverty in 2014—a slight improvement over 2013, and more than one in four children live in families where no member of the household has full-time, year-round employment. This compares to 22 percent of children living in poverty and 30 percent of children living in families where no member of the household has full-time, year round employment nationwide.

Key New Jersey trends include gains in health insurance but worsened poverty and racial inequity

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.

The percent of children without health insurance has decreased to 5 percent in 2014 for the state of New Jersey as a whole from 2010-2014. Nationwide, state health insurance covered close to an additional 3 million children.

“The decrease in the rates of children without health insurance is a success story for New Jersey,” said Cecilia Zalkind, President and CEO, Advocates for Children of New Jersey, which produces the state-level Kids Count reports. “It is a tribute to the work of advocates and government agencies working in partnership to improve child well-being. We need to use that approach to resolve other barriers to child well-being, such as the racial inequity across many indicators, particularly economic well-being.”

Teenagers 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. Nationally, 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.

“With rising higher education costs, stagnant wages and a flimsy social safety net, teens are less likely than their parents or grandparents to obtain economic security,” said Patrick McCarthy, president and CEO of the Casey Foundation. “For the sake of our economy and our society, we must reverse this trend to ensure that today’s youth—who will be the next generation of workers, parents and community leaders—have a successful transition to adulthood and beyond.”

“Generation Z is the most diverse yet, and children of color are already the majority in 12 states. By the end of the decade, children of color will be the majority of all children in the United States,” said Laura Speer, associate director for policy reform and advocacy. “Our shared future depends on today’s young people fulfilling their potential.”

National and State Rankings for the 2016 *Data Book*

For the second year in a row, a non-New England state ranks number one for overall child well-being. Minnesota holds the top spot, followed by Massachusetts, Iowa, New Hampshire and Connecticut. Mississippi remains the lowest ranked state, with New Jersey ranking seventh overall.

- New Jersey ranked second in education, just behind Massachusetts. Louisiana ranked lowest in this category.
- The top five states in economic well-being are in the heartland and Plain States regions—Wyoming, North Dakota, Minnesota, Iowa and Nebraska. Economic well-being was New Jersey’s lowest ranking out of the four categories, falling in the 20th spot nationwide.
- The biggest improvements in overall rankings compared to last year’s *Data Book* are in Montana, Rhode Island, South Dakota, Washington, West Virginia and Wyoming.
- The biggest drops in overall rankings are in Alaska, Maine, Maryland and Kansas.

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. 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.

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. KIDS COUNT® is a registered trademark of the Annie E. Casey Foundation. Follow Annie E. Casey Foundation on Twitter @aekidscount and on Facebook at <http://www.facebook.com/KIDSCOUNT>.

Advocates for Children of New Jersey is the trusted, independent voice putting children's needs first for more than 35 years. Our work results in better laws and policies, more effective funding and stronger services for children and families. And it means that more children are given the chance to grow up safe, healthy, and educated. For more information, visit www.acnj.org. Follow ACNJ on Twitter @acnjforkids and on Facebook at <http://www.facebook.com/acnjforkids>.