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Well-Being of Colorado Kids in Middle of the Pack, Despite Economic Gains

Many Colorado children still aren't seeing the benefits of hot economy

DENVER, Colo., June 13, 2017 — Colorado's national ranking of 22nd in overall child well-being reveals that health and prosperity don't extend to all children. The 2017 *KIDS COUNT® Data Book*, released today by the Annie E. Casey Foundation, shows that kids in other states are benefiting more from gains in the economic well-being, education, health and family and community indicators.

Colorado's ranking in child economic well-being fell from 12th in 2016 to 16th in 2017, as the state showed little improvement relative to the nation in child poverty, the percentage of families burdened by housing costs and the percentage of teens not in school and not working.

"An economy as strong as ours should advance the well-being of us all — especially our children," said Kelly Causey, President and CEO of the Colorado Children's Campaign. "However, too many children and families aren't benefiting from one of the hottest economies in the nation. Imagine the prosperity Colorado would enjoy if we invested equally in the health and education of our children as we do in growing our economy."

Colorado ranks among the bottom 10 states for the health of its children, holding steady at 43rd in the health category. However, the state has seen one of the largest declines of any state in the percentage of children without health insurance. Despite ranking highly for children's health insurance coverage, Colorado's percentages of low-birthweight babies and teen drug and alcohol abuse contribute to its low overall health ranking. Altitude is one contributor to low birthweight, but factors such as smoking during pregnancy, poor prenatal nutrition, poverty and stress also increase the risk of low birthweight.

On the positive side, between 2016 and 2017, Colorado's rank improved from 22nd to 19th for family and community well-being. Colorado boasts a lower-than-average rate of births to teen mothers as well as lower-than-average percentages of children living in single-parent families and children living in high-poverty neighborhoods.

"The impact public policy has on the well-being of kids is clear," Causey said. "Colorado's innovative approaches to comprehensive family planning are showing immediate and sustained impacts on our families with the greatest obstacles to self-sufficiency. When women are able to determine their futures, we all benefit. "Policymakers should be applauded for making this a priority in our restricted budget and seek other research-based approaches to ensuring the long-term well-being of children and families," Causey added.

Thanks to high rates of preschool enrollment relative to other states and better-than-average scores on nationwide assessments, Colorado ranked 16th among states in the education domain.

Overall education rankings cannot be compared to previous years in this edition of the KIDS COUNT Data Book due to a change in data source for “high school students not graduating on time.” This change also prevents comparing the overall ranking of states in this edition to previous editions.

Encouraging trends in this year’s report:

Economic Well-Being

- At 15 percent in 2015, child poverty in Colorado remains below the national average of 21 percent, but this still represents more than 180,000 Colorado kids living in families struggling to make ends meet.
- In 2015, a quarter of Colorado kids lived in a family where no parent had full-time, year-round employment. Although Colorado maintained its number 10 ranking on this indicator, nearly 10,000 more kids lived in families where no parent had secure employment in 2015 than in 2014.

Education

- Colorado ranks 43rd in graduation rate, with 23 percent of high school students not graduating on time in 2014-2015.
- In Colorado, 23 percent of high school students did not graduate on time in 2014-15, above the national average of 17 percent.
- Scores in Colorado on the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), which is used to measure proficiency in reading and math, declined in 2015. Fewer than two-thirds of Colorado’s fourth graders scored below proficient in reading in 2015 and 63 percent of eighth graders scored below proficient in math.
- On average, 48 percent of Colorado 3- and 4-year olds were enrolled in school between 2013 and 2015, the seventh highest percentage of any state.

Health

- Colorado has seen one of the largest declines of any state in the percentage of children without health insurance. The percentage of Colorado kids lacking health insurance dropped by more than half in the past five years, from 10 percent in 2010 to 4 percent in 2015. Colorado now ranks 16th among states for this indicator, up from 30th last year.
- The number of Colorado teens ages 12 to 17 who abused drugs or alcohol in the past year has declined steadily since 2009-2010, dropping from 36,000 to 26,000 in 2013-2014.

Family and Community

- Between 2010 and 2015, Colorado was among the states that saw the second largest decrease in births to females ages 15 to 19. The teen birth rate dropped 42 percent during that time, from 33 births per 1,000 women ages 15 to 19 in 2010 to 19 births per 1,000 women in 2015.
- About 28 percent of Colorado children live in single-parent families, compared to 35 percent nationwide.

Release Information

The 2017 *Data Book* will be available June 13 at 12:01 a.m. EDT at www.aecf.org. Additional information is available at <http://databook.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.

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The **Colorado Children's Campaign** is a nonprofit, nonpartisan advocacy organization committed since 1985 to realizing every chance for every child in Colorado. We advocate for the development and implementation of data-driven public policies that improve child well-being in health, education and early childhood. We do this by providing Coloradans with trusted data and research on child well-being and organizing an extensive state-wide network of dedicated child advocates. For more information, please visit www.coloradokids.org/.

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. KIDS COUNT® is a registered trademark of the Annie E. Casey Foundation. For more information, visit www.aecf.org.