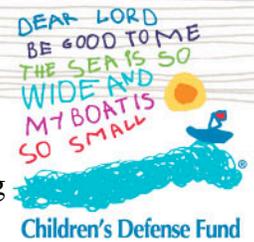


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Family-Friendly Policies and Investments Keep Minnesota among the Top in Nation for Child Well-Being

Overall ranking masks chronic inequities for children of color; targeted investment and opportunities necessary

ST. PAUL, Minn., June 13 —Recent federal, state and local policies and investments have helped place Minnesota among the top-ranking states in child well-being, according to the 2017 *KIDS COUNT*[®] *Data Book* released today by the Annie E. Casey Foundation.

Minnesota ranks fourth in the nation for overall child well-being. Policy improvements around health and economic well-being, in particular, have helped drive down child poverty, parental unemployment and the percentage of children without health insurance, all contributing to the state's top ranking. However, children of color and American Indian children continue to face steep disparities in each of these indicators.

State policies to increase the minimum wage and invest in early education and child care supports—as well as implementation of the Affordable Care Act (ACA)—have contributed to Minnesota's first-place ranking in health and second-place ranking in economic well-being among the 50 states. Since 2010, the year the ACA was implemented, the percentage of uninsured children in Minnesota has declined nearly 60 percent to an historic low of 3 percent.

“Eight years after the devastating recession, thanks to continued commitment by policymakers to the needs of children and families, we see gains that are promising not just for families across the state but also for future prosperity,” Children's Defense Fund-Minnesota Executive Director Bharti Wahi said.

“However, the data also tell us that children of color and American Indian children face structural and institutional obstacles to success that we must start breaking down through targeted policies and investments in order to ensure a well-prepared workforce and continued economic success,” Wahi added.

The annual *Data Book* uses 16 indicators to rank each state across four domains — health, education, economic well-being and family and community — that represent what children need most to thrive. Minnesota ranks:

- **First in health.** The health domain looks at the percentage of children who lack health insurance, child and teen death rates, low-birth weight babies and alcohol or drug abuse among teens. With consistently high rankings in this category, Minnesota has been first two years in a row primarily because of decreased uninsured rates due to increased access to care provided by the Affordable Care Act.
- **Second in economic well-being.** The economic well-being domain examines data related to child poverty, family employment, housing costs and whether older teens are neither in school nor working.
- **Fourth in family and community.** This domain examines the percentage of children living in high-poverty areas, single-parent households and education levels among heads of households, as well as teen birth rates.

- **Eighth in education.** This domain examines the percentage of children ages 3 and 4 not attending school, fourth graders not proficient in reading, eighth graders not proficient in math and high school students not graduating on time.

The 2017 *Data Book* also showed positive trends for Minnesota in the decreasing numbers of children living in high-poverty neighborhoods, and teens abusing drugs and alcohol as well as an ongoing decline, since 2010, of the teen birth rate.

Policymakers and leaders should take note of trends in education in Minnesota as a target for investment, including the 4 percent rise in the percentage of 3- and 4-year-olds not in school (now at 56 percent), nearly two-thirds of fourth graders not proficient in reading and more than half of eighth graders not proficient in math.

Wahi underscored the importance of the Child Care Assistance Program and culturally relevant early childhood and K-12 education and support services, among the many tools state decision makers could use to increase opportunities and reduce systemic barriers to success. She also pointed to targeted tax credits for working families and work-family supports, such as paid family and medical leave, a benefit to which workers of color are currently less likely to have access. Recently bills were signed into law from the 2017 Minnesota State Legislature that included some promising provisions such as an \$18 million investment in the Child Care Assistance Program, expansions of the Working Family Tax Credit and Child and Dependent Care Tax Credit, a \$20 million investment in Early Learning Scholarships and \$50 million in School Readiness Program Plus, which prioritize low-income young children.

“We need to continue to build on these recent investments to ensure all of our children have access to opportunities that support their success,” Wahi said. “Our collective future hinges on every Minnesota child having access to basic needs and opportunities that help them thrive,” Wahi concluded.

Nationally, and in Minnesota, more high school students are graduating on time, but Minnesota children of color and American Indian children face some of the steepest disparities in graduation rates in the country, with 52 percent of American Indian, 62 percent of black, 66 percent of Hispanic/Latino, and 83 percent of Asian students graduating in four years in 2015 compared to 87 percent of white students.

“Minnesota cannot be content with a high ranking that masks chronic inequities for children of color and American Indian children in our state,” Wahi said. “Lawmakers must make priority investments in programs and policies that promote racial and economic equity.”

Release Information

The 2017 *KIDS COUNT Data Book* will be available June 13 at 12:01 a.m. EDT at www.aecf.org. Additional information is available at www.aecf.org/databook, which also contains the most recent national, state and local data on hundreds of indicators of child well-being. Journalists interested in creating maps, graphs and rankings in stories about the *Data Book* can use the KIDS COUNT Data Center at datacenter.kidscount.org.

About the Children’s Defense Fund-Minnesota

CDF-MN releases an annual state KIDS COUNT Data Book every fall. [Download the 2016 data book here.](#) The Children’s Defense Fund Leave No Child Behind® mission is to ensure every child a Healthy Start, a Head Start, a Fair Start, a Safe Start and a Moral Start in life and successful passage to adulthood with the help of caring families and communities.

About the Annie E. Casey Foundation

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.

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