

NEWS



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New Jersey Ranks First in Education, Third Overall for Child Well-Being

But 2018 KIDS COUNT® Data Book shows that New Jersey children continue to struggle in economic indicators

NEWARK— New Jersey leads the nation in educational outcomes for kids, with high enrollment in preschool and high numbers of high school seniors graduating on time, according to the *2018 KIDS COUNT® Data Book* released today by the Annie E. Casey Foundation. The Garden State ranked third overall in the nation for child well-being.

Consistent with prior years, however, New Jersey continues to fall short when it comes to ensuring children the economic supports they need to succeed, ranking 21st overall in economic well-being. Once again, New Jersey ranked near the bottom for children whose families spent more than 30 percent of their income on housing.

“New Jersey’s first place ranking in education reflects the state’s continued investment in giving children a strong start, but far too many families continue to struggle to make ends meet,” said Cecilia Zalkind, president and CEO of Advocates for Children of New Jersey (ACNJ), the KIDS COUNT grantee for New Jersey. “Though we are certainly showing continued gains for our children, New Jersey can do better to ensure that all children, regardless of their family’s income, are able to grow and thrive.”

In addition to the data on the well-being of our nation’s kids, this year’s *Data Book* highlights the importance of the upcoming 2020 census and the chronic undercount of children under the age of 5. Approximately 148,000 children in New Jersey live in hard-to-count census tracts, representing roughly 28 percent of all children under 5. Funding for programs like Medicaid, Head Start, food stamps and child care are all determined, in part, by population estimates provided by the census. It is estimated that New Jersey receives roughly \$3.6 billion annually in federal funding for these programs.

The annual *KIDS COUNT Data Book* from the Annie E. Casey Foundation uses 16 indicators to rank each state across four domains — health, education, economic well-being and family and community — as an assessment of child well-being. New Jersey ranks:

- **21st in economic well-being.** With almost a quarter of children living in families where a parent does not have full-time, year-round employment and close to 40 percent living in families

Giving Every Child A Chance

spending more than 30 percent of their income on housing, New Jersey families continue to struggle economically.

- **First in education.** With 64 percent of children ages three and four attending school (compared to 48 percent nationally), preschool enrollment and early education continue to be a bright spot in New Jersey education. In the 2018 *Data Book*, New Jersey passed Massachusetts, the state formerly holding the number one education ranking.
- **15th in the family and community domain.** Teen birth rates are at an all-time low nationwide, and New Jersey has seen a 45 percent decline in the rate of births to teens since 2010.
- **Third in health.** New Jersey continues to show progress in reducing the number of uninsured children. Since 2010, the percentage of children living without health insurance has decreased by 33 percent.

The 2018 *Data Book* also shows that the decennial census historically disproportionately undercounts children of color as well as kids in low-income and immigrant families.

“If the 2020 numbers are wrong, we will live with the consequences for 10 years. And because New Jersey is an incredibly diverse state with children from a variety of backgrounds, an inaccurate census count could cause thousands of children to miss out,” Zalkind said. “This could negatively impact funding for federal school meals programs as well as access to crucial health services for children.”

“We will count on children of all races and ethnicities to build America’s future, so the country must count *all* children in this upcoming census, so we can direct funding to meet their needs,” said Casey Foundation President and CEO Patrick McCarthy. “It’s not too late to ensure we conduct a census that leads to proper funding, representation and programs for the continued healthy development of kids. But it’s up to policymakers, communities and the nation to make sure that every kid is counted and matters.”

Release Information

The 2018 *KIDS COUNT*[®] *Data Book* will be available June 27 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 Advocates for Children of New Jersey

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>.

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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