



UNDER EMBARGO Until Monday, June 17 at 12:01 a.m. ET

Contact: Teresa Falgoust

tfalgoust@agendaforchildren.org

(504) 586-8509

Louisiana lost nearly 100,000 children since 1990 but made headway in children's health, education and economic security

30th KIDS COUNT® Data Book provides the most comprehensive annual report on child well-being in the United States

NEW ORLEANS, Louisiana —The nation's population of children has grown by more than 9 million since 1990, while Louisiana has seen its child population shrink by 100,000 according to the 30th edition of the *KIDS COUNT® Data Book* released today by the Annie E. Casey Foundation. Positive trends in children's health, education and economic security were noted while the states' overall rank remains near bottom at 49th.

The *2019 KIDS COUNT Data Book* — the most comprehensive annual report on child well-being in the United States — notes measurable progress since the first *Data Book*, which was published in 1990. Nevertheless, more than 13 million U.S. children live in poverty and serious racial and ethnic disparities persist.

Outcomes for children in Louisiana have improved since 1990 on 12 of the 16 indicators tracked by the *KIDS COUNT Data Book*, including the number of children living in poverty (down 10 percent), the teen birth rate (down 61 percent) and young children not attending preschool (down 33 percent). Louisiana made no progress on two measures (children living in households that spend more than 30 percent of their income on housing and teens not in school and not working). Conditions worsened on two other indicators — the percent of low birth-weight babies and percentage of children in single-parent families.

Louisiana's child population has declined by 8 percent since 1990, when the first *Data Book* was published. Most southern states saw large increases in their child populations between 1990 and 2017, making Louisiana an outlier in the region.

"Louisiana's children represent 1,108,403 unique opportunities to create a stronger, more vibrant state," said Dr. Anthony Recasner, CEO of Agenda for Children. "Louisiana's child population has shrunk by nearly 100,000 children since 1990, while our neighbors in Texas saw their child population increase by more than 2.4 million children. If we want our state to grow and thrive, we need to invest in policies and programs that will give children a strong foundation and attract new families to our state."

The *KIDS COUNT Data Book* shows how essential accurate data are to sound policymaking. The 2010 census missed an estimated 12,000 young children in Louisiana, which costs our state more than \$16 million annually in lost funding from five critical federal programs. The

upcoming count may miss even more if young children are not a priority. The stakes are high: 55 major federal programs, including Head Start and the Children's Health Insurance Program, allocate more than \$880 billion each year based on census data. Louisiana has a particularly high rate of young children who live in "hard-to-count" communities (36 percent), which increases the risk of having another undercount of young children in 2020.

"Our kids are counting on us to get an accurate census in 2020," said Dr. Recasner. "Without a coordinated complete count effort, we run the risk of missing thousands of children once again in the next census. If that happens, Louisiana will essentially forfeit millions of dollars that our children need for education, health, nutrition and safety. As a state that's ranked 49th in child well-being, we simply cannot afford to leave a dime for children on the table."

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. Louisiana ranks:

- **50th in economic well-being.** With 28 percent of children living in poverty, Louisiana was one of just three states where child poverty was higher in 2017 than in 2010. (The national average is 18 percent.) Louisiana had the nation's highest child-poverty rate in 2017.
- **48th in education.** Louisiana's strongest education indicator was the number of 3- and 4-year-olds attending preschool at 52 percent, earning the state a ranking of eighth on that measure. Despite the positive ranking, additional local, state and federal investments are needed to provide quality early experiences to the rest of Louisiana's young children not enrolled in preschool, including children under the age of 3, who are even less likely to have access to early care and education.
- **48th in the family and community domain.** Thirteen percent of Louisiana children live in families where the household head lacks a high school diploma — a 57 percent decrease over three decades. Where Louisiana's rate was higher than the national average in 1990, it is now at the national average and has continued to show significant declines in the past few years. Children whose parents have at least a high school diploma tend to have better outcomes on a wide range of measures, from reading proficiency to economic well-being, making this a positive sign for the state's future.
- **42nd in health.** Louisiana's best ranking was on the health domain, due in part to its success in connecting 97 percent of children to health insurance and maintaining low rates of drug and alcohol abuse among teenagers. The state is ranked 49th for the percentage of babies born at low birth weight; the rate in 2017 (10.7 percent) was exactly the same as it was in 2010. Despite the lack of recent progress, Louisiana's Medicaid expansion promises to have a long-term positive impact on birth outcomes because improvements in women's health are likely to improve birth outcomes.

"Louisiana needs to build upon its successes to create an opportunity-rich community that's ready to support the children and families who live here and attract newcomers," said Dr. Recasner. "We were the first southern state to pass a refundable state EITC and we are one of the only southern states to connect more parents to health care through Medicaid expansion.

However, if we want to move out of 49th place, we need to do a lot more to support children and families, including expanding funding for child care, reducing disparities for children of color and fostering an economy where more parents earn family-supporting wages.”

The Casey Foundation points to areas of tremendous improvement in children’s lives nationally — including access to health care, decreased rates of teen childbearing and increased rates of high school graduation — and draws a direct line to policies that support this success. The Casey Foundation calls on elected officials and representatives to:

- *Expand the programs that make and keep kids healthy.* For the sake of all children, regardless of their immigration status, states should expand access to Medicaid.
- *Provide the tools proven to help families lift themselves up economically.* Federal and state earned income tax credits (EITC) and child tax credit programs mean working parents can use more of their take-home pay to meet their children’s needs.
- *Address ethnic and racial inequities.* The national averages of child well-being can mask the reality that black and brown children still face a greater number of obstacles.
- *Count all kids.* Ensure the 2020 census counts all children, especially those under 5 years old and from hard-to-count areas.

The *2019 KIDS COUNT Data Book* is the 30th edition of an annual data study that is based on U.S. Census and other publicly available data, representing all 50 states, the District of Columbia and Puerto Rico.

Release Information

The *2019 KIDS COUNT® Data Book* will be available June 17 at 12:01 a.m. EDT at www.aecf.org. Additional information is available at www.aecf.org/databook. 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 Agenda for Children

Agenda for Children, a private non-profit organization, works to make Louisiana a state in which all children can thrive. Visit www.agendaforchildren.org to learn more.

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.

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