

NEWS



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New Jersey child population more diverse; state lags in economic well-being for children and families

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

NEWARK, NEW JERSEY —New Jersey’s child population has increased since 1990, and it is more diverse than ever before, with more than 50 percent being kids of color. Although New Jersey ranks fifth overall in child well-being, wide racial gaps in educational outcomes, economic well-being and maternal and infant mortality persist. With this multicultural boom in our youth population, greater investments must be made to expand opportunities for all of our state’s residents.

The *2019 KIDS COUNT® Data Book* from the Annie E. Casey Foundation — the most comprehensive annual report on child well-being in the United States — notes measurable progress in New Jersey since the first *Data Book*, which was published in 1990. Nevertheless, more than 270,000 New Jersey children continue to live in poverty, a 27 percent increase since 1990. The Garden State has also seen other troubling trends in economic well-being, with a greater share of children living in families burdened with high housing costs.

New Jersey has made progress in some areas, such as health, by ensuring that more children have access to insurance as well as reducing child and teen death rates. The child and teen death rate was 36 per 100,000 youth ages 1 to 19 in 1990, and it decreased to 16 per 100,000 in 2017.

“Our state has changed over the last 30 years, and we have made great strides, but we must continue investing in our children in order to ensure that they have bright futures,” said Cecilia Zalkind, president and CEO of Advocates for Children of New Jersey, the *KIDS COUNT* grantee for New Jersey.

The *KIDS COUNT Data Book* shows how essential accurate data are to sound policymaking. It is estimated that 2.2 million children under age 5 were missed in the last census, and 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 nationally each year based on census data.

Giving Every Child A Chance

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:

- *28th in economic well-being.* Although New Jersey saw its lowest rank in this area as compared to the national average, there was some improvement seen since 2010. Fewer children lived in families where a parent lacked full-time, year-round employment, decreasing by 11 percent since 2010.
- *Second in education.* New Jersey has remained near the top of this category for the last several years, with more than 60 percent of young children attending preschool and 90 percent of high school students graduating on time.
- *13th in the family and community domain.* Fewer children live in families led by a parent without a high school education, and teen birth rates continue to decline. Yet, a higher percentage of children live in areas of concentrated poverty, where they may face heightened risks such as higher rates of crime and unemployment.
- *Third in health.* New Jersey ranks near the middle of the pack for its percentage of low-birth weight babies. More investments are needed to support healthy starts for our state’s expectant mothers and infants.

“America’s children are one-quarter of our population and 100 percent of our future,” said Casey Foundation President and CEO Lisa Hamilton. “All of the 74 million kids in our increasingly diverse country have unlimited potential, and we have the data, knowledge and evidence to create the policies that will help them realize it.”

The Casey Foundation points to areas of tremendous improvement in children’s lives — 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. Especially as the child population is expanding, there are steps that policymakers should take to help all children thrive. The Casey Foundation calls on elected officials and representatives to do the following:

- *Expand the programs that make and keep kids healthy.* New Jersey expanded access to Medicaid and saw uninsured rates decrease. Regardless of children’s immigration status, states should expand access to Medicaid like New Jersey has.
- *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, including 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 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 40 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 at <http://www.twitter.com/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.

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