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Oklahoma Policy Institute

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Oklahoma ranks in bottom 10 states for child well-being

New KIDS COUNT Data Book highlights trends and solutions for Oklahoma children

TULSA, Okla. — Oklahoma ranks in the bottom 10 states in the nation for child well-being, according to the *2019 KIDS COUNT® Data Book* released today by the Annie E. Casey Foundation. With an overall ranking of 42nd out of all 50 states, Oklahoma ranked especially low for education (45th) and health (43rd).

The *2019 KIDS COUNT Data Book* — the most comprehensive annual report on child well-being in the United States — notes measurable progress for the nation’s kids since the first *Data Book*, which was published in 1990. Nevertheless, more than 13 million U.S. children live in poverty, including about 1 in 5 children in Oklahoma, and serious racial and ethnic disparities persist.

Oklahoma has made major progress from 2010 to 2017 in areas such as reducing teen pregnancies (down 40 percent) and reducing the child uninsured rate (down 27 percent), trends that match most states. However, on those measures and many others, Oklahoma’s progress trails the nation.

“Even in years when the economy is strong, far too many Oklahoma kids don’t have the resources they need to thrive,” said Gene Perry, director of strategy and communication and KIDS COUNT coordinator for Oklahoma Policy Institute. “The data show a serious need for our state to further reduce the number of uninsured and continue rebuilding investment in our schools after years of cuts.”

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. Oklahoma ranks:

- **35th in economic well-being.** Oklahoma was close to the national average for the percentage of children living in families with at least one full-time employed parent, but the state’s child poverty rate remains significantly higher than the nation’s.
- **45th in education.** The *Data Book* ranking is based on data from 2017, before Oklahoma lawmakers funded a teacher raise and began to reinvest in education. Oklahoma’s large decline in fourth-grade reading proficiency rankings may also be a delayed effect of the state’s mandate to retain children in the third grade if they don’t pass a reading test. Fourth-grade reading proficiency jumped in 2015 when those students with the lowest reading score remained in third grade, but now that this class has moved on to fourth grade, scores have fallen back to the pre-retention trend.
- **40th in the family and community domain.** Although Oklahoma has seen large reductions in teen births since 2010, the teen birth rate is still third-highest in the nation, better than only Mississippi and Arkansas. Oklahoma did see improvement in the percentage of children living in

families where the head of household lacks a high school diploma — at 12 percent in 2017, down from 14 percent in 2010.

- **43rd in health.** Oklahoma’s high child uninsured rate contributed to the state’s low ranking in this area. For the last three years, Oklahoma’s child uninsured rate has hovered around 8 percent. In 2017, that gave us the fourth-highest share of children without health insurance in the U.S.

In Oklahoma the child population grew by 14 percent from 1990 to 2017, close to the national average of 15 percent. Especially as the child population is expanding, there are steps policymakers should take to help all children thrive. The Casey Foundation calls on lawmakers to:

- *Expand the programs that make and keep kids healthy.* For the sake of all children, Oklahoma should expand access to Medicaid. Expanding Medicaid for working adults would reduce our child uninsured rate as parents with coverage are much more likely to get their children covered, and it would protect children by making sure all parents can access treatment for chronic diseases and mental illness.
- *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. Lawmakers effectively ended the state EITC for most of Oklahoma’s lowest income working families by making it non-refundable in 2016. Now that the state budget has recovered, restoring the EITC should be a top priority.
- *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. This is true in Oklahoma, where children of color experience significantly higher poverty rates and are much more likely to have incarcerated parents.
- *Count all kids.* Ensure the 2020 census counts all children, which is essential for deciding the distribution of billions of dollars in federal grants. Oklahoma contains many of the hardest to count census tracts in the nation — and young children under 5 are undercounted at a higher rate than any other age group.

“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. It’s incumbent on us to do just that.”

The *2019 KIDS COUNT Data Book* is the 30th edition of an annual data study that is based on the 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 Oklahoma Policy Institute

OK Policy advances equitable and fiscally responsible policies that expand opportunity for all Oklahomans through non-partisan research, analysis, and advocacy. For more information, visit www.okpolicy.org.

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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