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Mississippi Ranks Last in Children's Well-Being, But Making Gains

Data from Annie E. Casey Foundation Show State's Improvements in Education

JACKSON, Miss. — June 21, 2021 — Despite ranking 50th in the nation for overall child well-being, falling from 49th the previous year, Mississippi is making notable gains in education, according to data published in the *2021 KIDS COUNT® Data Book*, a 50-state report released annually by the Annie E. Casey Foundation to track child well-being in the United States. The report also provides recent household survey data, analyzing how families have fared during the COVID-19 crisis and resulting recession.

“We can use this data like a GPS that points us precisely to where Mississippi children and their families need the most support,” said Dr. Linda Southward, executive director of the Children’s Foundation of Mississippi. “We can chart routes from where we are now as a state to where we’d like to be.”

Sixteen indicators measuring four domains — economic well-being, education, health, and family and community context — are used in each year’s *Data Book* to assess child well-being. Highlights from 2019 data, which are the most recent available, include:

- **ECONOMIC WELL-BEING:** 28% of children in Mississippi lived in households with an income below the poverty line. Mississippi’s children have the highest level of poverty in the nation, but the state has had a 15% reduction in the child poverty rate since 2010 (33%).
- **EDUCATION:** Mississippi ranked 39th, unchanged from the previous year. Importantly, Mississippi improved on all of the education indicators since the previous ranking, with the greatest improvements in fourth grade literacy. Fourth graders not proficient in reading dropped from 73% in 2017 to 68% in 2019. This indicator also showed a 13% improvement since 2009 (78%).

- **HEALTH:** Although Mississippi ranked 50th in Health, the percentage of children without health insurance in the state remained low at 6%.
- **FAMILY AND COMMUNITY CONTEXT:** The greatest long-term improvement in family and community has been reduction in the teen birth rate. The Mississippi teen birth rate in 2019, 29 per 1,000, has declined significantly from 55 per 1,000 in 2010.

Children and families during COVID-19

Survey data from the U.S. Census Bureau found that in 2020, during the height of the pandemic, 27% of Mississippi households with children had little or no confidence in their ability to pay their next rent or mortgage payment. By March 2021, this had fallen to 19%, suggesting the beginnings of a recovery on this front. However, the percentage of adults living in households with children and who felt down, depressed or hopeless remained the same at 29%, indicating a widespread need for mental health care services.

Recommendations for improving children’s well-being post-pandemic

“The COVID-19 pandemic is the most extraordinary crisis to hit families in decades,” said Lisa Hamilton, president and CEO of the Annie E. Casey Foundation. “Deliberate policy decisions can help them recover, and we’re already seeing the beginnings of that. Policymakers should use this moment to repair the damage the pandemic has caused — and to address long-standing inequities it has exacerbated.”

Investing in children, families and communities is a priority to ensure an equitable and expansive recovery. Several of the Annie E. Casey Foundation’s suggestions have already been enacted in the American Rescue Plan.

“It’s essential that Mississippi’s policy makers, as well as other stakeholders, coordinate their efforts toward improving well-being for all children in our state,” said Southward.

These findings spotlight ways that Mississippi can make positive change for children across our state, such as having a state Earned Income Tax Credit that can help to lift working families out of poverty, strengthen public schools and pathways to postsecondary education and training and prioritize the hardest hit areas and communities across the state.

Release Information

The 2021 KIDS COUNT® Data Book will be available June 21 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 the Children’s Foundation of Mississippi

The Children’s Foundation of Mississippi focuses on systems and policy changes to advance positive outcomes for children and youth across Mississippi and is home to Mississippi KIDS COUNT. The Children’s Foundation is supportive of advancing strong public-private partnerships, scaling and sustaining results-producing efforts to inform sound and equitable policy. Learn more about its work at childrensfoundationms.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. KIDS COUNT® is a registered trademark of the Annie E. Casey Foundation.

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