



Contact: Teresa Falgoust
(504) 586-8509, ext. 117
tfalgoust@agendaforchildren.org

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
11 a.m. EDT/10 a.m. CST

Louisiana Ranked 49th in State-by-State Report on Child Well-Being

New Orleans, LA— The 20th annual *KIDS COUNT Data Book*, published by the Annie E. Casey Foundation, ranked Louisiana 49th among states in overall child well-being. The report reveals that Louisiana's children are far more likely to experience various negative outcomes than their peers in other states. The data show:

- Louisiana's child poverty rate in 2007 was the second-highest in the country. Twenty-seven percent (27%) of Louisiana children lived in poverty in 2007, which is significantly more than the national average (18%) and three times as high as the child poverty rate in New Hampshire, the best-ranked state in terms of child poverty.
- Louisiana was ranked 49th on two basic measures of babies' health—infant mortality and low birthweight babies.
- Despite improvements since 2000 on four key indicators—child death rate, teen birth rate, high school dropouts, and teens who are not in school and not working—Louisiana ranked among the bottom ten states for all but one measure of child well-being (the teen birth rate).

Louisiana's data either stayed the same or got worse on three indicators that have a significant impact on a child's economic well-being. While Louisiana's child poverty rate remained unchanged since 2000, the percentage of children living in families where no parent has full-time, year-round employment and the percentage of children living in single-parent families both increased. These trends are especially concerning because this data is based on information collected in 2007, before the effects of our current economic crisis were fully felt in Louisiana.

Conditions improved between 2000 and 2006 on three of four indicators focused on the well-being of Louisiana's teens. While the teen death rate increased by 5%, the teen birth rate, the percentage of teens who are high school dropouts, and the percentage of teens who were neither in school nor working declined during this time period. "We are pleased to see that more of our kids have connections to school and work. However, we are troubled by fact that our teen birth rate actually increased between 2005 and 2006 after many years of decline" said Judy Watts, President of Agenda for Children.

"Counting What Counts," this year's KIDS COUNT Essay, assesses the nation's progress in measuring and analyzing the well-being of this nation's children. The Essay contends that major improvements to child well-being could be realized through better uses of information and technology. Even as the amount of information on children available at the state level has expanded dramatically over the past two decades, we still lack basic data in some key areas, including families' assets, socio-emotional health, mental health, peer influences, and neighborhood effects. Data collection and analysis are also instrumental in assessing progress and ensuring accountability in vital public programs. For example, through ongoing data collection and analysis, Maine's child welfare system was able to dramatically improve outcomes and reduce the number of children in group settings by 67%.

(more)

The Essay highlights two organizations in Louisiana that are using data to improve outcomes for kids—the Louisiana Department of Education and the Greater New Orleans Community Data Center.

The Louisiana Department of Education (LDOE) is cited as one of just six state education departments whose data systems include all 10 elements considered necessary for educational planning by the Data Quality Campaign. LDOE's data system allows users to systematically track individual students' performances across a variety of measures, including ACT scores, course completion, graduation, dropouts, and test scores. A strong data system of this type provides vital information that was previously unavailable. For example, while LDOE has long calculated annual dropout rates, we can now also calculate cohort graduation rates, a key measure of student success. While annual dropout rates tell us what percentage of students dropped out of school over the course of a single school year, cohort graduation rates tell us what percentage of entering ninth grade students graduated with a high school diploma four years later. In the 2006-2007 school year, the cohort graduation rate was 65.9% in Louisiana and the annual dropout rate was 6.9% for 9th-12th graders. By reporting a graduation rate, the department can focus attention not just on the need for effective dropout prevention programs, but also on the need for strategies and interventions to help kids graduate on time with their peers.

The Greater New Orleans Community Data Center has played an integral role in recovery efforts in New Orleans. The data center has created comprehensive neighborhood-level maps showing where people are living, where child care centers are located, and where there are schools. The interactive child care map, which was created through a partnership with Agenda for Children, allows users to easily visualize the child care landscape by several key characteristics, such as Head Start status, capacity, and whether or not a center provides evening care. "We are confident that the child care and education maps will help funders and planners, as well as community organizations, make strategic decisions about children's services in New Orleans," said Teresa Falgoust, KIDS COUNT Coordinator at Agenda for Children. The maps are available at www.gnocdc.org.

Better data, combined with improved data analysis, is crucial in achieving better outcomes for our most vulnerable children and families. "However, improvements in data and analysis alone will not improve the lives of Louisiana's children. Communities and policymakers alike need to commit to holding child-serving programs and systems accountable. We all need to recognize the importance of making sound investments in Louisiana's children," says Judy Watts, President of Agenda for Children.

Agenda for Children, Louisiana's statewide child advocacy organization, works to make Louisiana a state in which all children can thrive. For more information, please visit the Agenda for Children website at www.agendaforchildren.org.

The *KIDS COUNT Data Book* with state-by-state rankings, supplemental data, and the essay launches at 11:00 a.m. EDT on July 28, 2009 at <http://datacenter.kidscount.org>. Through the KIDS COUNT Data Center users can download the complete *Data Book*, access hundreds of other measures of child well-being, and view real-time information on portable devices.

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