On-Time Graduation Improving, but Child Poverty Stays the Same in Alaska, According to KIDS COUNT National Report

Anchorage- While the nation's economy gradually recovers, Alaska, which wasn't hit as hard by the recession, saw no reduction in the number of children living in poverty in 2011, based on data released by the Annie E Casey Foundation in its 2013 KIDS COUNT Data Book. The annual report contains information on children's well-being for every state, the District of Columbia and the nation.

From 2005 to 2010, the percentage of Alaska high-school students not graduating on time dropped from one-third to one-quarter. Overall, Alaska ranked 43rd on the 2013 Data Book’s education index. Among fourth-grade students, 74% were not proficient in reading and 65% of eighth graders were not proficient in math in 2011. Percentages like these indicate that Alaska’s children are growing up with educational risk factors that limit their ability to compete and thrive in the global economy they will inherit.

While most states saw improvements in children’s health indicators, Alaska has not done nearly as well according to the new data in the Foundation’s KIDS COUNT Data Book. Despite having the lowest percentage of low-birth weight babies five out of the past six years; declines in the number of children without health insurance; and fewer teens abusing alcohol or drugs, Alaska’s overall health index was among the worst (46) in the nation. Since 2005 the child and teen death rate declined by 19% nationwide while Alaska’s rate increased by 5%, making the state’s rank (49) almost the worst in the nation.

In 2011, 15% of Alaska’s children lived in poverty, the same percentage as in 2005. The economic well-being index in the 2013 Data Book ranks Alaska 24th among the states. About one-third of children live in households that spend more than 30% of their income on housing, roughly 7,000 more children than in 2005. Economic security is critical for all children not only because of day-to-day challenges, but also because growing up in poverty is associated with many negative outcomes.

In addition to the indicators in the national KIDS COUNT Data Book, the KIDS COUNT Data Center (http://datacenter.kidscount.org/) provides easy, online access to hundreds of indicators by state, county, city and school district as well as information for Alaska’s seven regions. Data Center users can download the Data Book, and create interactive maps and graphs. Visit the mobile site from your smartphone, at http://mobile.kidscount.org.

Kids Count Alaska is funded by the Annie E. Casey Foundation which sponsors KIDS COUNT programs in all 50 states as well as in Washington, D.C., Puerto Rico, and the U.S. Virgin Islands. In addition to the measures discussed above, the Kids Count Alaska Data Book includes indicators specifically for Alaska, many are available by region. You can view and download all Alaska Data Books at http://kidscount.alaska.edu.