Georgia Drops Back into Bottom 10 States for Child Well-being
Investments in Health, Education Show Promise for Rebound

ATLANTA—Georgia’s ranking for child well-being fell six spots to 43rd in the nation, according to the 2013 KIDS COUNT Data Book. The annual report, released today by The Annie E. Casey Foundation, shows that Georgia continues to struggle with child poverty, received mixed results in Family and Community category, but has made some gains in the Health and Education domains.

“Although Georgia has dipped in the national ranking, we must be mindful of our own story,” said Gaye Smith, executive director of Georgia Family Connection Partnership (GaFCP). “We’ve actually improved or held steady on most indicators within our state, including Education and Health. So we are making gains—just not as quickly as the rest of the nation. We must continue to build on our strategic investments in children and families if we are to rally back.”

The most disheartening finding in Georgia is that more than one in five children live in poverty. The ever-growing number of children living in households where their parents lack full-time, year-round employment—866,000—is nearly 25 percent higher than it was four years ago.

“We’re still reeling from the harsh impact of a poor economy,” said Smith. “Our state has the highest percentage of foreclosure sales in the nation, and home prices continue to languish. But we also know that the effects of the recession are intensified by generational poverty.”

The Health domain suffered the biggest setback, dropping ten spots to 40th in the nation, but trends over time show that Georgia’s rates actually improved in all but one health indicator—babies born at low birthweight. More children are covered by health insurance, while child and teen deaths, and the rate of teens who abuse alcohol or drugs, are down. The rate of births to teen girls ages 15 to 19 has decreased dramatically, but Georgia’s rate is still well above average, causing the state to rank 41st in the nation.

“Georgia is making progress because we’re using what we learn from the data to make informed decisions,” said Smith. “The governor’s Georgia SHAPE program, for instance, is already addressing our childhood obesity epidemic. Beyond that, comprehensive school-based health clinic programs and youth fitness campaigns, the Grade-Level Reading Campaign, the Georgia Meth Project, and the Supermarket Access Task Force—are gearing up to increase access to routine healthcare for children, and lessen the costs of substance abuse.”

Georgia remains 38th in the nation in education—below the national average for eighth-grade math proficiency and on-time high-school graduation, and on par with the national proficiency in fourth-grade reading. However, education is also a bright spot in the KIDS COUNT Data Book, because Georgia is above the national average in enrolling children in preschool.
“I’m a firm believer that a high-quality education is one way to assure positive outcomes,” said Department of Early Care and Learning Commissioner Bobby Cagle. “And if we can assess and raise the quality of education when children are at their most impressionable, we can impact many things, not the least of these is the life of a child. I can think of nothing that is more important. I share Gov. Nathan Deal’s vision for a state where children attend quality early-care and education programs that support the whole child and prepare them for ongoing success in life.”

State School Superintendent John Barge agrees. “Some incredible things going on in education in Georgia aren’t making headlines,” he said. “When it comes to transitions and alignment—which looks at our educational system from early childhood through our post-secondary system and its alignment to the world of work—Georgia received Education Week’s 2013 Quality Counts report’s first ever perfect score of 100. And the report ranks the quality of Georgia’s educational system seventh in the nation.”

###

For interactive statewide data, visit Georgia KIDS COUNT at gafcp.org/kidscout.

**Georgia Family Connection Partnership** (GaFCP) is a public/private partnership created by the State of Georgia and funders from the private sector to assist communities in addressing the serious challenges facing children and families. GaFCP also serves as a resource to state agencies across Georgia that work to improve the conditions of children and families. Georgia KIDS COUNT provides policymakers and citizens with current data they need to make informed decisions regarding priorities, services, and resources that impact Georgia’s children, youth, families, and communities. Georgia KIDS COUNT is funded, in part, through a grant from The Annie E. Casey Foundation, a private charitable organization dedicated to helping build better futures for disadvantaged children in the United States.

The KIDS COUNT Data Center (datacenter.kidscount.org) is a comprehensive source of information where you can download this year’s complete Data Book and access the new mobile site being launched using your smart phone.