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Improvements in Education and Health Move Mississippi Out of the Number 50 Spot, KIDS COUNT Report Finds
Positive indicators despite growing poverty rate in state and nation

STARKVILLE—Mississippi has improved its ranking for overall child well-being according to new data released in the Annie E. Casey Foundation’s KIDS COUNT Data Book. Eight of the 16 indicators used to rank states in the areas of Economic Well-Being, Education, Health, and Family and Community show slight improvements, moving the state into the 49th position for the first time in the 24 year history of the Foundation’s Data Book. New Mexico fell to 50th. New Hampshire, Vermont, and Massachusetts ranked highest for overall child well-being.

In Education, Mississippi was ranked 48th with improvement in three of four measurements. The percentage of Mississippi children not attending pre-school went from 54 percent in 2005-2007 to 50 percent in 2009-2011. For fourth grade reading, the number of Mississippi students who were not proficient decreased to 78 percent in 2011 compared to 82 percent in 2005. For eighth grade math, the number of students who were not proficient decreased to 81 percent in 2011 compared to 86 percent in 2008. High school students not graduating on time remained the same at 36 percent or 14,476 students.

The number of Mississippi children without health insurance has also improved. According to the report, in 2011, 61,000 children (8 percent) did not have access to health insurance compared to 13 percent in the year 2008. Child and teen death rates (per 100,000) went from 52 in 2005 to 38 in 2010. The number of teens abusing alcohol and drugs also decreased. Only one of the four health indicators worsened; the number of low-birthweight babies increased from 11.8 percent in 2005 to 12.1 percent in 2010.

Although the economic well-being of the nation’s children improved slightly from 2010 to 2011, the negative impact of the recession remains evident. In 2011, the child poverty rate stood at 23 percent or about 16.4 million children—an increase of about 3 million since 2005. In Mississippi the child poverty rate was 32 percent or 236,000 children during the same time period. Across the nation, the number of children whose parents lack full time, year-round employment was nearly 20 percent higher than in 2008. In Mississippi, parents of 285,000 children (38 percent) did not have secure employment in 2011.

“While the Health and Education indicators have improved somewhat, keeping Mississippi out of its perennial 50th spot, the high percentage of children living in poverty coupled with children living in households whose parents lack secure employment continue to be of concern,” said Dr. Linda Southward, Mississippi KIDS COUNT director. “Improving quality early care and learning environments and having families with secure employment are two of the critical factors in advancing the overall well-being of Mississippi’s children and youth. Mississippi KIDS COUNT continues to promote success stories across Mississippi, spotlighting best practices and areas of success in education, health, economic well-being, and child safety.”

The 2013 Data Book also examines how America’s youngest children are faring, adding to the ongoing national conversation on early childhood education. In particular, younger children are disproportionately affected by the
lingering effects of the recession. The poverty rate among children younger than 3 is 26 percent; among 3- to 5-year-olds, it is 25 percent—higher than the national average for all kids. In Mississippi, 36 percent of children ages 0-5 live in poverty.

“Children are our nation’s most precious resource, as well as our future leaders, employees, citizens, and parents,” said Patrick McCarthy, the Foundation’s president and CEO. “The early years of their lives are a critical juncture in their development. As our economic recovery continues, we cannot lose sight of doing whatever it takes to help kids, particularly kids in low-income families reach their full potential and that includes laying a solid foundation from the moment they are born.”

The KIDS COUNT DATA Book features the latest data on child well-being for every state, the District of Columbia, and the nation. This information is available in the newly redesigned KIDS COUNT Data Center which also contains the most recent national, state, and local data on hundreds of measures of child well-being. Data Center users can create rankings, maps and graphs for use in publications and on websites and view real-time information on mobile devices. Mississippi KIDS COUNT, located at Mississippi State University’s Social Science Research Center is a part of the Annie E. Casey Foundation’s network of KIDS COUNT state grantees.

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