North Dakota ranks well nationally with regard to child health and well-being; however, opportunities for investment are widespread

FARGO - North Dakota’s overall child well-being ranks sixth in the nation according to the Annie E. Casey Foundation’s 2013 KIDS COUNT® Data Book, an annual assessment of children’s well-being in the United States.

The Data Book provides a robust and comprehensive portrait of how U.S. children are doing in key areas. It ranks states based on 16 indicators of child well-being (until 2012, the annual rankings were based on 10 indicators) reflecting current child development research. In addition, the 16 indicators are organized into four domains that capture what children need most to thrive: Economic Well-Being, Family and Community, Education, and Health.

North Dakota children are showing some progress in the Education and Health indicators, and mixed results with regard to the Family and Community indicator. Despite North Dakota ranking first in the nation with regard to Economic Well-being, all four indicators within that domain showed declines (i.e., children living in poverty, children whose parents lack secure employment, children in households with a high housing cost burden, and teens not in school and not working).

North Dakota continues to lead the nation in growth of GDP and per capita income and continues to have the nation’s lowest unemployment rate. These positive economic indicators reflect trends that are bringing prosperity to the state and many of its residents. However, many North Dakotans still face challenges and our prosperity provides us a unique opportunity to make investments in the lives of our children to ensure they get the best possible start in life.

Economic Well-Being (1st in the nation)

- **Strengths:** North Dakota ranks well with regard to the economic well-being of children - the best in the nation. North Dakota has the smallest proportion of children whose parents lack secure employment and the smallest proportion of children living in families with a high housing cost burden (i.e., greater than 30 percent of income goes to housing costs). In addition, when compared to other states, North Dakota has the third lowest child poverty rate.
- **Challenges and Opportunities:** Although it is a relatively small percentage of children living in poverty, the percentage has increased over the past six years - this amidst an economic boom in the state. The percentage of children in cost-burdened homes has increased as well, from 19 percent in 2005 to 21 percent in 2011. Teens considered to be idle (i.e., not in school and not working) increased slightly, from 6 percent in 2008 to 7 percent in 2011.

Family and Community (4th in the nation)

- **Strengths:** When compared with other states, children in North Dakota fare well in terms of family and community indicators. North Dakota has the lowest proportion of children living in families where the household head lacks a high school diploma and the second lowest proportion of children living in single-parent families.
- **Challenges and Opportunities:** About one in four North Dakota children now live with a single parent (26 percent in 2011, up from 23 percent in 2005), and these children are much more likely to be living in poverty than children living with married parents. The proportion of children living in high poverty neighborhoods has
increased as well – from 5 percent in 2000 to 8 percent between 2007 and 2011, when the data was collected. The teen birth rate in North Dakota, which showed slight improvement from 2005 to 2010, slipped in ranking from ninth best among states to 17th in 2010.

**Education (16th in the nation)**

- **Strengths:** All four education indicators showed improvement over the measurement period: children not attending preschool, fourth graders not proficient in reading, eighth graders not proficient in math, and high school students not graduating on time. North Dakota has the third lowest proportion of high school students in the nation not graduating on time.
- **Challenges and Opportunities:** High-quality prekindergarten programs for 3- and 4-year-olds can improve school readiness, with the greatest gains accruing to the highest-risk children. Yet, two-thirds of 3- and 4-year-olds in North Dakota do not attend nursery school or preschool (47th in the nation). According to data from the National Assessment of Educational Progress, nearly two-thirds of fourth graders are not proficient in reading and more than half of eighth graders are not proficient in math. This has resulted in ACT scores which indicate that the majority of North Dakota students, upon completion of high school, are not prepared for college-level courses.

**Health (25th in the nation)**

- **Strengths:** Three of the four health indicators showed improvement over the measurement period: children without health insurance, the child and teen death rate, and teens who abuse alcohol or drugs. While the proportion is up slightly, North Dakota has the seventh lowest proportion of low-birthweight babies in the nation.
- **Challenges and Opportunities:** Though showing some improvement, the child death rate in North Dakota ranks 41st in the nation. The percentage of babies born at a low birthweight increased from 6.4 percent in 2005 to 6.7 percent in 2010. A low birthweight (i.e., less than 5 pounds, 8 ounces) carries a range of health risks, including a weakened immune system, reduced muscle strength, decreased cognitive and social development, and a higher incidence of diabetes and heart disease in later life.

The 2013 *KIDS COUNT Data Book* includes the latest data on child well-being for every state, the District of Columbia, and the nation. This information will be available June 24, 2013 at 12:01 a.m. EDT on the KIDS COUNT Data Center (http://datacenter.kidscount.org), which also contains the most recent national, state, and local data on hundreds of other measures of child well-being. The Data Center allows users to create rankings, maps, and graphs for use in publications and on websites, and to view real-time information on mobile devices.

The 2013 *North Dakota KIDS COUNT Fact Book*, which provides child well-being data for North Dakota, its 53 counties, and eight planning regions will be available from North Dakota KIDS COUNT in the fall of 2013.

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The *North Dakota KIDS COUNT program is a project of the Annie E. Casey Foundation. Our mission is to provide current and accurate information necessary to inform discussions and decisions to improve the health and well-being of children in North Dakota. You can see more at http://www.ndkidscount.org or search for “North Dakota KIDS COUNT” on Facebook.