Overall Well-being of Oklahoma’s Children Improves but Child Poverty Remains High

OKLAHOMA CITY – Though Oklahoma weathered the recent recession better than many states, key indicators tracking childhood poverty have worsened in recent years – particularly among the youngest children -- reflecting the increasing child poverty rate nationally, according to new data in the Annie E. Casey Foundation’s 2013 KIDS COUNT Data Book.

There is some good news. Oklahoma’s ranking on overall child well-being improved to 36th, up from 40th in 2012, making it one of two states showing the biggest improvement from last year.

Oklahoma improved its ranking in three of the four key areas where specific indicators are tracked: Economic Well-Being, Health and Family/Community. Compared to the 2012 report, the Economic Well-being indicators moved up to 25th from 29th; the Health indicators moved to 43rd from 44th; and the Family/Community indicators moved to 39th from 40th. Education was the only area where Oklahoma failed to improve compared to last year, dropping to 40th from 39th.

“We are finally moving up from the bottom of the barrel on some key indicators related to child well-being, however, our state is not even close to the national average for most of our rankings,” said Doug Gibson, Interim Executive Director for the Oklahoma Institute for Child Advocacy, the organization that directs Oklahoma KIDS COUNT.

“The persistently high child poverty rate is a serious concern, as poverty impacts the health, education, family stability and overall well-being of a child in negative ways – often, for a lifetime.” Gibson said.

When the current indicators (2010-11 data) are compared to the same data from 2005, several have improved slightly.

Two of the indicators showing the most improvement since 2005 were:

- Child and teen deaths (per 100,000) with Oklahoma now ranking 36th, compared to 45th.
- Teen birth rate (15-19 year-olds) at 50 per 1,000, compared to 54 per 1,000.

Other indicators that showed slight improvement since 2005 were:

- The percent of children not attending preschool dropped from 62% to 59%.
- The percent of fourth graders not reading at grade level dropped from 75% to 73%.
- The percent of eighth graders not proficient in math dropped from 79% to 73%.
- The percent of high school students not graduating on time dropped from 22% to 21%.
- The percent of children without health insurance dropped from 13% in 2005 to 11% in current data.
- Teens who abuse alcohol and drugs dropped from 8% to 6%.
- Children in families where the household head lacks a high school diploma dropped from 14% to 13%.
The state indicators that worsened most significantly since 2005 were:

- Children living in high poverty areas, which more than doubled -- jumping from 5 percent in 2005 to 12 percent in current data.
- The number of children living in single-parent families rose from 32% to 36%.

Other indicators that worsened slightly in the new data compared to 2005 include:

- The percent of low birth-weight babies increased from 8.0% to 8.4%.
- The percent of children whose parents lack secure employment rose from 29% to 30%.
- Children living in households with a high housing cost burden rose from 29% to 30%.
- Teens not in school and not working increased from 8% to 9%.

In addition to presenting state and national data on 16 indicators in the four core areas and looking at trends over time, the 2013 KIDS COUNT Data Book highlights how the country’s youngest children are faring. That picture is not good.

Nationally, the poverty rate for children under age 3 is 26%, and among children ages 3 – 5 it is 25% -- higher than the national average for all children. These figures support the need to expand high quality early childhood care and education programs for all children, especially the children growing up in poverty.

“Oklahoma’s ranking has been so low for so long on most health, education and economic well-being indicators for children, which directly impacts the well-being of our state and its economic potential,” Gibson said. “Investing in children is a smart investment for future economic growth.”

The 2013 National KIDS COUNT Data Book with state-by-state rankings and supplemental data is embargoed until 12:01 a.m. EDT, June 24, 2013 at datacenter.kidscount.org/databook/2013.

On the newly redesigned 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 mobile devices; check: http://datacenter.kidscount.org/.

The Oklahoma Institute for Child Advocacy is our state’s KIDS COUNT partner with the Annie E. Casey Foundation. For more information, check www.oica.org or contact info@oica.org.

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The Oklahoma Institute for Child Advocacy is the statewide, nonprofit, 501-c-3 organization that creates awareness, takes action and changes policy to promote the health, safety, education and economic well-being of Oklahoma’s children and youth. The Institute directs Oklahoma KIDS COUNT. Check: www.oica.org.