South Dakota 18th in Overall Rankings

*Economic, Health domains improve; Education, Family and Community decline for SD children*

Vermillion (June 24, 2013) – There’s good, bad, and mixed news for South Dakota kids, according to the Annie E. Casey Foundation 2013 *KIDS COUNT® Data Book*.

“Our overall rank of 18th is a slight drop from last year,” says Carole Cochran, project director of South Dakota KIDS COUNT at the University of South Dakota’s Beacom School of Business. She notes that while conditions improved for the state’s children in the Economic and Health domains, it dropped in Education, and Family and Community.

The state’s overall economic outlook for children was boosted by a sharp decline in the percent of teens ages 16 to 19 who are neither attending school nor working. From 2008 to 2011, that number dropped from 6 percent to 5 percent, a 17 percent change that moved South Dakota from eighth to second for this indicator. A contributing factor may have been a 2009 change in state law that required school attendance to age 18.

Also on the plus side, the percentage of South Dakota children without health insurance showed definite improvement. Children without insurance dropped from 8 percent in 2008 to 6 percent in 2011, a 25 percent decrease.

Not all the economic news regarding children is positive, however. The 2013 *Data Book* shows that 36,000 South Dakota children (nearly one in five) are living in poverty (income less than $22,811 for a family of two adults and two children in 2011) — an additional 3,000 youngsters since 2005.

Another concern is the increase from 5.8 percent to 6.8 percent in the number of low birth-weight babies to South Dakota mothers from 2009 to 2010. The state’s ranking fell from first (best) in 2009 to eighth in 2010. Some contributing factors for this change could be a lack of prenatal care, good nutrition, and use of tobacco and alcohol. Access to prenatal care can influence positive change for mothers and their babies.

Cochran notes mixed results in another category. “While our child and teen death rate decreased from the previous year, we still rank 48th in the nation.” The leading cause of teen deaths in South Dakota is car crashes. Those numbers can be reduced, according to the Centers for Disease Control...
and Prevention, by requiring more time behind the wheel with an experienced driver and limiting distractions (use of electronic devices, teen passengers).

While the 2013 Legislature did prohibit new drivers from using wireless communication devices, it failed to enact three other provisions recommended by a legislatively appointed task force charged with reducing teen vehicle crashes. Those included extending the length of time a new driver is directly supervised by an adult licensed driver; limiting the number of passengers in a vehicle driven by a beginning driver; and establishing a statewide driver education program.

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The 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. Through the 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.

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