For Second Year, W.Va. Ranks 47th in the Nation in Education According to KIDS COUNT
State Improves to 27th in Children’s Health

CHARLESTON, W.VA. - June 24, 2013 - According to the Annie E. Casey Foundation’s 2013 KIDS COUNT® Data Book, West Virginia’s education system ranks 47th (or 4th worst) in the nation for the second straight year. Nearly three out of four West Virginia 4th graders (73%) are not proficient in reading, and nearly two out of three of the state’s three- and four-year-olds (64%) are not enrolled in a pre-school program. Joining West Virginia in the bottom five for education are Arizona, Mississippi, New Mexico and Nevada.

West Virginia fared significantly better in the report’s children’s health indicators with a national ranking of 27th, which is up from 31st in the nation last year. The state ranks 33rd in the economic well-being for children and 34th in family and community measures, and its overall national rank is 37th out of 50.

“Over the past two decades, West Virginia has made dramatic improvements in children’s health by focusing on policies we know will improve health outcomes, like expanded access to insurance and good prenatal care,” said Margie Hale Executive Director of KIDS COUNT. “We must devote that same attention to improving our bottom-five ranking in education. One of the reasons our ranking is so low is our lack of quality programs for three-year-olds. We have already made some important strides with our universal pre-kindergarten (Pre-k) program for four-year-olds. But, research tells us, to get the full benefit of pre-school education, we also must improve the quality and expand the capacity of programs that serve three-year-olds. We applaud the Governor for focusing on the importance of the early years, and we urge his new Early Childhood Education Task Force to make high-quality programs for three-year-olds a top priority for West Virginia. If we can reach kids early, when the building blocks of literacy are formed, we can lay the foundation for success in elementary school, middle school, high school and beyond.”

As the nation’s economy recovers, America’s children are showing some signs of improvement despite an ever-growing poverty rate, according to new data in the Annie E. Casey Foundation’s KIDS COUNT® Data Book.

Nationally, children continue to progress in education and health but have gained only incremental steps in their economic well-being since 2010, falling short of where they stood before the recession. From roughly 2005 to 2011, the teen birth rate dropped by 15 percent to a historic low. However, in West Virginia the teen birth rate during the same period increased from 43 per thousand to 45 per thousand, which is 43rd among the 50 states. Nationally, the rate of high school students not graduating in four years saw an almost 20 percent decline, as did the child and teen death rate; and the percentage of children without health insurance decreased by 30 percent.
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 16.4 million children — an increase of 3 million since 2005. **In West Virginia, 26 percent of all kids live in poverty (38th in the nation), and that percentage has not changed since 2005.** The number of children living in households spending more than 30 percent of their income on housing — more than 29 million in 2011 — saw minor improvement from the previous year, but was still about 2 million more than in 2005. Similarly, the number of children whose parents lacked full-time, year-round employment was nearly 20 percent higher than in 2008.

The 2013 *Data Book* also examines how America’s youngest children are faring, adding to the ongoing national conversation on early childhood education. “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.”

At the state level, New Hampshire, Vermont and Massachusetts rank highest for overall child well-being, while Nevada, Mississippi and New Mexico rank lowest. For the first time in *Data Book* history, Mississippi moved out of the No. 50 spot for child well-being, now occupied by New Mexico. While the two states remain fairly even, Mississippi performed better in a few areas, such as the number of children not attending preschool and those whose parents lack a high school diploma. Three southwestern states — Arizona, Nevada and New Mexico — are now in the bottom five for the overall rankings.

Forty-six states and the District of Columbia saw improvements in math proficiency, but a considerable gap lies between Massachusetts, with 49 percent of its eighth-graders not proficient in the subject, and Mississippi, with 81 percent. **West Virginia’s 8th grade math proficiency score has improved 3 percent since 2005, but nearly 4 out of 5 of the state’s 8th graders (79%) are not proficient, which puts West Virginia at 48th among the 50 states for this indicator.**

“The progress we’re seeing in child health and education is encouraging, but the economic data clearly speak to the considerable challenges we still face,” said Laura Speer, the Casey Foundation’s associate director for policy reform and data. “We need to do better and be smarter about investing in effective programs and services to help ensure all kids get the best possible start in life.”

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.

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*West Virginia KIDS COUNT’s vision is to make West Virginia a great place to be a kid. Founded in 1990, KIDS COUNT provides the most trusted information about the well-being of children and builds alliances to advocate for what kids need. The non-profit organization’s signature program is the KIDS COUNT Data Book, an annual, county-by-county report of child well-being in West Virginia.*

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