WASHINGTON KIDS FACE AN OPPORTUNITY GAP

Children in Washington continue to feel the pinch of tough economic times, according to new data from the Annie E. Casey Foundation’s KIDS COUNT® Data Book.

One of every six Washington kids (18 percent) is living in poverty, 64,000 more than in 2005, which was before the Great Recession. More than half a million children, or one in three, live in households where no parent has stable employment.

“We owe our kids the means to a great future: among them education, health care, quality early learning from birth to age five,” says Paola Maranan, executive director of the Children’s Alliance. “These numbers show that hard times are still weighing on the vulnerable first years of too many Washingtonians.”

The data shows that:

- Just 13 states have a greater share of children living in families facing high housing costs.
- Washington has a relatively low share of children attending preschool compared to most states.
- Washington ranks 30th in the country for graduating our high school students on time.

The data points to persistent racial and ethnic disparities in children’s health, education and other forms of opportunity. One in three Black or Latino children are growing up in poverty – nearly double the aggregate rate. Native American children are three times more likely to be uninsured than children of other racial or ethnic backgrounds.

Poor health outcomes, inadequate education, and other inequities form the opportunity gap that obstructs children’s progress toward a secure and healthy future.

“We need to close the gaps that cut kids off from economic opportunity,” says Kevin C. Washington, a youth mentor, education leader, and member of Tabor 100, an association of African-American entrepreneurs and business advocates. “We can’t get complacent when we hear that test scores are going up if graduation rates aren’t also improving for poor and minority children. From a workforce
development standpoint, these kids are the employees of the future – and we cannot afford to leave them behind."

“These numbers are a timely reminder that what happens to kids outside the classroom is just as important as what happens inside,” says Maranan. “Smart investments are needed to build opportunity for Washington kids – for example, by meeting the need for quality early learning.”

The KIDS COUNT Data Book provides policymakers and community members with benchmarks of child well-being intended to enrich local, state and national discussions concerning ways to secure better futures for all children.

The KIDS COUNT Data Center is a one-stop source for statistics on child well-being and includes national, state, county, city, congressional and school district level information, as well as information on immigrant communities and communities of color.

KIDS COUNT in Washington is a partnership between Children’s Alliance and the Washington State Budget & Policy Center to help improve young lives. Together, the two organizations gather and analyze the best emerging data on how kids are doing in our state, and then turn that information into action on issues like poverty, hunger, health care, and education. Earlier this month, the partnership released “The State of Washington’s Children 2013,” which shares the perspectives of leaders in communities of color to help us understand what this data means for families all across the state.

Hundreds of data indicators about the well-being of children are available through the KIDS COUNT in Washington web site: www.kidscountwa.org.

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