Louisiana Ranked 46th in Overall Child Well-Being

New KIDS COUNT Data Book Reveals Improvements in Education, Health and Community

NEW ORLEANS—Despite being hit with multiple hurricanes, a massive oil spill and a national recession, Louisiana has managed to make progress in improving the well-being of its children since the mid-2000’s. The Annie E. Casey Foundation’s new KIDS COUNT Data Book ranked the state 46th overall based on its performance on 16 indicators of children’s well-being across four domains: Economic Well-Being, Education, Health, and Family and Community.

Louisiana’s children have seen improvements on most of the report’s measures of Education, Health, and Family and Community over the past several years. The KIDS COUNT Data Book shows that the percentage of fourth graders scoring below proficient in reading improved by 4% between 2005 and 2011, and Louisiana’s child and teen death rate fell by 30% between 2005 and 2010. However, all four measures related to children’s economic well-being got worse since 2005 in Louisiana, including the child poverty rate and the percentage of children whose parents lack full-time, year-round employment. At 29%, Louisiana’s child poverty rate was higher than the child poverty rates in 47 other states. More than a third (35%) of Louisiana children lived in families where no parent has full-time, year-round employment in 2011, which was 9% higher than 2008 levels.

“Building a bright future for Louisiana’s children is critical to our state’s future success,” said Dr. Anthony Recasner, CEO of Agenda for Children. “The KIDS COUNT Data Book shows that while many of the investments we’ve made in children are paying off, we still have a long way to go if we want Louisiana’s children to have the same opportunities as children in the best-ranked states.”

The Data Book highlights the critical importance of investing in children’s earliest years and profiles research showing that early intervention can reduce the harmful effects of growing up in poverty and improve child outcomes. Louisiana has been successful in enrolling young children in preschool programs. In 2009-2011, just under half (48%) of Louisiana’s three and four year-olds were not enrolled in a preschool program, which ranked the state 6th on this measure. In addition to its efforts to expand access to early education programs, Louisiana has made significant efforts to improve the quality of early education programs in recent years through a quality rating system for child care centers, nationally recognized program standards for public prekindergarten programs, and innovative tax credits to support improved program quality and teacher credentials. Most recently, the 2012 Louisiana Legislature passed Act 3, which aims to
coordinate quality standards for early care and education programs across settings and provide parents with clear information about early childhood programs in their community.

“We know that high quality early education is one of the most powerful tools we have to ensure children’s success in school and in life,” said Dr. Recasner. “Louisiana’s commitment to support and expand early education opportunities is a key strategy in our efforts to build a strong economy.”

Key findings from the 2013 Data Book include:

- Louisiana outperformed the national average on three measures—uninsured children, teens who abuse drugs or alcohol, and children ages three and four who are not enrolled in preschool.

- In 2010/2011, 6% of Louisiana teens aged 12-17 abused drugs or alcohol, a rate just below the national average of 7%.

- Despite a 7% improvement between 2005 and 2010, Louisiana still has one of the nation’s highest rates of low birthweight babies. The national low birthweight rate improved by just 1% in the same time period, falling from 8.2% to 8.1%.

- Louisiana was one of just four states in which the percentage of children who live in high-poverty neighborhoods actually declined between 2000 and 2007-2011. Despite the improvement, 17% of Louisiana children lived in high-poverty neighborhoods in 2007-2011, ranking the state 46th on this measure.

“Every child deserves the opportunity to grow up healthy, well educated and in a safe, supportive environment,” said Dr. Recasner. “While the Data Book makes it clear that Louisiana children continue to face a number of challenges, it also shows that we are moving in the right direction on many measures of child well-being. If we want to see these trends continue, we must make the kinds of smart investments in early childhood education, health and economic security that can provide the foundation for children’s lifelong success.”

The KIDS COUNT Data Book features the latest data on child well-being for every state, the District of Columbia and the nation. All of the data is available on the newly redesigned KIDS COUNT Data Center, which 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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Agenda for Children, Louisiana’s statewide child advocacy organization, works to make Louisiana a state in which all children can thrive. Visit www.agendaforchildren.org to learn more.