FEW BRIGHT SPOTS FOR N.C. CHILDREN AS ECONOMIC WOES CONTINUE

National report ranks North Carolina 35th in the nation in child well-being

RALEIGH—North Carolina has made long-term progress in child health and education despite continued economic setbacks, according to data released today by the Annie E. Casey Foundation.


In 2011, more than one in three children in North Carolina (34 percent) lived in a family that lacked full-time, year-round employment, up 21 percent since 2008. Families that lack secure parental employment are more likely to fall into poverty, experience housing instability or struggle to obtain other necessities like healthy foods.

“Children’s economic security lays the foundation for success in adulthood,” said Deborah Bryan, president and chief executive officer of Action for Children North Carolina. “We know the smartest investment our state can make is to protect the healthy growth and development of our children. And yet, at a time when so many families face significant financial stress caused by high unemployment rates and stagnant wages, North Carolina policymakers have scaled back critical supports that serve to soften the blow of economic hardship.”

Recent changes to supports for vulnerable families mean more children of out-of-work and low-income parents will likely to slip through widening gaps in North Carolina’s safety net. Earlier this year Governor McCrory signed legislation into law which reduced the state’s unemployment insurance benefits and scheduled the North Carolina’s Earned Income Tax Credit to sunset in 2013.

Although children and families in North Carolina continue to face financial obstacles, the report shows positive long-term trends in health and education. From roughly 2005 to 2011, the percent of children without health insurance dropped 20 percent and fourth grade reading proficiency and eighth grade math proficiency both improved by 7 percent.

“These gains in children’s health and education are no accident,” said Bryan. “Investments in programs like Medicaid and N.C. Health Choice, our state’s affordable health coverage plan for income-qualified children, provide children the medical coverage they need to achieve and maintain good health. At the same time, previous investments in high-quality early learning opportunities provided through Smart Start and NC Pre-K have helped to better prepare our most vulnerable children to succeed in school.”

(More)
Other findings in the 2013 KIDS COUNT Data Book include:

- **Economic Well-Being [38]**: The economic downturn continues to take a devastating toll on families’ economic stability. More than one in four children in North Carolina (26 percent) now lives in poverty, defined as a household with an annual income below $22,811 for a family of two adults and two children in 2011. *North Carolina ranks 38th in the nation for child poverty.*

- **Education [27]**: The percent of high school students not graduating on time declined to 23 percent in 2009-2010, down 18 percent since the 2005-2006 school year. Students who graduate from high school on time are more likely to continue to postsecondary education or training, have higher earnings and are more employable than students who fail to graduate. *North Carolina ranks 30th in the nation for the percent of high school students not graduating on time.*

- **Health [34]**: Far too many children in North Carolina fail to receive a healthy start in life. One in 11 North Carolina babies (9.1 percent) are born weighing less than 2,500 grams—about 5.5 pounds. Children born at a low birthweight face stiffer odds to thrive than other babies. Low-birthweight babies are at greater risk of dying within their first year of life, more likely to experience developmental problems or short- and long-term disabilities, and are susceptible to chronic health problems like heart disease and diabetes. *North Carolina ranks 44th in the nation for low-birthweight births.*

- **Family and Community [36]**: North Carolina’s teen birth rate declined to 38 births per 1,000 girls ages 15 to 19 in 2010. Teenage childbearing can have long-term negative effects for both the mothers and their newborns, and babies born to teen moms are more likely to be born into families with limited resources. *North Carolina ranks 33rd in the nation for teen births.*

*Domain [Rank]*

The 2013 KIDS COUNT Data Book, with state-by-state rankings and supplemental data, will be available at 12:01 a.m EDT, June 24, 2013 on the newly revamped KIDS COUNT Data Center at [http://datacenter.kidscount.org](http://datacenter.kidscount.org).

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**Action for Children North Carolina** is a leading statewide, nonpartisan, nonprofit policy research and advocacy organization dedicated to ensuring that North Carolina children are healthy, safe, well-educated and have every opportunity for success. For more information, visit [http://www.ncchild.org](http://www.ncchild.org).