



MISSISSIPPI KIDS COUNT

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Mississippi 48th Among States in Children's Well-being

The state continues to have high numbers of children living in poverty despite known policy prescriptions

STARKVILLE, Mississippi — Despite some improvements over the last 30 years, Mississippi is near the bottom of state rankings at 48th for overall child well-being, according to new data released in the Annie E. Casey Foundation's annual *KIDS COUNT® Data Book*. The state saw little change from last year in the 16 *Data Book* indicators used to rank states in the four domains of economic well-being, education, health and family and community, though comparisons to 1990 data shed some light on long-term trends.

A closer examination of each of the four areas of well-being demonstrates where Mississippi needs improvement:

- Like much of the nation, Mississippi has seen modest improvements in **economic well-being** since 1990, now ranking 47th in this domain. The state still has 27 percent of its children living in poverty, ranking 48th on this indicator. This number is down slightly from 1990, when 33 percent of Mississippi children lived in poverty. Additionally, according to the Current Population Survey, 33 percent of children in the state live in families where no parent has full-time, year-round employment, putting Mississippi 48th in the nation on this specific indicator. This is also slightly down from 1990, when this was reality for 39 percent of children. Therefore, despite minimal long-term improvement, the state is not addressing the needs of children in poverty as well as other states.
- In **education**, Mississippi ranked 44th among states. While the state still ranks 48th in the percentage of fourth graders scoring below proficient in reading (73 percent), this represents an improvement from 1990, when 86 percent of children scored below proficient. This year, Mississippi also ranks 47th for the percentage of eighth graders scoring below proficient in math (78 percent).
- Mississippi ranked 47th in **health** this year. The biggest success for many states has been an increase in children's access to health insurance. Mississippi has improved from a 17 percent child uninsured rate in 1990 to just 6 percent according to the Current Population Survey.
- Mississippi ranks near the bottom of the nation in the **family and community** domain, at 49th. Given the changing nature of family structure, it's not surprising that the percentage of Mississippi children living in single-parent families has increased to 46 percent in 2017 from 35 percent in 1990. However, the percentage of children living in a family where the household head lacks a high school diploma has decreased, from 35 percent in 1990 to 13 percent in 2017.

Changing Demographics and the Need to Support All Children

The *2019 Data Book* notes that, nationwide, children of color now make up a greater proportion of the overall child population. Mississippi has historically had a relatively high African-American child population, which has held constant from 1990 (45 percent of child population) to 2017 (43 percent). But the state has also seen increases in American Indian or Alaska Native children (from 2,997 in 1990 to 4,578 in 2017) and Hispanic children (from 4,889 in 1990 to 33,140 in 2017). This means that half of Mississippi's child population is now non-white.

"Now more than ever it is imperative that Mississippi implement researched-based policies that have been demonstrated to lift families out of poverty, such as a state Earned Income Tax Credit," said Dr. Linda Southward, co-director of Mississippi KIDS COUNT. "Poverty is connected to children's health and education, and disproportionately impacts children of color. Given the changing demographics in Mississippi, we have children who are more likely to be disenfranchised economically, which reinforces the importance of looking at children's issues through an economic lens."

Solutions to child poverty exist. The National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine just released 'The Roadmap to Reducing Child Poverty,' which outlines 10 policy and program approaches to reducing child poverty, including modifications to support working parents through the Earned Income Tax Credit, child care subsidies and minimum wage. Additionally, they point to modifications to safety net programs that benefit children and families, such as the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program and the housing choice voucher program.

"In order for Mississippi to receive federal matching dollars for many of the programs that provide needed services for children, it will be imperative that the state counts all its children in the upcoming 2020 census," added Dr. Heather Hanna, co-director of Mississippi KIDS COUNT. "Federal programs send states funding based on the numbers of children counted in the census. If we undercount our children, then we will not receive adequate funding to ensure all children have an opportunity for optimal development and success. Continuation and growth of these programs are essential in leveling the playing field for all children and raising Mississippi's rankings relative to other states."

"America's children are one quarter of our population and 100 percent of our future," said Casey Foundation President and CEO Lisa Hamilton. "All of the 74 million kids in our increasingly diverse country have unlimited potential, and we have the data, knowledge and evidence to create the policies that will help them realize it. It's incumbent on us to do just that."

Release Information

The *2019 KIDS COUNT*[®] *Data Book* will be available June 17 at 12:01 a.m. EDT at www.aecf.org. Additional information is available at www.aecf.org/databook, which also contains the most recent national, state and local data on hundreds of indicators of child well-being. Journalists interested in creating maps, graphs and rankings in stories about the Data Book can use the *KIDS COUNT* Data Center at datacenter.kidscount.org.

About Mississippi KIDS COUNT

Mississippi *KIDS COUNT* is part of the national *KIDS COUNT* network of state-based organizations supported by the Annie E. Casey Foundation. For more information about Mississippi *KIDS COUNT*, visit www.kidscount.ssrc.msstate.edu.

About the Annie E. Casey Foundation

The Annie E. Casey Foundation creates a brighter future for the nation's children by developing solutions to strengthen families, build paths to economic opportunity and transform struggling communities into safer and healthier places to live, work and grow. For more information, visit www.aecf.org. *KIDS COUNT*[®] is a registered trademark of the Annie E. Casey Foundation.