NEW REPORT SHOWS PROGRESS IN CHILD EDUCATION AND HEALTH DESPITE ECONOMIC DECLINES

Baltimore — The Annie E. Casey Foundation’s latest KIDS COUNT® Data Book shows both promising progress and discouraging setbacks for the nation’s children: While their academic achievement and health improved in most states, their economic well-being continued to decline.

Over the period of roughly 2005 to 2011, the improvements in children’s health and education include a 20 percent decrease in the number of kids without health insurance; a 16 percent drop in the child and teen death rate; an 11 percent reduction in the rate of high school students not graduating in four years; and an 8 percent reduction in the proportion of eighth-graders scoring less than proficient in math.

The 2012 Data Book indicates kids and families nationwide are still struggling economically in the wake of the recession. In 2010, one-third of youths had parents without secure employment — an increase of 22 percent, or about 4 million children, in just two years. From 2005 to 2010, the number of children living in poverty rose by 2.4 million.

“This year’s findings reveal signs of hope in the midst of tough economic times for millions of families across the country,” said Patrick McCarthy, the Casey Foundation’s president and CEO. “While we’ve made progress in some important areas, we must work together to make sure every child, not just a select few, has the opportunity to succeed. We can help children reach their full potential by ensuring they stay on track in school and grow up healthy in strong financially stable families surrounded by supportive communities.”

The Casey Foundation updated the Data Book this year with a broader index of 16 indicators of child well-being, organized into four categories: Economic Well-Being, Education, Health, and Family and Community. Previous annual rankings were based on just 10 indicators; the new index reflects the tremendous advances in child development research since the first KIDS COUNT Data Book in 1990. The report also ranks states in each of the four categories.

“The data reveal that there is still much to be done to improve the prospects for the next generation,” said Laura Speer, the Casey Foundation’s associate director for policy reform and data. “They also show that a child’s success depends not only on individual, family and community resources, but also on the state where he or she grows up.”
Among the findings, the three most populous states ranked in the bottom half in terms of overall child well-being: California, the most populous state, is ranked at No. 41, Texas at No. 44 and New York at No. 29.

New Hampshire, Massachusetts and Vermont rank highest in overall child well-being, while Nevada, New Mexico and Mississippi rank lowest in this year’s Data Book. A few other noteworthy state developments:

- Eight of the 10 most populous states are in the bottom half of the overall rankings.
- In 36 states and the District of Columbia, at least one in three children lived in households that pay more than 30 percent of their income on housing costs.
- The number of fourth-graders scoring less than proficient in reading dropped in 35 states and the District of Columbia, with Maryland and Alabama seeing the greatest improvement.
- Child poverty rates rose in 43 states, ranging from New Hampshire’s 10 percent rise to Mississippi’s 33 percent.
- Vermont and Virginia led among 47 states that saw their child and teen death rates decline, with decreases of 46 and 30 percent, respectively. The District of Columbia saw a 36 percent drop.

The Data Book also highlights major disparities among U.S. children along racial and ethnic lines. Even as children of color grow in numbers, representing the majority of U.S. births, they continue to lag behind their white counterparts by almost every measure:

- In 2010, American Indian (49 percent) and black (49 percent) children were nearly twice as likely as their white counterparts (25 percent) to have no parent with secure employment.
- While 58 percent of white fourth-graders had yet to achieve reading proficiency in 2011, more than 80 percent of their Latino, African-American and American Indian classmates lagged in this area.
- While only 6 percent of white children had no health insurance in 2010, more than twice as many American Indian and Latinos shared the same plight, at 18 and 14 percent, respectively.
- In 2010, 66 percent of black youths lived in single-parent families, exceeding their American Indian (52 percent), Latino (41 percent), white (24 percent) and Asian (16 percent) peers.

The KIDS COUNT Data Book includes the latest data on child well-being for every state, the District of Columbia and the nation. This information will be available July 25 at 12:01 a.m. in the KIDS COUNT Data Center, which also contains the most recent national, state and local data on hundreds of other measures of child well-being. The Data Center allows users to create rankings, maps and graphs for use in publications and on websites, and to view real-time information on mobile devices.

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