Study: Well being of Florida children lags

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The well-being of Florida's children is among the worst in the nation, according to a report released Wednesday by the Annie E. Casey Foundation.

The annual Kids Count report ranked the state 44th in the economic well-being of it's children, 38th in their health outcomes and 35th in educational performance. Overall, the state ranked 38th, down from last year's ranking of 36.

In addition, the study said, the number of Florida children in poverty increased 28 percent from 2005 to 2010. The study considered factors such as whether a child's parents are employed or can pay for housing.

The Annie E. Casey Foundation is a nonprofit focused on disadvantaged children.

Child advocates in Palm Beach County and statewide said they were not surprised by the results, since a weakened economy almost always impacts children.

"Clearly, this important analysis shows children in Florida have suffered — and continue to suffer — during these tough economic times," said Tana Ebbole, chief executive officer of the Children's Services Council of Palm Beach County. "Too many are living in poverty while their parents struggle to find work and keep a roof over their heads," Ebbole added.

David Wilkins, secretary of the Florida Department of Children and Families, said some of the percentages in the study reflect the harsh economic realities of many Floridians. A "domino effect" is created when children live in poverty and end up performing poorly in school and abusing drugs, he said.

"Particularly in Florida, where we were devastated by the housing market and then the inability to get out of this economic slump, it has a direct impact on children in poverty," Wilkins said.

Florida scored worse than the national average in a handful of categories, the study showed. In 2010, 23 percent of children statewide lived in poverty. More than 30 percent of them had parents who lacked secure employment, up from 28 percent in 2008. In addition, 49 percent of Floridians saw their housing costs increase to 30 percent or more, up from 42 percent of Floridians in 2005.
“I think it's a ticking time bomb,” said Roy Miller, president of the Children's Campaign in Florida. “Children are exposed now in much larger numbers to poverty and all of its ill effects. So what's going to happen to those children five years, 10 years, 15 years down the road? We don’t know.”

Florida did improve in a few categories.

The number of children in Florida not attending preschool in 2008-2010 was 51 percent, 1 percent better than in 2005-2007. Also, the percentage of high school students not graduating on time dropped from 36 in 2005-2006 to 31 in 2008-2009. The state ranked 35th nationwide in education.

In two categories that had 2011 data available, 65 percent of fourth graders were not proficient in reading, compared to 70 percent in 2005. In addition, 72 percent of eighth graders were not proficient in math, a slight improvement from 74 percent in 2005.

Christine Koehn, vice president of community impact for United Way of Palm Beach County, said Florida's low education ratings are “tough to see but unfortunately not terribly shocking, if you look at the indicators in our community.”

“Palm Beach County has a high unemployment rate and therefore many individuals with limited or no access to healthcare and increased food insecurity,” Koehn said, adding that these issues can prevent a child from being successful in school.

Florida also saw slight improvements in health issues. Although the state ranked 38th nationwide, there was a decrease in the number of kids without health insurance — from 18 percent in 2008 to 13 percent in 2010. The percentages, however, were still below the national average of 8 percent.

The News Service of Florida contributed to this story.

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65% of 4th graders are not proficient in READING?!?!? Keep letting those illegals drag down the entire system. Disgraceful

And Scott thinks he is going to get corporations to move their families and employees to a state that doesn't care about American's future - its children. The Republican legislature in control since Jeb got elected into office 12 years ago has decimated the public school system so they could give corporate tax breaks to for-profit under performing charter and voucher schools. Their property insurance increases means that when a company moves here their employees can't afford to buy a home, and workers who already live here are moving to more insurance and tax friendly states north of the border. So thanks Republicans, you're doing a fine job (for your friends).

hey rical...you're nuts.. My property taxes are half of what they were when i bought my place about ten years ago..and i no longer have to pay intangible tax. I love our governor so much i think i'll vote for him twice.

Ever see the subhuman white trash garbage that rolls out of the inland communities of our lovely state? It's just plain scary.

How many of those children in Florida are actually American, bet we have more NON-American then most States.

Sure property taxes are down..... values are down even more!

Since RicII wants to blame the Republicans...I am more than happy to blame "their" president...since I didn't vote for him. And since Democrats don't think we have illegals here, more than likely most of the poverty is because of illegals being here. Now since the Dems don't mind illegals, then let us just remove "their" president so that our economy will improve. This president is THE WORST PRESIDENT EVER!