



AGENDA FOR CHILDREN

A VOICE FOR LOUISIANA'S CHILDREN

EMBARGOED FOR RELEASE

Until 12:01 AM EDT
August 17, 2011

CONTACT: Teresa Falgoust
(504) 586-8509
tfgoust@agendaforchildren.org

2011 KIDS COUNT *DATA BOOK* REVEALS IMPACT OF THE RECESSION ON LOUISIANA'S CHILDREN *Gains of the 1990s Lost in Recession*

(NEW ORLEANS, LA, August 17, 2011) According to data released by the Annie E Casey Foundation in its 2011 KIDS COUNT *Data Book*, Louisiana ranks 49th among states in overall child well-being based on ten key indicators of child health and well-being.

The *Data Book* highlights key trends for Louisiana's children:

- Improvements in the child death rate (9% decrease), the teen birth rate (13% decrease), the percent of teens not in school and not high school graduates (27% decrease), and child poverty (11% decrease)
- Two indicators relating to infant health—low birthweight babies and infant mortality—were slightly worse than 2000 levels. However, both indicators have improved since the mid-2000s.
- Both the teen death rate and the percentage of children living in single-parent families have worsened for Louisiana's children since 2000. While the teen death rate improved nationally between 2000 and 2007, Louisiana's teen death rate increased by 11% during that time period. In 2009, 42% of Louisiana children lived in single parent families—a larger proportion than any other state except Mississippi.
- Data for two other indicators related to teen and parental employment were not comparable between 2000 and 2009. Louisiana received its highest ranking (35th) on the proportion of children living in families in which no parent has full-time, year-round employment. In 2009, 11% of teens ages 16-19 were not in school and not working, ranking Louisiana 40th on that measure.

“It is encouraging to see the progress that Louisiana has made in the latest KIDS COUNT report, but Louisiana's 49th place ranking shows that we have a long way to go,” said Edward Ashworth, Director of the Louisiana Budget Project. “Our children are the economic future of our state, and we must invest in their well-being if we are to have the economic prosperity we all want for Louisiana.”

According to data in the 22nd annual KIDS COUNT *Data Book* the economic and social gains for children that occurred across the 1990s stalled, even before the economic downturn began. This year's *Data Book* reports an eighteen percent increase in the U.S. child poverty rate between 2000 and 2009. This increase means that 2.5 million more American children are living below the federal poverty line (\$21,756 for a family of two adults and two children) and effectively wiping out the gains made on this important measure in the late 1990's. While

(more)

Louisiana's 2009 child poverty rate (24%) was lower than the 2000 rate, Louisiana continues to rank among the bottom ten states in child poverty. Data from the Census Bureau's American Community Survey also indicate that nearly half (46%) of Louisiana children lived in low-income families earning less than 200% of the federal poverty threshold in 2009.

In an ongoing effort to track the impact of the recession, there are two new indicators in this year's data set -- the number of children impacted by foreclosure and households with at least one unemployed parent. In Louisiana, 39,000 or 2% of the state's children were impacted by foreclosure since 2007. In 2010, an estimated 77,000 or 7% of Louisiana children lived in households where there was at least one parent who was eligible for and or seeking employment, but was unemployed at the time the data were collected. Data on the official unemployment figures are supplemented in the report by information on the number of children whose parents lack secure, year-round employment. With one out of every three Louisiana children living in families where no parent has full-time, year-round employment, both parental unemployment and underemployment pose serious challenges to children's financial security and overall well-being.

"Research consistently shows that growing up in a low-income family puts a child at a higher risk for a variety of negative outcomes," said Teresa Falgoust, KIDS COUNT Coordinator at Agenda for Children. "However, we can ensure a brighter future for Louisiana tomorrow by investing in policies and programs that support Louisiana's children and families today."

The 2011 Data Book's message "America's Children, America's Challenge: Promoting Opportunity for the Next Generation," explores the impact of the recession on children and families and presents research findings on family economic success and the critical role of investing in early childhood programs that can allow the next generation to succeed.

Louisiana has made a number of investments and commitments in recent years that are in line with the report's recommendations. Over the past decade, Louisiana's investments in early education include major expansions in public prekindergarten programs, ongoing state support for the Nurse Family Partnership home visiting program, and the development of a Quality Rating System for child care centers. Louisiana has also achieved success in making sure that children have access to public support programs such as LaCHIP, Louisiana's Children's Health Insurance Program. The Casey Foundation highlighted LaCHIP for its innovative "express lane" eligibility program that used data from the SNAP (food stamp) program to enroll 10,000 uninsured children in LaCHIP virtually overnight.

"Louisiana's investments in early childhood and ensuring access to benefits are strong steps in the right direction to improve outcomes for Louisiana's children," said Dr. Anthony Recasner, Chief Executive Officer of Agenda for Children. "However, Louisiana's persistently poor performance in the KIDS COUNT rankings shows that we still have a long way to go. In these tough economic times, it is critical that policy makers protect evidence-based programs and policies that are effective at promoting child and family well-being."

In addition to the 10 key measures tracked in the *Data Book*, the KIDS COUNT Data Center (<http://datacenter.kidscount.org>) provides easy, online access to the latest child well-being data on hundreds of indicators by state, county, city, and school district. It serves as a comprehensive source of information for policymakers, advocates, members of the media, and others concerned with addressing the needs of children, families, and communities. By visiting the Data Center, users can download the complete *Data Book*, and create interactive maps and graphs. Visit the new mobile site being launched in conjunction with this year's *Data Book* from your smartphone, such as the Droid, BlackBerry, or iPhone.

(more)

The *KIDS COUNT Data Book* with state-by-state rankings and supplemental data launches at 12:01 a.m. EDT, August 17, 2011 at <http://datacenter.kidscount.org>. For interactive Louisiana KIDS COUNT data, visit <http://datacenter.kidscount.org/la>.

Follow the Annie E. Casey Foundation and this issue on Twitter @aeckidscount and on Facebook at <http://www.facebook.com/KIDSCOUNT>.

#

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.