



children's defense fund ohio

UNDER EMBARGO until Monday, June 21 at 12:01 a.m. ET

Kim Eckhart, KIDS COUNT Project Manager
614-312-8469
keckhart@childrensdefense.org

Alison Paxson, Policy and Communications Associate
937-206-2576
apaxson@childrensdefense.org

Nearly 1 in 5 Ohio Students Were Not Graduating on Time Even Before COVID-19 Upended the Educations of Millions of Ohio Children, New Report Shows

New report from the Annie E. Casey Foundation ranks Ohio 31st nationally in overall child well-being for second year in a row, demonstrating a return to pre-pandemic levels of support for children and families would fail to meet challenges of and sustain equitable recovery from coronavirus

COLUMBUS — Nearly 20% of Ohio children were not graduating on time prior to COVID-19, according to a new report that shows Ohio trailed the national average, leading advocates to voice concern about impending educational and economic crises that could affect a generation of children.

The 2021 *KIDS COUNT*® *Data Book*, a 50-state annual report from the Annie E. Casey Foundation that tracks child well-being in the United States, shows how children were faring prior to the pandemic, as well as the challenges faced by children and families during the public health crisis. The report, released today, underscores the need to address housing insecurity, lack of health care and mental health concerns. Updates from the pandemic period are depicted in the 2021 *Data Book* to provide comprehensive insight into the well-being of Ohio's children.

"It's too early to tell what the impact of the pandemic on graduation rates will be, especially as this school year has left many marginalized students disconnected and placed valuable in-person learning and school-based services out of reach," says Tracy Nájera, executive director of Children's Defense Fund-Ohio. "But we know when children are emotionally healthy, they are better prepared to learn, and that's why we need bold policies that meet the needs of Ohio students, such as ensuring every child can benefit from Student Wellness and Success Funds for mental and behavioral health care and other supports so that they can be ready to learn after such a hard year."

Sixteen indicators measuring four domains — economic well-being, education, health, and family and community context — are used by the Foundation in each year's *Data Book* to assess child well-being. The annual KIDS COUNT data and rankings represent the most recent information available but do not capture the impact of the past year. Ohio ranks:

- **25th in Economic Well-Being.** Prior to the pandemic, there had been a 22% decrease since 2010 in the number of children living in poverty. Amongst the rankings for neighboring states, Ohio trails Michigan (24th) and ranks ahead of West Virginia (46th) and Kentucky (40th).
- **28th in Education.** Nearly 20% of Ohio children did not graduate on time prior to the pandemic, less than the national average, making Ohio 38th out of all 50 states in this indicator. This will be the third year that Ohio has dropped further in the rankings for this indicator.

- **29th in Health.** Ohio children were less healthy in 2019 than they were in 2010. In fact, 6% more children were overweight or obese than they were in 2010. The rate of children with health insurance is higher than in 2010 but remained consistent at 5% from 2017-2019.
- **34th in Family and Community Context.** In 2019, 8% more child and teen deaths occurred compared to 2010. The number of low-birth-weight babies increased from 8.5% in 2018 to 8.6% in 2019 equating to about 11,500 babies in Ohio potentially facing serious health challenges. The number of parents who do not have full-time year-round employment is still high, at 26%. Those who lack a secure form of employment could easily find themselves out of work and consequently without health insurance.

Survey data from the U.S. Census Bureau’s Household Pulse Survey from last year add to the story of Ohio’s children and families in this moment:

- In 2020, 23% of households with children reported feeling down, depressed or hopeless, and the responses didn’t show any improvement in March of 2021.
- During the pandemic, 28% of Black households in Ohio with children sometimes or often did not have enough food to eat, compared to 11% of white families.
- Similarly, with housing insecurity, 43% of Latino or Hispanic families and 42% of Black families had little or no confidence in their ability to pay their next rent or mortgage payment compared to 15% of white families.
- Nearly half of Ohio households where at least one household member planned to take classes from a college, university, community college, trade school or other occupational school in fall of 2020 took fewer classes or cancelled their plans.

“The COVID-19 pandemic is the most extraordinary crisis to hit families in decades,” said **Lisa Hamilton, president and CEO of the Annie E. Casey Foundation.** “Deliberate policy decisions can help them recover, and we’re already seeing the beginnings of that. Policymakers should use this moment to repair the damage the pandemic has caused — and to address long-standing inequities it has exacerbated.”

COVID-19 exposed, and in some areas exacerbated, health inequity. CDF-Ohio prioritizes the investment of children, families and communities not only to combat the racially disproportionate effects of the pandemic but also to advocate and ensure an equitable and expansive recovery.

The indicators from the 2021 *Data Book* and the U.S. Census Bureau’s Household Pulse Survey tell the story of how children and families have been faring in Ohio prior to the pandemic up until recent months and represent key benchmarks in Ohio’s progress toward ensuring that all children have what they need to thrive into adulthood.

Investing in children, families and communities is a priority to ensure an equitable and expansive recovery. Several of the Annie E. Casey Foundation’s suggestions have already been enacted in the American Rescue Plan, and additional recommendations include:

- **Congress should make the expansion of the child tax credit permanent.** The child tax credit has long had bipartisan support, as it is a research-based policy that can reduce childhood poverty and improve overall child wellbeing. In fact, the CTC is estimated to lift 132,000 children under age 18 in Ohio out of poverty through the expansion.
- **State and local governments should prioritize the recovery of hard-hit communities of color.**

- **States should expand income support that helps families care for their children.** Permanently extending unemployment insurance eligibility to contract, gig and other workers and expanding state tax credits would benefit parents and children.
- **States that have not done so should expand Medicaid under the Affordable Care Act.** Ohioans are fortunate in that this Medicaid expansion occurred in 2014 making individuals with incomes up to 138% of the federal poverty line eligible for coverage.
- **States should strengthen public schools and pathways to postsecondary education and training.**

Release Information

The *2021 KIDS COUNT® Data Book* will be available June 21 at 12:01 a.m. EDT at www.aecf.org. Additional information is available at www.aecf.org/databook. 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 Children's Defense Fund-Ohio

The Children's Defense Fund Leave No Child Behind® mission is to ensure every child a Healthy Start, a Head Start, a Fair Start, a Safe Start and a Moral Start in life and successful passage to adulthood with the help of caring families and communities.

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.

###