

New York's Children

Annie E Casey Foundation recently released the 20th annual edition of its Kids Count Data Book profiling the well-being of children on numerous indicators and providing a state-by-state ranking on ten key measures of well-being.

How did New York do? New York did very well on those ten measures of well-being and improved its overall ranking from 20th in 2008 to 17th in 2009 based upon the most recent available figures (data from 2006 or 2007). New York ranks in the top ten on three of the key indicators and showed improvement on seven measures. New York remained at the same level on the remaining three indicators.

The top five states in the rankings were New Hampshire, Minnesota, Utah, Connecticut and Massachusetts. At the bottom were Mississippi, Louisiana, Alabama, Arkansas, and Tennessee.

While the ten indicators provide a useful comparison with other states, there are many other indicators that are equally important if not more so to children's well-being and future success. Taken together, the indicators provide a mixed picture of how New York is doing and can serve to focus future attention.

For instance, in the Education category, the number of 4th graders who scored below the basic math level improved from 19% in 2005 to 15% in 2007 while scores for reading remained the same over that time period. Eighth grade math and reading scores showed no improvement. Most troubling, the percentage of 3 to 5 year olds enrolled in nursery school, preschool or kindergarten decreased from 67% to 63% from 2006 to 2007, representing a significant drop in just one year.

Regarding indicators under the Safety and Risky Behaviors category, the rate of children in foster care per 1,000 dropped from 10 in 2004 to 8 in 2006. At the same time, the percent of youth who aged out of foster care without having a permanent family increased by 4.7%

As of 2006, 8% of New York's children remain uninsured, including 8% in the 0 to 5 age group. We can expect to see some dramatic improvements in this number in future years due New York State's decision to raise CHIP eligibility to 400% of the federal poverty level.

The percent of children with asthma difficulties has increased 2% from 2003 to 2007. And those with special health care needs have grown dramatically, from 12% in 2001 to 19% in 2007. Of particular concern are the 8.3%, or 1 in 12 babies born to women of all ages in 2006 were low birth weight (LBW). For teen mothers, the rates were higher—9% for White teens and 13.6%

for Black, non-Hispanic teens. The average across the state was 10% putting New York at 38th in comparison with other states and below the national average.

But most alarming are the indicators having to do with economic well-being. Although there was no movement, either up or down, with these indicators, New York has far too many children living in poverty, nearly one in five. New York ranks 19th among states in the number of children living in poverty with 844,000 or 19% of children living at or below the federal poverty level in 2007. This number represents a 4.9% decrease from 2006. Of those 19%, 9% live in extreme poverty. Almost half, or 48%, of the state's children are living in families with income below 250% of poverty, a more accurate reflection of the number of children whose families struggle to meet their most basic needs. Additionally, far too many are living in overcrowded housing and 33% live in families where no parent has full-time, year-round employment. These percentages reflect 2007 data.

We anticipate an increase in the number of children living in poverty when the 2008 data is released due to the economic recession. Dr. Irwin Redlener, President of the Children's Health Fund projects "a rise from 12.5 million before the recession to nearly 17 million by the end of this year."¹

Bob Herbert, in an April 21, 2009 Op-Ed in The New York Times titled, *Children in Peril*², wrote that the recession is leading to a "toxic mix for children, a demoralizing convergence of factors that have long been known to impede the ability of young people to flourish." Those factors include increasing numbers of children in poverty, spike in homelessness, loss of health insurance due to unemployment, and a decrease in the quality of public education. The long-term effects on children will continue well into adulthood. They are more likely to achieve lower levels of education, to live in poverty and experience poorer health.

While the Annie E. Casey Foundation's key indicators demonstrate that New York has done well in addressing children's needs, other indicators point to areas where improvement is necessary. According to Dr. Redlener, what is happening to children during this recession is a "quiet disaster"³. We have to do better for our children and families; that should be the state's priority.

For more information about the 2009 Data Book from the Annie E. Casey Foundation, go to <http://datacenter.kidscount.org/>

¹ Children in Peril, op-ed by Bob Herbert, The New York Times, April 21, 2009
<http://www.nytimes.com/2009/04/21/opinion/21herbert.html>

² Ibid.

³ Ibid.