



**Press Release**

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**Kentucky 35<sup>th</sup> in KIDS COUNT Ranking of Child Well-being  
2012 Data Book Tracks New Indicators for a More Comprehensive National Ranking**

**Jeffersontown, KY** – Kentucky stands as one of the bottom fifteen states in the nation for overall child well-being with a rank of 35, according to the Annie E. Casey Foundation's 2012 [KIDS COUNT Data Book](#). Kentucky children have experienced setbacks due to financial instability, but have made gains in the education and health areas.

The *Data Book* shows that kids and families in the Commonwealth continue to struggle in the wake of the recession. Between 2005 and 2010, the percent of children living in poverty grew by 18 percent, leaving more than one in four Kentucky children (26 percent) in poverty.

"This year's KIDS COUNT book is not just a call for action, it also generates questions about how to improve child outcomes. Is Kentucky really going to accept the fact that kids in 70 percent of the other states fare better than our own children? Do the interests of kids trump the interests of polarizing Frankfort politics? What practical steps can be taken in the 2013 General Assembly to build a better future for our children?" said Dr. Terry Brooks, executive director of Kentucky Youth Advocates. "The bottom line is that Kentucky's kids and families need immediate and direct action in Frankfort. If we are to have a strong workforce and a strong economy tomorrow, we must preserve and strengthen our children's health, education and family economy today."

The 2012 *Data Book* features an updated child well-being index that provides an even more robust and comprehensive portrait of how children fare both nationwide and in Kentucky. It ranks states on overall child well-being based on 16 different indicators — a change from the previous 10 indicators. The 16 indicators are organized into four domains: Economic Well-Being, Family and Community, Education, and Health. The report also ranks states in each of these areas. Notable findings from each of these four categories for Kentucky are as follows:

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**Economic Well-Being – Kentucky Ranks 37:** One key indicator highlighted in this section is the percent of children living in families without secure parental employment, which increased by 12 percent in Kentucky between 2008 and 2010. This means that more than one-third (37 percent) of all Kentucky children now live in such underemployed families. This increase contributes to the high percentage of children living in poverty in Kentucky. It is important for policymakers to acknowledge that many families with children have yet to recover from the recession and are struggling more than they would be during normal economic times. One way to increase job growth and promote a strong economy is to support targeted job training programs which increase both the quality of the workforce as well as the quality of jobs. Another key solution is to increase access to unemployment insurance in order to assist families as they search for work.

**Family and Community – Kentucky Ranks 38:** Also contributing to the high percentage of children living in poverty in Kentucky is the percent of children in families where the head of household lacks a high school diploma or GED. While Kentucky experienced an 18 percent improvement between 2005 and 2010, nearly one in six children still live in households where the head has not secured a basic education. Without a basic education, parents and caregivers face substantial challenges in being able to find employment that will meet the basic needs and foster self sufficiency for their family. Innovative approaches, like the Back on Track to College model being implemented in states across the country, not only help students who have dropped out complete their high school education, but also get students started towards a postsecondary degree.

**Education – Kentucky Ranks 28:** Kentucky ranks quite a bit higher in the area of child education, but the sad reality is that two in three kids in Kentucky do not meet national standards for proficiency in reading and math. In 2011, 65 percent of Kentucky 4<sup>th</sup> graders could not read at a proficient level, and 69 percent of Kentucky 8<sup>th</sup> graders could not do math at a proficient level. Reading on grade level by the end of 3<sup>rd</sup> grade marks a critical milestone, because children need to read to learn other subjects. And, children who cannot read proficiently by the end of third grade are four times more likely to not graduate high school at the same time as their peers who can read proficiently. Also, proficient math skills at the end of middle school prepare youth for taking strong courses in high school, setting the foundation for postsecondary studies and work.

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“When two out of three kids fail to meet proficiency, a relatively high national ranking is no cause for celebration,” said Brooks. “Kentucky can improve academic outcomes by strengthening early childhood education and K-12 education, prioritizing initiatives that are proven successful, and addressing two key areas that contribute to underachievement: chronic absences and summer learning loss. The state’s future workforce and economy depend on it.”

**Health – Kentucky Ranks 25:** Between 2008 and 2010, the number of uninsured children in Kentucky fell by 14 percent. Our state has made great strides in recent years in getting eligible children enrolled in Medicaid and the Kentucky Children’s Health Insurance Program (KCHIP). This improvement means better health for more kids, but these numbers do not reflect the recent shift to Medicaid managed care that began in November 2011. The state must both continue proactive outreach strategies and ensure the availability of Medicaid and KCHIP enrollment and retention data so child advocates can monitor how this major transition impacts Kentucky’s kids.

The 2012 *KIDS COUNT Data Book* and a state profile including all 16 indicators for Kentucky 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. Follow the Annie E. Casey Foundation on this issue on Twitter @aekidscount and on Facebook at <http://www.facebook.com/KIDSCOUNT>.

**To access the 2012 KIDS COUNT Data Book and the Kentucky profile, visit**  
<http://www.aecf.org/newsroom/databook2012.aspx>.

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*Kentucky Youth Advocates is a non-partisan, non-profit, children's advocacy organization. KYA represents a voice for Kentucky's most precious asset – its youth. We believe that Kentucky's youth deserve the opportunities and resources necessary to ensure their productive development and health.*