



Rhode Island KIDS COUNT

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20th annual National KIDS COUNT Data Book on the status of children in the United States released.

Rhode Island ranks 15th among the states for overall child well-being based on the 10 indicators tracked in National Data Book.

Between 2000 and 2007, Rhode Island improved on 6 of the indicators, including important progress on 4 measures related to the well-being of teenagers.

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PROVIDENCE, RI, July 28, 2009 – The 20th annual *National KIDS COUNT Data Book*, a state-by-state report on children’s well-being issued by the Annie E. Casey Foundation, shows that Rhode Island ranks 15<sup>th</sup> in the nation on an index of 10 key indicators (with 1<sup>st</sup> being the best and 50<sup>th</sup> being the worst). Last year Rhode Island ranked 21<sup>st</sup> overall. The *KIDS COUNT Data Book* provides information and statistical trends on the status of children in the U.S. as a whole and in each of the 50 states and features data on 10 indicators of child well-being – including measures related to family economic security, child and teen development, health and education.

#### **Indicators of Child Well-Being in the U.S.**

“The data in this year’s *KIDS COUNT Data Book* suggest that as a nation and as a state we are making progress in many areas that impact the lives of infants, children and teenagers everyday,” stated Elizabeth Burke Bryant, Executive Director of Rhode Island KIDS COUNT. The 20<sup>th</sup> annual *KIDS COUNT Data Book* indicators show six areas of improvement as a nation: infant mortality, child deaths, teen deaths, teen births, high school dropouts, and teens not in school and not working.

“In other areas, the national data present a less optimistic picture. We are seeing increases in children living in poverty and children living in families

where no parent has full-time year-round employment. Across the U.S. we are seeing a continued rise the percentage of infants born with a low birthweight, a risk to their healthy development.” The national *Data Book* notes that these indicators of child well-being do not fully reflect the impact of the recession on children, because the effects of the current economic downturn were not felt at the national level until well into 2008 and the data reported – the most recent available -- are for 2006 and 2007. According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, the U.S. unemployment rate more than doubled from 4.5 percent in May 2007 to 9.4 percent in May 2009.

### **Indicators of Child Well-Being in Rhode Island**

Rhode Island ranks 15<sup>th</sup> among the 50 states on an overall index of child well-being based on the 10 KIDS COUNT indicators. In Rhode Island, 6 of the 10 indicators of child well-being tracked in the *National KIDS COUNT Data Book* have improved between 2000 and 2007, 3 have worsened and 1 area had no change. Bryant remarked, “The data for Rhode Island that is presented in the national *KIDS COUNT Data Book* shows that as a state we have made important progress in meeting the needs of children and families despite the economic challenges we face. We still have more that needs to be done if we want all Rhode Island children to have the opportunities they need to be successful in school and in the workforce.”

Key findings for Rhode Island include:

#### *Rhode Island improvements in teen well-being:*

- Rhode Island ranks first (best) in the nation for the teen death rate for youth ages 15-19, which improved by 35% since 2000.
- The rate of births to teens ages 15 to 19 improved by 18% since 2000.
- The percentage of teens ages 16-19 who are high school dropouts showed a 40% improvement between 2000 and 2007.
- The percentage of teens ages 16-19 who are not in school and not working improved by 14% since 2000.

#### *Rhode Island improvements in the well-being of infants and children:*

- Rhode Island’s infant mortality rate improved by 3% between 2000 and 2006.
- Rhode Island’s child death rate for children ages 1-14 improved by 6% between 2000 and 2006.

### *Worsening of Rhode Island Child Well-Being in 3 Areas*

- Rhode Island saw worsening of three measures of child well-being since 2000, including an 11% increase in the percentage of infants born low birth weight, a 3% increase in the percentage of children living in single-parent families and a 6% increase in the percentage of children living in poverty.
- There was no change on one of the ten indicators of child well-being, the percentage of Rhode Island children living in families where no parent has full-time year round employment.

“The well-being of Rhode Island’s children worsened in many of the same areas where we are seeing declines nationally,” noted Elizabeth Burke Bryant. “There are higher percentages of infants being born with low birthweight and Rhode Island continues to struggle with the effects of the economic downturn on the economic security of families with children.”

### **Data-Driven Decision Making Needed to Improve Results for Children**

The *2009 KIDS COUNT Data Book* reviews the country’s progress in collecting, analyzing and using data to monitor the well-being of children in the country and in the states. The *KIDS COUNT Data Book* essay, entitled “Counting What Counts: Taking Results Seriously for Vulnerable Children and Families,” recommends a series of action steps to increase the quality and quantity of federal and state data on the well-being of children, to more effectively use data to improve policy and practice, to hold public agencies accountable for results, and to mobilize states and local communities to use data to take action on behalf of vulnerable children and families.

Bryant remarked, “The annual *KIDS COUNT Data Book* released by the Annie E. Casey Foundation each year reminds policymakers and the public that what gets measured gets done. While results always matter, they are even more important during times of economic crisis when resources are few and the consequences for children can be dire.”

Key recommendations for changes in state and federal data collection systems that are highlighted in the *KIDS COUNT Data Book* include the following:

- Update the federal poverty measure based on the recommendations of the National Academy of Sciences so that the poverty measure more accurately reflects families’ resources and costs

- Ensure the accuracy of the U.S. Census by properly funding, managing, and promoting the upcoming *2010 Census* and increasing the sample size for the *American Community Survey*, the annual survey conducted by the Census
- Collect more information on the health of young children and teen dropouts who are often missed because many health surveys are conducted in the schools
- Amend the *No Child Left Behind Act* to promote the adoption of meaningful and comparable proficiency standards and methods for calculating graduation rates in each state

### **Rhode Island KIDS COUNT Highlighted**

The *National KIDS COUNT Data Book* specifically cites the work of Rhode Island KIDS COUNT as an example of how “good data, when used properly, can powerfully boost the effectiveness of government financed human services programs and improve the lives of vulnerable children – particularly when tied to a purposeful advocacy campaign.” The following is an excerpt from the *National KIDS COUNT Data Book Essay*:

“Until the Rhode Island KIDS COUNT organization began sounding the alarm about lead poisoning among young children in the mid-1990s, the issue had generated little attention in the state capital. To highlight the consequences of lead poisoning on cognitive development and school success, RI KIDS COUNT created a new indicator reflecting the percentage of children entering kindergarten who had ever registered an elevated level of lead in their blood... Since 1997, the percentage of Rhode Island children entering kindergarten with a history of elevated blood lead levels has shrunk from 28 percent to 5 percent, and in the state’s central cities, the rates have fallen from 38 percent to 7 percent.”

Bryant said, “Access to timely and user-friendly data is necessary to inform policies and providing effective programming to improve child outcomes. We must renew our commitment to providing children the best start in life by identifying children at risk and helping families secure health care, high quality child care, and the other supports they need to provide for their families. We must ensure that all children get a high-quality education and graduate prepared for post-secondary education and with the skills to be successful in the workforce.”

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Rhode Island KIDS COUNT is a statewide children’s policy organization that works to improve the health, economic well-being, education, safety and development of Rhode Island children and youth. The organization is one of fifty state-level organizations that work in partnership with the Annie E. Casey Foundation to track the social condition of children at the state and local level across the country.