



Promoting public policy that enhances the lives of children and youth in Vermont

EMBARGOED FOR RELEASE until 12:01am EDT July 22, 2014

Contact: Sarah Teel | 802.229.6377 | steel@voicesforvtkids.org
Carlen Finn | 802.229.6377 | carlenf@voicesforvtkids.org

Vermont ranks 2nd for children's well-being; 2014 Data Book highlights impact of policies.

Montpelier - Voices for Vermont's Children celebrates the release of the special 25th edition of the *KIDS COUNT Data Book*. Since 1990 the *KIDS COUNT Data Book* has raised awareness locally and nationally of child well-being and what policies and programs might lead to improvements in child well-being in our nation.

This year, Vermont ranks 2nd in the nation for overall child-well-being. This is unchanged from 2013.

While three New England states rank within the top five for overall well-being among the 50 states, the top five states in the area of economic well-being are in the heartland and Plain States regions — North Dakota, South Dakota, Iowa, Minnesota and Nebraska.

Rankings are based on 16 different indicators across the four domains of Economic Well-Being, Education, Health, and Family and Community. According to some of this data, Vermont's consistently high overall ranking hides several problem areas.

Economic progress in the U.S. still lags, even after the end of the recession. Nationally, three of the four economic well-being indicators were worse than the mid-decade years (children in poverty; children whose parents lack secure employment; children living in households with a high housing cost burden).

In Vermont, these same indicators are similarly troubling.

- 15 percent or 19,000 Vermont children still live below the poverty threshold, although Vermont's high child poverty rate is 4th lowest in the nation.
- 28 percent, or 35,000 children in Vermont live in families where no parent has secure employment, which gives Vermont a rank of 13 for this indicator.
- 36 percent of children live in households with a high housing cost burden. Vermont's rank for this indicator is 31.

"These numbers show the challenges so many Vermont families are facing. Children need strong supports—guaranteed by good policy—that protect them from the impacts of this reality," says Sarah Teel, research associate at Voices for Vermont's Children.

The *Data Book* includes among its indicators the percentage of 3 and 4 year olds not attending preschool. In 2010-2012, 51 percent of Vermont 3- and 4-year-olds did not attend preschool. This was only slightly better than the national rate of 53 percent.

“This year will be a good year to take note of this as a baseline,” said Teel. “With Vermont’s universal pre-kindergarten law, more kids will have access, and we can expect to see this percentage improve.”

In 2012, 97 percent of kids in Vermont had health insurance, largely due to the state’s Dr. Dynasaur program, which covered almost half of Vermont’s kids. But 3,000 children still lacked coverage. Vermont is tied for 2nd in the nation on this indicator, with Illinois and Hawaii, and behind Massachusetts.

“Policies matter. The State Children’s Health Insurance Program allows Dr. Dynasaur to cover kids from 225 up to 300 percent of the poverty level, well above the federal level of 133 percent,” says Sheila Reed, associate director of Voices for Vermont’s Children. “This allows Vermont to cover many more children and is a reason Vermont ranks so high in terms of healthcare for kids.”

“On several fronts, we’ve seen the difference that smart policies, effective programs and high quality practice can make in improving child well-being and long term outcomes,” said Patrick McCarthy, president and CEO of the Annie E. Casey Foundation. “We should all be encouraged by the improvements in many well-being indicators in the health, education and safety areas.”

Some good news in Vermont is that several indicators reflecting the experience of older children have improved.

- The percentage of teens who are not in school and not working was 4 percent in 2012, down from 6 percent in 2011, and lower than the national percentage of 8 percent.
- 7 percent of high school students in 2012 did not graduate on time, compared to 9 percent in 2010 and 18 percent in 2005/2006. Nationally in 2012, 19 percent of high school students did not graduate on time.
- The rate of teen births is also relatively low, at 16 births per 1,000 females ages 15-19, compared to the national rate of 29 per 1,000.

However, the percentage of teens who abuse alcohol or drugs is 8 percent, which falls toward the high end of the 5 percent to 9 percent range seen across all the states.

“The Foundation’s partnership with state and national advocates for children has thrived since our first *Data Book* and has brought steady attention to how kids are faring,” said Laura Speer, Casey’s associate director for policy reform and advocacy. “The *Data Book* highlights the achievements of advocates across the country that have been critical in advancing increased investment in effective programs and services to help ensure that kids get the best possible start in life.”

Voices for Vermont’s Children has been the KIDS COUNT state partner in Vermont for 21 years.

The [KIDS COUNT Data Book](#) features the latest data on child well-being for every state, the District of Columbia and the nation. This information is available in the [KIDS COUNT Data Center](#), which also contains the most recent national, state and local data on hundreds of measures of child well-being.

Data Center users can create rankings, maps and graphs for use in publications and on websites, and view real-time information on mobile devices.

###

Voices for Vermont's Children is a statewide, multi-issue, independent non-profit that promotes public policy to enhance the lives of children and youth in Vermont. For more information, visit www.voicesforvorkids.org.

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.