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Oklahoma Missing Opportunities to Give Young Adult Parents and Their Kids a Boost

New Casey Foundation report illuminates needs and barriers facing Oklahoma's young parents and their children

TULSA, Okla. — With limited access to opportunities to advance their education and find family-sustaining jobs, Oklahoma's 62,000 young adult parents face hurdles to support their children and fulfill their own potential, according to *Opening Doors for Young Parents*, the latest KIDS COUNT® policy report from the Annie E. Casey Foundation.

The Casey Foundation's KIDS COUNT grantee in Oklahoma, Oklahoma Policy Institute, joined the call for action so these young parents can contribute to the state's communities and economy.

The fifty-state report reveals that, at 18 percent, Oklahoma is above the national average (10 percent) of youth ages 18 to 24 who are also young parents.

The report highlights the following statewide trends and areas of concern:

- 66,000 children in Oklahoma have young parents ages 18 to 24.
- 74 percent of children of young parents in Oklahoma live in low-income families, which is above the national average.
- Only eight percent of young parents ages 18 to 24 have completed an associate degree or higher.
- 47 percent of Oklahoma's young parents are people of color, facing challenges exacerbated by discrimination and systemic inequities, with their children standing to suffer the most.

"Too many young families in Oklahoma don't get the chances they need to get ahead," said David Blatt, executive director of Oklahoma Policy Institute. "Without access to quality child care, health care, higher education and other vital supports, we're leaving young families and their children behind."

The report spotlights a national population of more than 6 million, including 2.9 million young adult parents, ages 18 to 24, and 3.4 million children nationwide living with young parents. *Opening Doors for Young Parents* illuminates the most common obstacles young adult parents face, including incomplete education, lack of family-sustaining employment opportunities, lack of access to quality child care, inadequate and unstable housing and financial insecurity.

These barriers threaten not only these young adults, but also their young children, setting off a chain of diminished opportunities for two of our nation's future generations. But the report includes recommendations for addressing the obstacles that young parents face, most of which can be driven by policy solutions at the state level.

The Casey Foundation stresses the importance of a two-generation approach to equip young parents for success. "If we don't support young people when they become parents, we are cheating two generations out of having a positive future," warned Casey Foundation President and CEO Patrick McCarthy. "We can help young adult parents develop the skills they need to raise their children, contribute to their communities, and drive our national economy forward."

Oklahoma Policy Institute further stresses the importance of helping the state's young parents access educational and employment opportunities. In an increasingly competitive workforce landscape, education can make a significant difference in earning power for families. However, as the data demonstrate, young adult parents here in Oklahoma, like young parents nationwide, do not have the post-secondary education or specialized skills to obtain family-sustaining jobs.

Release Information

Opening Doors for Young Parents will be available September 25 at 12:01 a.m. EDT at <https://www.aecf.org/opening-doors-for-young-parents>. Reporters may request an embargoed copy beginning September 18.

About Oklahoma Policy Institute

Oklahoma Policy Institute is an independent nonpartisan non-profit that provides factual information and advocates for fair and responsible public policies. For more information, visit okpolicy.org.

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.

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