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HEALTH

National Kids Count report ranks Kentucky 37th in child well-being; shows some improvement

By [LISA HORNUNG](#) | June 27, 2018 10:00 am



The 2018 Kids Count Data Book was released Wednesday. | Courtesy Kids Count

The national [2018 Kids Count Data Book](#), released Wednesday, which looks at child welfare in the United States,

ranked Kentucky No. 37 overall but showed an increase in the state's economic well-being for the first time in the history of the report.

Terry Brooks, executive director of Kentucky Youth Advocates, who manages the survey for Kentucky, said the increase in economic well-being is promising, but it's not enough.

"It's a reminder we have a long way to go," Brooks said. "I mean it's somewhat of a cliché to say this, but if we found ourselves rated 37 in bourbon or basketball it would be cause for a state crisis. You know, I would love to see the day come when it was a state crisis for us for our kids to be ranked 37."



Terry Brooks, executive director of Kentucky Youth Advocates

That ranking means children in the state are in the bottom half nationally in well-being. In the history of the count, Kentucky has moved around from the mid-40s to lower-30s, Brooks said.

The report, funded by the Annie E. Casey Foundation, a charity arm of UPS, breaks down the well-being of kids into four categories: economic, education, health, and family and community.

The report compares the current numbers with those of 2010, which the Casey Foundation used because it was just after the Great Recession and it was a good measure of improvement, Brooks said.

Prepping for the census

A county breakdown of the report will be released in November. In the meantime, Brooks and Kentucky Youth Advocates want to emphasize preparing for the 2020 census. Children under age 5 have repeatedly been the most undercounted age group in the census.

According to census expert Bill O'Hare, in the estimated net undercount of the 2010 census, 8,000 Kentucky children ages 0 to 4 were missed. Some 11 percent of Kentucky children under age 5 live in hard-to-count areas, including parts of eastern Kentucky and west Louisville. Low-income children and children of color are disproportionately impacted by the census undercount, advocates said.

"If our youngest kids aren't getting counted, they won't get the resources they need to grow, learn and succeed," said Sadiqa Reynolds, president and CEO of the Louisville Urban League, in a news release. "I urge our local leaders in Louisville and across Kentucky to prioritize our hardest-to-count kids by prioritizing the 2020 census. We must take advantage of all available funds — our kids deserve it."

Brooks agreed. "This is not just an urban or a rural issue," he said in the release. "This is not a one community issue. This is a statewide, community-by-community opportunity to ensure each child is counted and therefore planned for in local, state and federal budgets. Given Kentucky's revenue shortfalls and tough budget decisions in the 2018 legislature, every child accounted for in the 2020 census means federal funding infused into our communities for the next decade. It means Kentucky isn't risking the gains we've made and future improvements in child well-being."



Economic Well-Being

The increase in economic well-being puts Kentucky at a rank of 40, though it was ranked 39 last year.

“We have a quarter of a million children living in poverty,” Brooks said. “We have over 330,000 kids whose parents don’t have secure employment. So, we’re not celebrating the results but we’re celebrating that for the first time in a long time, that arena showed improvement rather than decline.”

29	EDUCATION	Rank	UNITED STATES	KENTUCKY		
YOUNG CHILDREN (AGES 3 AND 4) NOT IN SCHOOL			52% 2009-11	52% 2014-16 SAME	57% 2009-11	59% 2014-16 WORSE
US: 4,256,000 KY: 67,000						
FOURTH-GRADERS NOT PROFICIENT IN READING			68% 2009	65% 2017 BETTER	64% 2009	62% 2017 BETTER
US: N.A. KY: N.A.						
EIGHTH-GRADERS NOT PROFICIENT IN MATH			67% 2009	67% 2017 SAME	73% 2009	71% 2017 BETTER
US: N.A. KY: N.A.						
HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS NOT GRADUATING ON TIME			21% 2010-11	16% 2015-16 BETTER	N.A. 2009-11	11% 2015-16
US: N.A. KY: N.A.						

Education

In most education indicators, Kentucky stayed the same or improved, except for young children (ages 3 and 4) not in school, which is an area that declined, from 57 percent in 2009-11, to 59 in 2018.

While the state improved in some proficiencies, 62 percent of fourth graders are not proficient in reading and 71 percent of eight-graders are not proficient in math.

28	HEALTH	Rank	UNITED STATES	KENTUCKY		
LOW BIRTH-WEIGHT BABIES			8.1% 2016	8.2% 2016 WORSE	9.0% 2016	9.1% 2016 WORSE
US: 321,839 KY: 5,042						
CHILDREN WITHOUT HEALTH INSURANCE			8% 2016	4% 2016 BETTER	6% 2016	3% 2016 BETTER
US: 3,277,000 KY: 32,000						
CHILD AND TEEN DEATHS PER 100,000			26 2016	26 2016 SAME	32 2016	34 2016 WORSE
US: 20,360 KY: 366						
TEENS WHO ABUSE ALCOHOL OR DRUGS			N.A. 2009-11	5% 2015-16	N.A. 2009-11	4% 2015-16
US: 1,148,000 KY: 14,000						

Health

Kids’ health coverage is a bright spot for Kentucky with 97 percent of children covered — putting the state at a slightly higher rate than the nation (96 percent). In most health categories, Kentucky improved or stayed the same, but the state declined in rank in the category of low-birth-weight babies.

“We know that if a little boy or little girl is born at a low birth weight, not only does that impinge on health but actually research has shown it affects everything from learning in school to future success,” Brooks said. One of the main causes of low birth-weight is smoking, and Kentucky has the [highest percentage of smokers](#) in the nation.

But Brooks sees opportunity in those bleak numbers. “To me, what’s positive about that opportunity is, you know what would happen if community leaders and faith leaders and education leaders and the medical community and the media all got together and said, ‘You know what, we may not be able to tackle the use of tobacco overall, but boy one thing we’re going to do is we were going to make sure that every pregnant woman understands the consequences of using tobacco while you’re pregnant. That alone would really make a big difference in kids health in Kentucky,” he said.



Family and Community

The only decline Kentucky saw in Family and Community was that there are more children in single-parent families, but it follows the national trend. Brooks said this isn’t necessarily a bad or good thing, but shows a change in demographics.

Single-parent families tend to have fewer resources, and while teen births have declined, Kentucky still ranks 46th in teen births, Brooks said.

“It’s a reminder that most of Kentucky’s kids are not living with June and Ward Cleaver,” he said. “You know the days of ‘Ozzie and Harriet’ and ‘Leave It to Beaver’ are over. And again, that’s not good or bad. I think what it does suggest is that institutions, whether it’s churches or schools or the medical community, we have to understand that the families that we all have to serve look really different from maybe they did 25 years ago.”

1. New Hampshire	14. Maryland	26. Missouri	38. South Carolina
2. Massachusetts	15. Washington	27. Delaware	39. Georgia
3. New Jersey	16. Maine	28. Indiana	40. West Virginia
4. Minnesota	17. Pennsylvania	29. South Dakota	41. Arkansas
5. Iowa	18. Wyoming	30. Oregon	42. Alabama
6. Utah	19. Rhode Island	31. New York	43. Texas
7. Connecticut	20. Colorado	32. North Carolina	44. Oklahoma
8. Vermont	21. Idaho	33. Michigan	45. Arizona
9. Nebraska	22. Illinois	34. Florida	46. Alaska
10. Virginia	23. Montana	35. Tennessee	47. Nevada
11. North Dakota	24. Hawaii	36. California	48. Mississippi
12. Wisconsin	25. Ohio	37. Kentucky	49. Louisiana
13. Kansas			50. New Mexico

The overall rankings of the well-being of children, according to the 2018 Kids Count Data Book. | Courtesy

Overall

Brooks said that despite some bleak numbers, Kentucky is in the perfect position to improve the lives of its children.

“We know that the particular economic environment in which Kentucky finds itself in, we know that a state earned income tax credit, for instance, would really pump up all of those measurements even more,” he said. “And we know that if we would tackle predatory lending, you know, sort of the high price of being poor in Kentucky, that’s going to help Kentuckians keep more of their dollars at home. And so instead of looking at it from a deficit which we normally do, you know, ‘Oh, the economics of Kentucky,’ maybe this is the moment that the folks in Frankfort could look at this and say you know we’re on a crest, let’s use good strategies that have worked in other states to move the economy even further along especially for families and kids.”

LISA HORNUNG

Lisa Hornung a native of Louisville and has worked in local media for more than 15 years as a writer and editor. Before that she worked as a writer, editor and photographer for community newspapers in Kansas, Ohio and Kentucky. She has a bachelor's degree in journalism from the University of Georgia, and after a 20-year career in journalism, she obtained a master's degree in history from Eastern Kentucky University in 2016.



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