

# State makes some progress in KIDS COUNT study

LOUISVILLE – Kentucky has made progress in half of 16 indicators of child well-being, according to the 2025 KIDS COUNT Data Book, a 50-state report of recent data developed by the Annie E. Casey Foundation analyzing how kids are faring in post-pandemic America. However, the data show Kentucky kids still fall behind in reading and math scores, are more likely to experience poverty than peers in other states, and more likely to experience early death.

State and community leaders must do more to ensure the best possible outcomes for every child, no matter where they grow up in the Commonwealth.

"Each year, this annual report card on kids gives policymakers, advocates, and communities the data they need to make policy and budget recommendations and set priorities," said Dr. Terry Brooks, executive director of Kentucky Youth Advocates, Kentucky's member of the Casey Foundation's KIDS COUNT network.

"The reality is, however, that we are at an inflection point in Frankfort. Kentucky's kids will remain at the bottom of the pack among peer states unless the General Assembly and Governor take definitive action. For instance, there are a myriad of moves the Beshear Administration can make immediately and there are commonsense policies

and budget priorities around which House and Senate leadership can act come the 2026 session to improve family economic stability, student achievement, and child health and safety across our Commonwealth. The haunting question is not, 'Can we improve our kids' well-being?' but rather, 'Will we?'"

The Data Book annually presents national and state data from 16 indicators in four domains — economic well-being, education, health, and family and community factors — and ranks the states according to how children are faring overall. Since 2019, Kentucky has made progress on eight child well-being indicators, regressed on six, and remained steady on two.

Here are a few data highlights on how Kentucky kids fare from the report:

While slightly improved since 2019, one in five children live in poverty – ranking the Commonwealth 44th among states.

Sixty-three percent of young children were not in school in 2019-2023, compared to 58% in 2014-2018, demonstrating a continued need for a robust early childhood education infrastructure that prioritizes early learning and care for our youngest learners.

Over two-thirds of 4th graders scored below proficient in reading and over three in four 8th graders scored below proficient in math, which continues the

trends highlighted in the 2024 Data Book looking at the unprecedented learning loss following the pandemic and the toll of chronic absenteeism on academic performance.

Just 3% of children were without health insurance in 2023, ranking Kentucky 3rd best among states, emphasizing the need to protect the gains made in child health coverage.

The child and teen (age 1-19) death rate climbed to 37 per 100,000 children in 2023 from 29 per 100,000 children in 2019, which is a 28% increase that is attributed in other reports to unsafe access to deadly means, such as firearms, illicit substances, or medications, as well as due to physical abuse or youth suicide.

The percentage of children in homes in which the household head lacks a high school diploma continues to fall, 9% in 2023 compared to 11% in 2019.

The teen birth rate also continues to fall, currently at a rate of 21 per 1,000 females ages 15-19 in 2023 – yet this remains the Commonwealth's worst-ranked measure relative to other states at 46th in the nation.

In its 36th year of publication, the KIDS COUNT® Data Book provides reliable statewide numbers to help leaders see where progress is being made, where greater support is needed and which strategies are making a difference. Kentucky Youth

Advocates encourages lawmakers as well as faith, school, and other community leaders to use this detailed information to make data-driven decisions that invest in young people and move the Commonwealth one step closer to being the best place in America to be a kid.

"We know what kids need

to grow up healthy and connected so they can thrive as adults: stable homes, strong schools, nutritious food, meaningful relationships, and opportunities to learn, play, and grow. That calls for action from local community leaders ranging from the faith community to the business community, from neighbors

and grandparents, from pediatricians and policeman. I have deep confidence that those community supports are happening in vibrant ways in every core of our state. But let me affirm – the seminal move ahead can come only if our elected leaders in Frankfort match their rhetoric with action," said Brooks.



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## New laws take effect in Kentucky

FRANKFORT, — New laws on squatting, drone surveillance, campus diversity programs, workplace safety, and gift card scams are all set to take effect in Kentucky this week along with many other changes to state statute.

The Kentucky General Assembly passed more than 140 bills during this year's 30-day legislative session, and most of those measures will become effective on Friday.

The state constitution specifies that new laws take effect 90 days after the legislature adjourns unless they have special effective dates, are general appropriation measures, or include emergency clauses that make them effective immediately upon becoming law.

Lawmakers adjourned the 2025 session on March 28, making June 27 the effective

date for most bills.

Here's a look at some of the measures taking effect:

Antisemitism on Campus – Senate Joint Resolution 55 directs Kentucky's public colleges and universities to adopt policies for combating antisemitism.

Cell Phones in Schools – House Bill 208 calls on school districts to establish a policy for limiting the use of cell phones during instructional time with some exceptions for emergencies and instructional purposes.

Chevron Deference – Under Senate Bill 84, courts can no longer defer to a state agency's interpretation when dealing with ambiguity in statutes, administrative regulations or orders, a practice known as Chevron deference.

Child Abuse – Under Senate Bill 120, school

coaches will receive training on the duties and procedures for reporting child abuse. The legislation will also add language to sports participation forms informing parents and students about the right to report abuse and how to make a report.

College Faculty Performance Reviews – House Bill 424 calls for presidents and faculty at Kentucky's public universities to undergo performance and productivity evaluations at least once every four years. The university boards will establish the evaluation process for each institution.

Disabilities and Parental Rights – Senate Bill 26 clarifies that disability alone cannot be used as a basis for denying adoption petitions, terminating parental rights, or determining placement of children.

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