

CENTER *for* PUBLIC POLICY PRIORITIES

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Texas Ranks 43rd in Latest National Rankings of Child Well-Being

Possible 2020 census undercount could worsen conditions for Texas kids

AUSTIN, Texas — Texas children cannot afford to have an inaccurate census count, as the data would have major consequences for their health, wellness, education and economic opportunity. Texas ranks 43rd in child well-being – one of the 10 worst states for kids – though there are a few bright spots, including a decrease in the number of uninsured Texas children, according to the *2018 KIDS COUNT® Data Book* released today by the Annie E. Casey Foundation. The report confirms challenges for Texas kids and highlights the critical role of the upcoming 2020 census. Billions of dollars in federal aid to states rely on the accuracy of the census, including significant support for children's health care, housing and food programs.

"We have to count all the children and families in Texas, because we can't support people we don't know are here," said Ann Beeson, CEO of the Center for Public Policy Priorities (CPPP). "The data show us that Texas children have many challenges, and we need an accurate census to advance proven policy solutions that make this the best state for kids."

Reflecting overall trends in the United States, Texas child poverty and health insurance rates have improved. An estimated 22 percent of Texas children lived in poverty in 2016, down from 23 percent in 2015. Despite these gains, Texas still lags behind other states, ranking 37th in child poverty and 48th in the percent of children without health insurance.

The national *KIDS COUNT Data Book* annually ranks each state in four core areas of child well-being: health, education, economic well-being and family and community. Texas lags behind most states in child well-being, and state legislators need to enact policies to improve child outcomes. Texas ranks:

- **35th in economic well-being.** Although the number of children in poverty has decreased, more than 1.6 million Texas kids still live in poverty. About 27 percent of kids in Texas live in families where no member of the household has full-time, year-round employment.
- **32nd in education.** Data in the report confirm that Texas needs to do more to support education. A majority of Texas kids lack the reading and math skills they need to pursue higher education. Texas has a better on-time graduation rate than the U.S. average. 11 percent of Texas high schoolers did not graduate on time in the 2015-16 school year compared to 16 percent of students nationally. However, challenges in college and career readiness remain. Texas struggles to help its children improve in reading and math. Seventy-one percent of Texas fourth-graders scored below proficient in reading levels, and 67 percent of Texas eighth-graders scored below proficient in math levels.
- **47th in the family and community domain.** The *Data Book* refers to nurturing families and supportive communities as "family and community." Although the numbers are declining, 17 percent of Texas kids still live in high-poverty areas. An estimated 20 percent (almost 1.5 million) of kids in Texas live with a parent who lacks a high school diploma, down from 23 percent in 2012.

- **41st in health.** Texas child health insurance rates have improved since 2010, but still rank third to last in the United States. Lawmakers at the federal and state levels must protect and expand insurance access. Recent improvements are largely the result of the passage of the Affordable Care Act (ACA), which increased kids' access to critical physical and mental health care and strengthened families' financial security by reducing unexpected medical expenses. Threats to cut the popular Children's Health Insurance Program in 2017 and continued attacks on the ACA are not in line with keeping kids healthy.

CPPP has actively engaged in the [Texas Public School Finance Commission](#), which has been meeting this year, and urges that group to recommend boosted public school investment for Texas children.

"This report confirms that state leaders need to take more aggressive steps to improve the lives of millions of children and families, and that includes ensuring an accurate census," said Kristie Tingle, a research analyst at the Center for Public Policy Priorities in Austin. "Texas demographics — our large immigrant population and diverse overall population — have long made it a major challenge to get an accurate, full count of residents, and that [challenge](#) could be even larger in 2020 because of changes to the census."

Census surveys via internet may also not pick up lower-income populations without internet access. In Texas, 30 percent of young children under the age of five live in hard to count census tracts. These 582,000 children are at risk of being undercounted in the upcoming 2020 census, and federally funded programs that have driven youth success are in jeopardy.

CPPP offers the following recommendations to achieve a more accurate census:

- **Identify the 'hard to count' communities.** Community leaders and elected officials should learn about Texas' "hard to count" communities and begin reaching out to them now. Visit www.censushardtcountmaps.us to find areas of Texas that are the hardest to count. Targeting outreach to these hard-to-count areas and populations could help make a fair and accurate census more likely.
- **Conduct outreach across Texas.** State and local governments and community organizations need to ensure that all communities are counted. Create statewide and local 2020 census "complete count" committees. The Census Bureau regional staff can help with "complete count" committees and questions about the census.
- **Speak to your local officials.** All Texans can encourage their city and county officials to work with library systems, schools or other locations that might be helpful in encouraging residents to participate in the census.
- **Call Congress.** Texans can call their members of Congress and encourage them to maximize the Census Bureau's capacity. Federal lawmakers should fully fund the census outreach effort, and the administration needs to appoint a qualified and permanent director to lead the agency.

Release Information

The *2018 KIDS COUNT® Data Book* will be available June 26 at 11:01 p.m. CT at www.aecf.org. Additional information is available at www.aecf.org/databook, which also contains the most recent national, state and local data on hundreds of indicators of child well-being. Journalists interested in creating maps, graphs and rankings in stories about the *Data Book* can use the KIDS COUNT Data Center at datacenter.kidscount.org.

About the Center for Public Policy Priorities

At the Center for Public Policy Priorities, we believe in a Texas that offers everyone the chance to compete and succeed in life. We envision a Texas where everyone is healthy, well-educated and financially secure. We want the best Texas — a proud state that sets the bar nationally by expanding opportunity for all.

The Center for Public Policy Priorities is the Texas grantee for the Annie E. Casey Foundation's national KIDS COUNT Project. Visit CPPP.org/kidscount to view the Center's Texas-specific data reports and link to our regular updates county-level data on the KIDS COUNT Data Center.

CPPP is an independent public policy organization that uses data and analysis to advocate for solutions that enable Texans of all backgrounds to reach their full potential. We dare Texas to be the best state for hard-working people and their families.

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.