



# NEWS



**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

**CONTACTS: John Morgan, Executive Director**  
**Frank Beylotte, Kids Count Director**  
**Voices for Virginia's Children**  
**804-649-0184**  
[john@vakids.org](mailto:john@vakids.org)   [frank@vakids.org](mailto:frank@vakids.org)

## **National Report Shows Well-being of State's Children Holding Steady**

### **2009 KIDS COUNT Data Book Ranks Virginia Relatively Strong**

Richmond, VA., July 28, 2009 – National and state indicators of child well-being have improved slightly since 2000, according to a report released today by the Annie E. Casey Foundation and Voices for Virginia's Children. Over this period, Virginia has seen its greatest improvement in the high school dropout rate, while showing a worsening trend in the number of children living in single-parent families.

The report ranks states annually according to data on ten core indicators. Virginia's 2009 rank is 16 versus 15 last year, "An indication that child well-being in Virginia is relatively strong and holding fairly steady", according to John Morgan, Executive Director at Voices for Virginia's Children. "There are certainly areas needing further improvement, but all-in-all the picture in Virginia compared to elsewhere remains fairly positive."

Now in its 20<sup>th</sup> year, the *KIDS COUNT Data Book* provides information and statistical data showing trends over time in the needs and conditions of America's most disadvantaged children and families. The accompanying Data Book essay, "Counting What Counts," recommends major improvements in national and state-level efforts to collect and report meaningful data on the status of children and urges policy makers to then rely on this data to design and evaluate policy initiatives to improve child well-being.

**The 20<sup>th</sup> Annual *KIDS COUNT Data Book* shows the following trends since 2000 on the ten core indicators:**

National:

- Six indicators improved: infant mortality rate, child death rate, teen death rate, teen birth rate, high school dropout rate, and rate of teens not in school and not working;
- Four indicators worsened: low-birthweight babies, children living in families where no parent has full-time year-round employment, children in poverty, and children in single parent families.

Virginia:

- Four indicators improved: child death rate, teen death rate, teen birth rate, and high school dropout rate
- Two indicators unchanged: percent of teens not in school and not working, and child poverty rate.
- Four indicators worsened: percentage of low-birthweight babies, infant mortality rate, percentage of children living in families where no parent has full-time year-round employment, and percentage of children in single parent families.

**Other noteworthy trends include:**

Poverty

The national child poverty rate worsened from 13% in 2000 to between 17 and 19% annually throughout this decade (18% in 2007, the latest available figure). “KIDS COUNT has slightly more good news than bad for children, but there are some trends going in the wrong direction,” says Laura Beavers, coordinator of the national KIDS COUNT project at the Annie E. Casey Foundation in Baltimore. “The child poverty rate of 18 % means 900,000 more children are living in poverty nationally than in 2000.” Child poverty in Virginia, however, has held steady throughout the decade at a relatively low 13%, reflecting the state’s strong economy. “We are all concerned”, says Morgan at Voices, “that this figure does not yet reflect the impact of the recession, and that next year’s data may show a significant increase in child poverty. Such an increase would be a serious threat to the continued well-being of Virginia’s children.”

Births to Teen Mothers

The teen birth rate nationally worsened slightly from 2005 to 2006 after more than a decade of steady improvement. Although still below the rate in 2000, the teen birth rate increased from 40 to 42 per 1,000 births. The latest increase was widespread, occurring in 42 states including Virginia. Virginia’s teen birth rate was 41 per 1000 births in 2000, improved to 34 per 1000 by 2005, then worsened slightly to 35 per 1000 births in 2006, mirroring the national trends but in all years remaining below (i.e. better than) the national average. Policy experts note that a one-year change may be temporary but also could be an early signal of a more enduring and troublesome trend.

Overall Rankings

Virginia’s overall rank of 16 was down slightly from 15<sup>th</sup> in 2008. A change of one position is not considered significant and should be interpreted as an indication of relatively stable child well-being. Since 2000 our national child well-being rank has fluctuated slightly year-to-year but stayed in the range of 13 – 19. In 2009 New Hampshire, Minnesota, and Utah rank highest, and Alabama, Louisiana, and Mississippi lowest. Five states with the biggest improvement in rank between 1999-2000 and 2006-07 are New York, Connecticut, Maryland, North Carolina, and Illinois. The six states with the biggest drop in rank during this same period are Montana, Maine Alaska, Pennsylvania, South Dakota, and Vermont.

**Additional Virginia Data:**

**Virginia ranks in the top 10 on two of the ten core indicators.**

Virginia ranks seventh nationally in the percent of children living in families where no parent had full-time, year-round employment; and ninth on the child death rate.

**Lower percentage of teens are high school dropouts.**

The percentage of Virginia teens ages 16 to 19 who were high school dropouts fell from 9 percent in 2000 to 5 percent in 2007. Virginia ranks 11<sup>th</sup> nationally on this measure.

**Despite recent decrease, infant mortality rate higher than in 2000.**

From 2005 to 2006, Virginia's infant mortality rate decreased from 7.5 to 7.1 infant deaths per 1,000 live births. However, the state's 2006 rate remains higher than it was in 2000, when it stood at 6.9 deaths per 1,000 births, and higher than the national rate of 6.7

### **New Data Center**

This year's *Data Book* also heralds the launch of a new online and mobile-friendly Data Center ([datacenter.kidscount.org](http://datacenter.kidscount.org)) that contains hundreds of measures of child well-being covering national, state, county, and city information. Users can now access geographic profiles that include information on education, economic well-being, health status, racial and ethnic disparities, children in immigrant families, and many more topics.

“Meaningful data on the status of children, such as that provided by Voices for Virginia's Children through our KIDS COUNT project, can and should be the basis for sound public policy decisions regarding children,” says Frank Beylotte, Kids Count Director at Voices. “Our tight fiscal climate should prompt policy makers to rely even more on objective data to judge the merits of programs and improve their efficiency and effectiveness. That's the point of the 2009 essay – good data can help us improve outcomes for kids.”

*The Annie E. Casey Foundation is a private charitable organization, whose primary mission is to foster public policies, human-service reforms, and community supports that more effectively meet the needs of today's vulnerable children and families .The Foundation provides financial support for the Kids Count project at Voices for Virginia's Children and similar organizations in all 50 states. For more information, visit [www.aecf.org](http://www.aecf.org).*

*Voices for Virginia's Children is a non-partisan, privately funded policy research and advocacy organization that champions public policies to improve the lives of Virginia's children. Voices is Virginia's KIDS COUNT entity. More information is available at [www.vakids.org](http://www.vakids.org).*

The *KIDS COUNT Data Book* with state-by-state rankings, supplemental data, and the essay launches at 11:00 a.m. EDT on July 28, 2009 at <http://datacenter.kidscount.org>. Through the KIDS COUNT Data Center users can download the complete *Data Book*, access hundreds of other measures of child well-being, and view real-time information on portable devices.

###