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**The Annie E. Casey Foundation KIDS COUNT Releases 2013 Data Book showing some improvement in Oklahoma, while child poverty remains high**

*Critical investments in children are required to support Oklahoma's future workforce needs and continued economic growth.*

OKLAHOMA CITY – Investments in education and school readiness, access to health care and moving more families out of poverty and into the middle class appear to be key policy issues for Oklahoma to address to improve the well-being of the state's children, according to new data in the Annie E. Casey Foundation's *2013 KIDS COUNT Data Book*.

Though Oklahoma weathered the recent recession better than many states, key indicators tracking childhood poverty have worsened in recent years – particularly among the youngest children -- reflecting the increasing child poverty rate nationally.

There is some good news. Oklahoma's ranking on overall child well-being improved to 36<sup>th</sup>, up from 40<sup>th</sup> in 2012, making it one of two states showing the biggest improvement from last year.

State ranking is determined by 16 indicators, which are divided into four core areas. Oklahoma improved its ranking in three of the four areas: Economic Well-being moved up to 25<sup>th</sup> from 29<sup>th</sup>; Health moved to 43<sup>rd</sup> from 44<sup>th</sup>; and Family/Community moved to 39<sup>th</sup> from 40<sup>th</sup>. Education was the only area where Oklahoma failed to improve this year, dropping to 40<sup>th</sup> from 39<sup>th</sup>.

"We are pleased that Oklahoma is moving up from the bottom of the barrel on some key indicators for child well-being, however, our state is not even close to the national average for most of our rankings," said Doug Gibson, Interim Executive Director for the Oklahoma Institute for Child Advocacy, the organization that directs Oklahoma KIDS COUNT.

"The persistently high child poverty rate remains a serious concern, as poverty impacts a child's health, education and family stability in so many ways – often, for a lifetime," Gibson said.

When the current indicators (2010-11 data) are compared to the same data from 2005, nine indicators improved, six indicators worsened and remained the same. Unfortunately, the indicators that worsened or showed no change all relate to poverty and economic well-being.

Of the 16 indicators, the two showing the most improvement since 2005 were:

- Child and teen deaths (per 100,000) with Oklahoma now ranking 36<sup>th</sup>, compared to 45<sup>th</sup>.
- Teen birth rate (15-19 year-olds) at 50 per 1,000, compared to 54 per 1,000.

The indicators that worsened most significantly in Oklahoma since 2005 were:

- Children living in high poverty areas, which more than doubled -- jumping from 5 percent in 2005 to 12 percent in current data.
- The number of children living in single-parent families rose from 32% to 36%.

In addition to presenting state and national data on key indicators and looking at trends over time, the *2013 KIDS COUNT Data Book* highlights how the country's youngest children are faring. That picture is not good.

Nationally, the poverty rate for children under age 3 is 26%, and among children ages 3 – 5 it is 25% -- higher than the national average for all children. These figures support the need to expand high quality early childhood care and education programs for all children, especially the children growing up in poverty.

“Oklahoma’s ranking has been so low for so long on most health, education and economic well-being indicators for children, which directly impacts the well-being of our state and its economic potential,” Gibson said. “Investing in children is a smart investment for future economic growth.”

The *2013 National KIDS COUNT Data Book* with state-by-state rankings and supplemental data is embargoed until 12:01 a.m. EDT, June 24, 2013 at [datacenter.kidscount.org/databook/2013](http://datacenter.kidscount.org/databook/2013). On the newly redesigned 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 mobile devices; check: <http://datacenter.kidscount.org/>.

The Oklahoma Institute for Child Advocacy is our state’s KIDS COUNT partner with the Annie E. Casey Foundation. Oklahoma KIDS COUNT information is available on OICA’s website at [www.oica.org](http://www.oica.org).

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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, healthier places to live, work and grow. For more information, visit [www.aecf.org](http://www.aecf.org). KIDS COUNT ® is a registered trademark of the Annie E. Casey Foundation.

The Oklahoma Institute for Child Advocacy is the statewide, nonprofit, 501-c-3 organization that creates awareness, takes action and changes policy to promote the health, safety, education and economic well-being of Oklahoma’s children and youth. The Institute directs Oklahoma KIDS COUNT. Check: [www.oica.org](http://www.oica.org).