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Kansas Kids Count ranking improves

KHI NEWS SERVICE

July 28, 2009

TOPEKA — Kansas ranked 13th among the 50 states on the well-being of its children, according to a study released today.

The state's ranking was the best it had achieved in the past several years. According to the 2009 KIDS COUNT Data Book, produced for the Annie E. Casey Foundation, Kansas improved over the past eight years on four of the 10 measures of child well-being. It backslid on four measures, and saw no change on two.

Among the key Kansas findings:

Child deaths reduced

Since 2000, the child death rate (ages 1-14) in Kansas has improved by 16 percent and the teen death rate (ages 15-19) has seen a 19 percent improvement. Legislation passed in recent years, including a booster seat law and teen seat belt law, have helped, according to Kansas Action for Children, which works with the foundation on the report. This year's Legislature's stiffened the requirements for teen drivers.

More children in poverty

The rate of childhood poverty has increased by 25 percent since 2000. At that time, 12 percent of the state's children were growing up in poverty. The most recent data shows that 15 percent - nearly 100,000 children – are living in poor households.

Infant mortality rate

The state's infant mortality rate improved slightly – from a rate of 7.4 deaths per 1,000 live births to a rate of 7.1. But, the infant mortality rate has worsened since 2000 when the state had a rate of 6.8 and the rate remains above the national rate of 6.7.

High marks in four categories

Nationally, Kansas ranked third lowest in its percentage of high school dropouts, fourth in percentage of secure parental employment, seventh in percentage of idle teens, and seventh in percentage of children living in single-parent families.

"The good news is that we're seeing the results of the Legislature's work over the past decade. There's a definite correlation between the policies they've passed and the improvements showing up in the KIDS COUNT data," said Shannon Cotsoradis of Kansas Action for Children. "The bad news is that we still have a ways to go. More Kansas kids living in poverty poses a serious threat to our future economy. We need to keep looking for ways to make sure that our next generation is healthy, educated and economically stable."

The KIDS COUNT Data Book is in its 20th year. New this year is an expanded online data center. To access the online information for Kansas, visit <http://datacenter.kidscount.org/ks>.

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