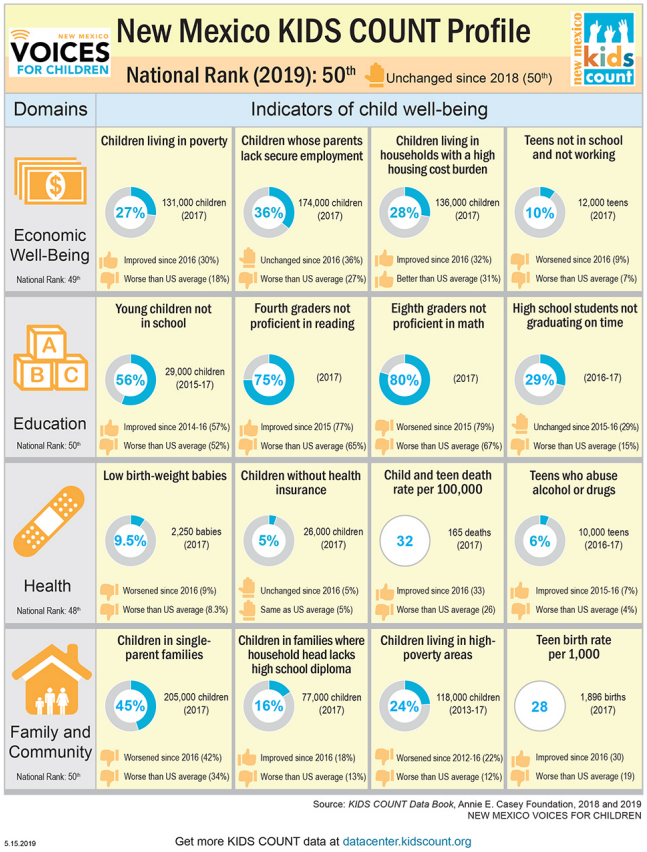

State makes some improvements in child poverty

New Mexico is ranked 50th out of the 50 states for child well-being by the 2019 KIDS COUNT® Data Book, released June 17 by the Annie E. Casey Foundation. This is the third time the state

has ranked last in the nation. New Mexico fell to the last spot in 2013, then again in 2018.

Louisiana ranked 49th this year, bumping Mississippi up to 48th. New Hampshire ranked first.

“It’s disappointing, but not terribly surprising to see New Mexico ranked at the bottom again, given the last ten years,” New Mexico Voices for Children Executive Director James Jimenez said. Voices for Children runs the state’s KIDS COUNT program. Further, Jimenez remarked, “It is going to take sustained investment to undo the damage from a decade of underfunding all of our child-serving programs and services like health care, child care and K-12 education. We started making progress in 2019, but clearly much more needs to be done.”

Using the most recent data available, the Data Book ranks the 50 states on 16 indicators of child well-being that are organized under four categories: economic well-being, education, health, and family and community. The indicators include everything from the child poverty rate and young children not attending preschool, to child and teen death rates and the teen birth rate, among others. Most of the data in this year’s report comes from 2017, the most recent year available.

As it did in 2018, New Mexico ranked last in the education domain, but this year the state fell to the bottom in the family and community domain, dropping one rank. The state ranked the same this year as in 2018 in the other two domains, economic security (49) and health (48).

There were some bright spots in the data. The state’s child poverty rate dropped slightly from 30 percent in the 2018 Data Book to 27 percent in this year’s report. That pulled our ranking in that measure up to 48 from 49. New Mexico’s teen birth rate continued to improve.

Our teen birth rate in the new Data Book is 28 births for every 1,000 females ages 15 to 19 (per 2017 data). That’s less than half what it was in the 2012 Data Book (60 births per 1,000 female teens; 2009 data). And while the share of New Mexico children who lack health insurance did not change from last year’s Data Book (5 percent; 2016 data), the number of children without insurance dropped slightly based on 2017 data, and the state’s rank improved to 27, up from 30.

Child advocates hope to see bigger improvements in the future.

“We made some real strides toward increasing our investments in children during the 2019 legislative session,” N.M. Voices Deputy Director Amber Wallin said. “However, it takes some time before improvements in public policy show up in measurable changes to child well-being. Our ranking is also dependent upon how well other states are doing, and most states made the kinds of investments during the recession that led to quicker, more robust recoveries than New Mexico did,” she added.

One of the policies enacted this year that has historically improved child well-being, was an increase in the state’s Working Families Tax Credit, which benefits more than 200,000 children each year. In addition, a large infusion of funding - about $450 million - was appropriated to the state’s K-12 schools. While that’s a significant increase, it only brings the state back to the same funding level it had prior to the recession in 2008, on a per-student, inflation-adjusted basis.

The 2019 KIDS COUNT Data Book is available at www.aecf.org.

New Mexico Voices for Children is a nonpartisan, nonprofit organization advocating for policies to improve the health and well-being of New Mexico’s children, families and communities. For more information, contact: Sharon Kayne, Communications Director, NM Voices for Children (505) 361-1288 (direct), (505) 401-8709 (c), skayne@nmvoices.org or: Marie-Pier Frigon, Communications Assistant, mfrigon@nmvoices.org

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