



AGENDA FOR CHILDREN

A VOICE FOR LOUISIANA'S CHILDREN

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Louisiana Children Face Serious Challenges

NEW ORLEANS—Louisiana's children and families are losing ground on seven out of ten major indicators of child well-being, according to a report released today by the Baltimore-based Annie E. Casey Foundation. Louisiana is once again ranked 49th overall on ten major indicators of child well-being in the foundation's 2007 *KIDS COUNT Data Book*.

Outcomes for Louisiana teenagers have seen significant improvements since 2000, with declines in the teen birth rate, the percentage of high school dropouts, and the percentage of teens that are not in school and not working. Despite these encouraging trends, one of the starkest measures of teenagers' well-being—the teen death rate—has actually increased by 13% since 2000.

Outcomes for Louisiana's babies are getting worse. Our infant mortality rate is now the worst in the nation. Analysis of the data demonstrates that if Louisiana shared the same infant mortality rate as Montana, the best-ranked state, an additional 390 Louisiana babies would live to celebrate their first birthdays. The good news is that the state's Department of Health and Hospitals' Office of Public Health has implemented several programs to reduce infant mortality, including an extensive public awareness campaign designed to reduce the incidence of Sudden Infant Death Syndrome, a leading cause of infant deaths in Louisiana.

The data clearly show that many of Louisiana's families do not share the same level of economic security that their counterparts in other states do. Forty-nine percent of Louisiana's children live in low-income families, compared to 40% nationally. Worse yet, 13% of our children live in extreme poverty, which is

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According to Judy Watts, President and CEO of Agenda for Children, “Poverty tends to underlie most, if not all, of the negative indicators that challenge Louisiana’s children and families. When you don’t have an adequate income, safe and stable housing, and food in the pantry, it’s hard to provide the supervision and care that all children need, at any age.”

Analysis of the Kids Count data reveals that some relatively small changes could result in Louisiana meeting or exceeding the national average. Louisiana could have tied the national average for any given indicator by doing any of the following:

- Keeping 239 babies alive and well in their first year of life
- Avoiding 126 deaths among children aged 1 to 14
- Preventing 102 deaths to teens aged 15 to 19
- Preventing 2,553 births to girls aged 15 to 19
- Keeping 2,536 teens in school until they graduate
- Providing a means of family economic self-sufficiency for over 100,000 Louisiana children living in poverty

The theme of the 2007 Casey report focuses on the child welfare system, stressing the need to make lifelong family connections for children and youth in foster care a national priority. With six out of every thousand children living in foster care, Louisiana is actually below the national rate of ten per thousand. Still, 265 Louisiana children “aged out” of the foster care system in 2004 without having a permanent family. Without permanent family connections, these children face daunting challenges as they enter adulthood.

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Agenda for Children, Louisiana’s statewide child advocacy organization, works to make Louisiana a state in which all children can thrive. For more information, please visit the Agenda for Children website at www.agendaforchildren.org.

