

North Dakota Children Doing Well, But Not Improving

Fargo, North Dakota - July 28, 2009

First, the good news.

North Dakota's child well-being ranks 7th highest in the nation according to the national KIDS COUNT program, which today published their annual assessment of children's well-being in the United States. The ten measures used to rank states consider a wide variety of factors, such as children's health, economic security, and educational attainment.

Based on the [2009 National KIDS COUNT Data Book](#), North Dakota's 7th place ranking is a reflection of the state's performance on the following 10 indicators among the 50 states:

- Low share of teens who are high school dropouts (rank: 1st in nation)
- Low share of teens who are not in school or not working (rank: 1st in nation)
- Low share of children in single-parent families (rank: 3rd in nation)
- Low percentage of low-birthweight babies (rank: 5th in nation)
- Low percentage of children without secure parental employment (rank: 7th in nation)
- Teen birth rate (rank: 8th lowest in nation)
- Low percent of children in poverty (rank: 11th in nation)
- Infant mortality rate (rank: 14th in nation)
- Child death rate (rank: 39th in nation)
- Teen death rate (rank: 41st in nation)

Poor improvement over time.

North Dakota has often ranked in the top ten of the 50 states with regard to child well-being since KIDS COUNT began their assessments in 1988. Consistently being in the top ten is positive, yet it is important to examine whether children's lives have improved over time, too. A closer look at changes in child well-being from 2000 to 2005 reveals that North Dakota declined in 5 of 10 measures, representing a 13 percent decline overall in child well-being as compared with a 5 percent decline in child well-being across the nation from 2000 to 2005.

North Dakota KIDS COUNT Program Director, Dr. Polly Fassinger, cautions "While North Dakota ranks well in children's well-being, we rank 47th in the nation for making improvements in children's well-being." Fassinger adds, "State rankings provide useful information about the relative well-being of children in our state, but in order to understand whether or not children's lives are improving, you must examine trends over time."

For example, child and teen death rates are areas for concern in our state. From 2000 to 2005, North Dakota's child death rate (ages 1-14) increased by 21% (increasing from 19 to 23 deaths per 100,000 children) and the teen death rate (ages 15-19) grew by 54% (increasing from 52 to 80 teen deaths per 100,000 teens). During the same five year period, the national child and teen death rate actually declined by 9% and 3% respectively. Data from 2007 reveal that the leading cause of child death for North Dakota children ages 1-14 is illness, accounting for 70% of these deaths. The leading cause of teen deaths in North Dakota is traffic accidents, accounting for 41% of teen deaths in 2007.

Dr. Fassinger notes, "Of course, each individual death is felt deeply by the child's family and friends. And especially because of the declining number of children in our state, North Dakota should deeply grieve this loss, too. Every year our state is losing the equivalent of two entire

school classrooms of children, given the number of deaths to North Dakota children ages 1-19."

Two other measures of child well-being remained fairly steady from 2000 to 2005: the percentage of children in single-parent families and the teen birth rate. North Dakota ranks third in the nation with respect to our low rate of children living in single-parent homes (approximately one in four North Dakota children); this rate has changed little since 2000. Living in a single-parent family is an important measure of child well-being because these children often have access to fewer resources, such as income and health care. While the national teen birth rate declined by 17 percent from 2000 to 2005, North Dakota remained consistent at 27 births per every 1,000 females ages 15-19 from 2000 to 2004. In 2005, this rate grew to 30 births per every 1,000 females ages 15-19.

Two **new** North Dakota KIDS COUNT publications provide a closer look at North Dakota's ranking on child well-being and are available online:

[North Dakota Kids: A National Comparison](#)

and

[Is Child Well-Being Improving in North Dakota? A 2009 Analysis.](#)

This year's national KIDS COUNT Data Book is also complemented by the expanded national KIDS COUNT Data Center that contains hundreds of measures of child well-being covering national, state and county information. To access information for North Dakota online, go to datacenter.kidscount.org/nd.

About North Dakota KIDS COUNT

The mission of North Dakota KIDS COUNT is to provide accurate, current data on child well-being in order to inform local and state discussions about how to secure better futures for all of North Dakota's children.

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