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A collaborative project of
**MICHIGAN LEAGUE FOR
PUBLIC POLICY**
and
MICHIGAN'S CHILDREN

Embargoed until 12:01 a.m. Jan. 31, 2013
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Report: Michigan child well-being slips *Baraga County ranks 46th among 82 counties ranked*

[LANSING, Mich.] The latest Kids Count in Michigan Data Book underscores the need to act to help children in Michigan with eight of 15 indicators of child well-being showing worsening trends.

Baraga County ranked 46th of 82 counties for overall child well-being with No. 1 being the best ranking. This is the first time since 1992, when the first state data book was released, that the report ranks counties on the overall status of child well-being using 13 of 15 indicators. This provides a bigger picture of local child well-being and how the county compares with others.

"We clearly see a connection between higher-income communities and better outcomes for kids, but even in more affluent counties, child poverty and the need for food assistance jumped dramatically," said Jane Zehnder-Merrell, Kids Count in Michigan project director at the Michigan League for Public Policy. "No area of the state escaped worsening conditions for children when it comes to economic security."

Child poverty in Baraga County increased 19 percent over the trend period compared with a statewide jump of 28 percent. The rate of young children in the county qualifying for food assistance increased 23 percent, compared with a statewide increase of 55 percent. The period covered in the book is generally 2005 to 2011.

The rate of confirmed victims of abuse and neglect, linked to poverty, increased by 3 percent in the county compared with a statewide increase of 28 percent.

Statewide, the biggest improvements were the decline of kids in foster care, decreasing from 17,000 in 2005 to 11,000 in 2011, and a drop in fourth-graders not proficient in reading from 40 percent to 32 percent of test-takers in the Michigan Educational Assessment Program.

Statewide, mortality rates for infants fell by 8 percent between 2005 and 2010 while the death rate for children/youth ages 1-19 declined 11 percent.

Baraga County's best ranking was 22nd out of 82 counties in eighth-grade MEAP scores with 68 percent of students not proficient in math, compared with nearly 71 percent statewide. The county's poorest performance was in less than adequate prenatal care, ranking 71st out of 82 counties. Nearly 38 percent of mothers in Baraga County received poor prenatal care, compared with 30 percent statewide.

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The annual Data Book is released by the Kids Count in Michigan project. It is a collaboration between the Michigan League for Public Policy (formerly the Michigan League for Human Services), which researches and writes the report, and Michigan's Children, which works with advocates statewide to disseminate the findings. Both are nonpartisan, nonprofit advocacy organizations concerned about the well-being of children and their families.

"The release of this critical report is the start of a conversation. Each year, the data point clearly to programs and policies to improve the lives of all children, youth and families in Michigan," said Michele Corey, interim president and CEO of Michigan's Children. "Recently elected public officials have the opportunity to impact the future of our state by committing to these recommended policy changes and others proven to make a difference to child outcomes."

Policy recommendations to improve conditions included the following:

- **Maintain public systems and structures that help families withstand the weak economic recovery** by restoring state unemployment benefits from 20 weeks to 26 weeks and the state Earned Income Tax Credit from 6 percent to 20 percent of the federal credit, and raising eligibility and adjusting the sliding scale for child care subsidies to allow more parents access to licensed child care.
- **Address health inequities** by improving the health and well-being of children in low-income and communities of color, eliminating the causes of high teen homicide rates in African American communities, and supporting the successful implementation of the Affordable Care Act.
- **Invest in prevention** by supporting evidence-based programs to prevent teen pregnancies, services to families to prevent child abuse and neglect and early childhood care and education.
- **Improve education opportunities** by reducing class sizes in early grades, offering incentives to recruit and retain teachers in schools with large numbers of low-performing students and evaluating the impact of open school choice, magnet and charter schools on the students they serve as well as on surrounding schools.

The report is available at www.mlpp.org. Please note that the online report includes a trend page as well as a background page for each county as well the Upper Peninsula, Southeast Michigan, Traverse Bay area, out-Wayne and the city of Detroit.

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Kids Count in Michigan project is part of a broad national effort to improve conditions for children and their families. Funding for the project is provided by the Annie E. Casey Foundation, the Detroit-based Skillman Foundation, Blue Cross Blue Shield of Michigan Foundation, local United Ways and the Battle Creek Community Foundation. More state and local data are available at the Kids Count Data Center, www.datacenter.kidscount.org.

Editors, please note: For general comment on the report and questions about data collection, please contact the Michigan League for Public Policy at (517) 487-5436. For policy implications please contact Michigan's Children at (517) 485-3500.



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Report: Michigan child well-being slips *Houghton County ranks 6th among 82 counties ranked*

[LANSING, Mich.] The latest Kids Count in Michigan Data Book underscores the need to act to help children in Michigan with eight of 15 indicators of child well-being showing worsening trends.

Houghton County ranked 6th of 82 counties for overall child well-being with No. 1 being the best ranking. This is the first time since 1992, when the first state data book was released, that the report ranks counties on the overall status of child well-being using 13 of 15 indicators. This provides a bigger picture of local child well-being and how the county compares with others.

“We clearly see a connection between higher-income communities and better outcomes for kids, but even in more affluent counties, child poverty and the need for food assistance jumped dramatically,” said Jane Zehnder-Merrell, Kids Count in Michigan project director at the Michigan League for Public Policy. “No area of the state escaped worsening conditions for children when it comes to economic security.”

Child poverty in Houghton County increased 15 percent over the trend period compared with a statewide jump of 28 percent. The rate of young children in the county qualifying for food assistance increased 5 percent, compared with a statewide increase of 55 percent. The period covered in the book is generally 2005 to 2011.

The rate of confirmed victims of abuse and neglect, linked to poverty, showed no change in the county compared with a statewide increase of 28 percent.

Statewide, the biggest improvements were the decline of kids in foster care, decreasing from 17,000 in 2005 to 11,000 in 2011, and a drop in fourth-graders not proficient in reading from 40 percent to 32 percent of test-takers in the Michigan Educational Assessment Program.

Statewide, mortality rates for infants fell by 8 percent between 2005 and 2010 while the death rate for children/youth ages 1-19 declined 11 percent.

Houghton County ranked third in students not graduating on time, with 12 percent of students not graduating on time, compared to nearly 26 percent statewide. The county's poorest performance was in mothers receiving less than adequate prenatal care, ranking 67th of 83 counties, with 37.5 percent of mothers receiving poor prenatal care, compared with 29.6 percent statewide.

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"The release of this critical report is the start of a conversation. Each year, the data point clearly to programs and policies to improve the lives of all children, youth and families in Michigan," said Michele Corey, interim president and CEO of Michigan's Children. "Recently elected public officials have the opportunity to impact the future of our state by committing to these recommended policy changes and others proven to make a difference to child outcomes."

Policy recommendations to improve conditions included the following:

- **Maintain public systems and structures that help families withstand the weak economic recovery** by restoring state unemployment benefits from 20 weeks to 26 weeks and the state Earned Income Tax Credit from 6 percent to 20 percent of the federal credit, and raising eligibility and adjusting the sliding scale for child care subsidies to allow more parents access to licensed child care.
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