

About the 2021 Florida County Child Well-Being Index

The 2021 Florida County Child Well-Being Index, which relies on KIDS COUNT® data, is produced to help maintain a focus on Florida's children and to highlight areas in need of investment to better support their healthy development.

This year's index emulates the annual ranking of states published by the Annie E. Casey Foundation's annual KIDS COUNT® Data Book, which compares child well-being on 16 indicators in the areas of Economic Well-Being, Education, Health, and Family and Community.¹ These indicators are chosen carefully to provide the best representation possible of child well-being in each county.

Education

A quality education builds the foundation for children to be equipped for success as they enter the workforce. Early education is critical to children's school readiness, measured by the percentage of **children ages 3 and 4 in preschool**. Though Florida has one of the highest rates of 4-year-olds in preschool,² state funding only covers three hours of instruction, making the quality and duration of programming a top concern. **Fourth grade reading proficiency** is correlated with students graduating from high school.³ **Eighth grade math scores** predict success in post-secondary readiness, which opens the door to greater economic achievement.⁴

Health & Well-being

Health indicators were selected that have salience over the lifetime of children, including measures of overall health, such as **low birthweight babies** and overweight and obese 1st, 3rd, and 6th graders. **Teen pregnancy** not only puts babies and mothers' health at-risk in the short run, but it also reduces the likelihood of the mother's high school graduation and economic success.⁵ Having **health insurance** improves the health, educational, and economic outcomes of children⁶ and has positive economic benefits to states.⁷ Additionally, **children who are overweight** have greater risk of health issues like high blood pressure, but also have long term risks for adult obesity and related health issues.⁸

Economic Well-Being

The degree of economic stability within a child's household also impacts their overall well-being. The percent of **children in poverty** is included because the effects of poverty have lifelong consequences for physical and mental well-being, academic success, and more.⁹ Similarly, the **households that spend more than 30 percent of their income on housing** indicator is included because housing instability is associated with poor maternal health and depression¹⁰ as well as adverse effects on

children.¹¹ The **unemployment rate** is included because it reflects the economic conditions in each county that affect parents' ability to support their families. The percentage of disconnected youth, i.e., those who are **not in school or working**, is included because these youth may not be developing the skills they need to work and thrive as adults.¹²

Family and Community

Like economic indicators, the area of family and community provides a better understanding of the context in which children are growing and developing. **Children living in concentrated poverty** are living in neighborhoods with under-resourced schools, less green spaces, and fewer opportunities to achieve their full potential.¹³ Risk factors, including **child maltreatment** and **involvement with the juvenile justice system**, are important in making the right investments in prevention and early intervention with these children, youth, and their families. **Single heads of household** reflect the fact that these households tend to have fewer financial resources to support their family, higher levels of food insecurity,¹⁴ and poorer maternal physical¹⁵ and mental health.¹⁶

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For more details on the indicators and methodology, see *Sources and Terminology*.

¹ Annie E. Casey Foundation, "2021 KIDS COUNT Data Book: 2021 State trends in child well-being," <https://www.aecf.org/resources/2021-kids-count-data-book>.

² National Institute for Early Education Research, "The state of preschool 2020: State preschool yearbook," 2021, https://nieer.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/08/YB2020_Full_Report_080521.pdf.

³ Annie E. Casey Foundation, "Learning to read – Early warning: Why reading by the end of third grade matters," 2010, https://assets.aecf.org/m/resourcedoc/AECF-Early_Warning_Full_Report-2010.pdf.

⁴ Regional Education Southwest, "Identify indicators that predict postsecondary readiness and success in Arkansas," 2021, https://ies.ed.gov/ncee/edlabs/regions/southwest/pdf/REL_2021091.pdf.

⁵ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, "The adverse effects of teen pregnancy," <https://youth.gov/youth-topics/pregnancy-prevention/adverse-effects-teen-pregnancy>.

⁶ Child Trends, "Research brief 2017-22: Health insurance improves child well-being," May 2017, https://www.childtrends.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/05/2017-22HealthInsurance_finalupdate.pdf.

⁷ Kaiser Family Foundation, "The effects of Medicaid expansion under the ACA: Studies from January 2014 to January 2020," <https://www.kff.org/medicaid/report/the-effects-of-medicaid-expansion-under-the-aca-updated-findings-from-a-literature-review/>.

⁸ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, "Childhood Obesity Causes & Consequences," <https://www.cdc.gov/obesity/childhood/causes.html>.

⁹ C. Blair and C.C. Raver, "Poverty, stress, and brain development: New directions for prevention and intervention," *Academic Pediatrics*, 16(3 Suppl): S30-6. doi: 10.1016/j.acap.2016.01.010.

¹⁰ M. Sandel, et al., "Unstable housing and caregiver and child health in renter families," *Pediatrics*, 141 (2); DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1542/peds.2017-2199>.

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- ¹¹ Urban Institute, “Housing matters - How housing quality affects child mental health,” 2017, <https://housingmatters.urban.org/articles/how-housing-quality-affects-child-mental-health>.
- ¹² KidsData, “Teens ages 16-19 not in school and not working,” www.kidsdata.org.
- ¹³ Department of Housing and Urban Development, “Evidence Matters: Understanding neighborhood effects of concentrated poverty,” 2011, <https://www.huduser.gov/portal/periodicals/em/winter11/highlight2.html>.
- ¹⁴ K.S. Balistreri, “Family structure and child food insecurity: Evidence from the Current Population Survey,” 2017, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11205-017-1700-7>.
- ¹⁵ LF Berkman, et al., 2015 *Journal of Epidemiology and Community Health*, 69(9), 865-72. doi: 10.1136/jech-2014-205149. Epub 2015 May 14. PMID: 25977123; PMCID: PMC4759498.
- ¹⁶ I. Theodoritsi, N. Daliana, and A-S Antoniou, “The mental health of single-parent families in relation to psychological, societal and financial parameters,” in T. K. Babalis, Y. Xanthacou, and M. Kaila (Eds.), *Single-parenting in the 21st century: Perceptions, issues and implications* (pp. 77–101), Nova Science Publishers.