

# Study details welfare of Michigan kids; poverty level decreasing, still a "long way to go"

by Mikenzie Frost | Sinclair Broadcast Group

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LANSING, Mich. — The health and welfare of children in Michigan was detailed in the 27th annual Kids Count Databook released from the Michigan League for Public Policy and numerous categories showcase need for improvement, organizers said.

The numbers for the report come from a year-long study, collecting data and information from counties and various state and federal agencies. The report analyzed four categories that included 16 indicators: Economic security, health, safety, family, community and education.

Included in the report – one in five Michigan children are living at or below the poverty line. While the number is lower than previous years, Kids Count Program Director Alicia Guevara Warren said that data doesn't paint the whole picture.

“While we say that there is one in five kids still living in poverty, if we were to take that up and look at families who are living with low income, say 200 percent of the federal poverty level, that includes about 41 percent of kids in Michigan,” she said. “Although we are trending in the right direction in terms of reducing child poverty, I think we have a long way to go there.”

Michigan's Children, a policy and advocacy group for statewide issues impacting children, President and CEO Matt Gillard said living in poverty can create serious issues for kids.

“That's a challenging situation to grow up in,” he said.

The different places where kids are facing hardships are related, Guevara explained, and said it's important for the state to take a big picture look at the situation.

"If they are experiencing homelessness, or if they've experienced some type of trauma or food insecurity, those things all have to be addressed in order to see the educational outcomes that we want," she said.

More than half of third graders tested below proficient in reading and almost 70 percent of eighth graders tested not proficient in math. The report detailed that one in five high school students have difficulty graduating on time.

Guevara Warren said some students have had success with nontraditional pathways through high school, like graduating in five or six years. Regardless of the path, Guevara Warren said getting students through high school and onto the next step is critical to setting up their future success.

"In order to gain economic security, they're going to need that post-secondary education," she said. "We can't just isolate one problem and think that everything is going to magically be resolved."

The Kids Count Databook also showed that one in four toddlers in Michigan are not getting the complete vaccination list. The low numbers come after a nationwide measles outbreak and Michigan experiencing a record number of cases diagnosed across the state.

[2019 Kids Count Data Book](#) by on Scribd

Guevara Warren noted that some parents have opted to not vaccinate their children.

"Now, when we are seeing this outbreak, we need to be figuring out what types of public education campaigns need to happen to increase awareness of how important it is get immunized," she said.

The purpose of the information, Guevara Warren said, is to showcase the current state of families and communities across Michigan and work with policy directors and lawmakers to create change. One suggested the Michigan League for Public Policy detailed is increasing the Earned Income Tax Credit for some families.

Increasing the tax credit was an idea proposed by Gov. Gretchen Whitmer in her first budget she unveiled in March. Whitmer said the Kids Count showed that too many Michigan kids and families were not getting needed support.

"That's why my budget makes the biggest investment in our public schools in a generation of kids and invest in two-generation policies that make a meaningful difference early childhood education, close the gap between wealthy and poor schools," Whitmer said in a release from the League for Public Policy.

While the governor's budget is being debated in Lansing, Gillard said the information showcased in the 2019 Kids Count doesn't shine a good light on Michigan.

"Child wellbeing in Michigan would not put us near the top in most states," he said.

The Kids Count Databook can be viewed [online](#). Each county has been ranked by the Michigan League for Public Policy based on the various categories of information.