

The Salt Lake Tribune

Utah stumbles in fighting kids' poverty

By Julia Lyon

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Utah has dropped in the annual Annie E. Casey Foundation ranking of children in poverty, dropping from third to fourth place in the nation, after improving in the rankings until this year.

The rankings are a combination of factors, including the teen pregnancy rate, the percent of low birth weight babies and single-parent families.

New Hampshire, Minnesota and Vermont ranked higher than Utah.

Utah continues to fare extremely well in certain categories, such as the child poverty rate, based on a collection of the most recent data available. For example, only 11 percent of children in Utah live in poverty, according to 2008 data, compared to 18 percent nationwide.

"I think our challenge as a state is ... to celebrate that we are such a good place for most of our kids but that we should be there for all our kids," said Karen Crompton, the executive director of Voices for Utah Children, an advocacy group.

Nearly 90,000 kids in Utah lived in poverty, based on 2008 census numbers. That number is expected to increase as more current data become available.

Federal guidelines set the poverty rate as an income of \$21,834 or less for a family of two adults and two children as of 2008.

Utah had 19 percent of its children living in a family where no parent had full-time, year-round employment, which gave it the nation's top ranking. The percentage was 27 percent nationwide, 2008 data show. That means no parent had worked at least 35 hours a week for 50 or more weeks, in the previous 12 months.

But the positive ranking doesn't suggest children aren't in need.

"That's almost 20 percent — one out of five kids in the state lives in a household where a parent doesn't have secure employment," said Laura Beavers, national Kids Count coordinator. "We're really hoping this information will be used as policymakers and people in state government are making decisions about how to spend and cut state budgets."

The annual state rankings are presented in the Kids Count data book release.

Utah also has the lowest percent of children in single-parent families — 18 percent compared to 32 percent nationwide, according to 2008 data.

But with 6.7 percent of babies born with a low birth weight, Utah still has work to do, said Crompton, recalling discussions last legislative session to cut Medicaid assistance to pregnant women.

“Programs that help kids who live in poverty, whether it’s Medicaid, CHIP ... those are things that have a generation-changing impact,” she said.

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Do you want to read more about kids in Utah?

Go to the Annie E. Casey Foundation website. > www.aecf.org

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Uninsured adults and children

In 2007, 15.7 percent of Utahns under age 65 did not have health insurance, according to newly released U.S. Census data. Of the state’s children under age 19, nearly 11 percent were uninsured.

The county-by-county analysis again showed a wide range by region, with 26.2 of Rich County residents under age 65 uninsured, compared to 10.5 percent in Davis County. Davis County’s children, up to age 19, were also the least likely in the state to be uninsured, at 6.6 percent, with 23.7 percent uninsured in Rich County.

The report also shows disparities by race, with 34.1 percent of Utah’s Latinos uninsured, compared to 12.5 percent of whites and 19.7 percent of the state’s black residents.

Create statewide and county tables online. > www.census.gov/did/www/sahie/index.html