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### **Child Advocate Encouraged by 2006 KIDS COUNT Report**

Mississippi's third place ranking on the percent of children under six spending time in family-friend-neighbor child care came as a relief to Jane Boykin, spokesperson for KIDS COUNT Mississippi and President of the Jackson-based Forum on Children and Families.

Boykin said this year's KIDS COUNT data really "connect the dots" between parental income and employment and the school readiness and school success of children in working parent families, particularly in a State like Mississippi with so many low-income working families. She's counting on it to make a difference.

In addition to ranking third on the percentage of children in the family-friend-and neighbor care, what the Data Book refers to as "family-based" child care, Mississippi is listed:

- 6<sup>th</sup> in the percentage of children under six living in families with all parents employed (67% versus 59% national average)
- 43<sup>rd</sup> in the percentage of children living in working poor families (27% versus 21% national average) – 49<sup>th</sup> in the percentage of working families with children living in poverty (17% versus 10% national average)
- 3<sup>rd</sup> in the percentage of children under six in one or more forms of non-parental child care (73% versus 65% national average) – 34% of Mississippi children three

and four years of age with employed parents are in two child care arrangements and 13% percent are in three.

- 50<sup>th</sup> in the percentage of fourth grade students scoring below basic reading level. (52% versus 38% national average) and 48<sup>th</sup> in the percentage of eighth grade students scoring below basic reading level (40% versus 29% national average).
- 41<sup>st</sup> in the percentage of teens 16-19 who are high-school drop-outs (10% versus 8% national average)
- 48<sup>th</sup> in the number of births to teens 15-19 (63 versus national average of 42 births per 1000 teens 15-19)
- 50<sup>th</sup> in the percentage of low-birth weight births (11.4% versus 7.9% national average)

“Connect the dots and you see low-income children attending school readiness programs while their parents are home during the day and in ‘family-based’ child care arrangements while their parents work afternoon and evening shifts,” Boykin said. “You also see parents that work during the day scrambling to find child care for the rest of the work day and during the summer when their children are in part-day, part-year school readiness programs.”

“In other words, we’ve been trying to go in the right direction with the wrong map,” she continued, “and the right map is really pretty simple – child care that supports parental employment also supports parental involvement which, in turn, increases the school readiness of young children and their later school and life success. *Child Care Keeps Mississippi Working*,” she said, “so everyone wins if State funds are invested in making child care more accessible and affordable to working parents and more affordable for programs to provide.”

KIDS COUNT Mississippi, [www.kidscountms.org](http://www.kidscountms.org) is an affiliated state project of the Mississippi Forum on Children & Families, a Jackson-based non-profit organization promoting community resource development with information, education, and training programs.

KIDS COUNT, a national and state-by-state effort to track the status of children by providing policymakers and citizens with benchmarks of child well-being, is an initiative of the Annie E. Casey Foundation.

The Annie E. Casey Foundation, [www.aecf.org](http://www.aecf.org), is a private charitable organization, whose primary mission is to foster public policies, human-services reforms, and community supports that more effectively meet the needs of today's vulnerable children and families.

For more information from the 2006 KIDS COUNT Data Book visit [www.mfcf.org](http://www.mfcf.org) and [www.mfcf.org/kc/2006kcnationalrelease.htm](http://www.mfcf.org/kc/2006kcnationalrelease.htm).