



MEDIA ADVISORY
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Contact: Jennifer Eastland
601-355-4911

UPDATED ONLINE REPORT ON BIRTHS

Other states aren't waiting on Mississippi to catch up when it comes to getting newborns off to the right start in life according to data from the annual report *The Right Start for America's Newborns*.

In spite of improved performance on five indicators and posting 16 on the list of states ranked by progress from 1990 – 2001, Mississippi finished at the bottom of the state rankings on four of the eight indicators of newborn well-being – low birthweight births (10.7%), preterm births (17%), births to teens (17.8%), births to unmarried women (46.3%) – and near last on two others. The State finished at number 47 on teen births to women who were already mothers (23.5%) and at number 45 on births to mothers with less than 12 years of education 24.9%.

"I'm not surprised," said Jane Boykin, president of the Jackson-based Forum on Children and Families and project director for KIDS COUNT Mississippi, who thinks the most troubling aspect of Mississippi's performance on the national report is that it scored so poorly even with the significant gains made over the last decade.

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“We’ll stay behind, too,” she continued, “as long as we stay behind in our policies. We need to set our sights higher, set the standard for the nation, and top the list when states are ranked on the well-being of their children.”

“It’s time to let other states play catch up for a change,” she continued. “The question everyone should be asking is why we’re not working to be the *first* State to invest in a comprehensive learning readiness strategy - not why we’re among the last to invest State funds in school readiness.”

Boykin said both research and common sense point to the State’s making learning readiness a priority. It’s learning readiness,” she said, “particularly during the first 36 months of life, that prepares children to be successful, life-long learners.”

The *Right Start* report - a joint project of KIDS COUNT, an initiative of the Annie E. Casey Foundation, and Child Trends, a research organization located in Washington, D.C. - uses data from the National Center for Health Statistics. These data reflect conditions prior to birth; a newborn’s health status at birth; and maternal characteristics that are associated with a child’s educational and social outcomes.

The performance of Mississippi counties on the eight *Right Start* indicators can be found on the web-based KIDS COUNT Center for Data on Mississippi’s Children and Families located at www.mfcf.org/datacenter. A link to the national KIDS COUNT website is available at

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www.mfcf.org/kidscount. The *Right Start* report, data on all states, and the county level data from the KIDS COUNT Mississippi Data Center is also available at www.aecf.org/kidscount.

Both online formats allow viewers to create custom reports such as state and county profiles, line graphs showing trends over time, color-coded U.S. and Mississippi maps and ranking tables.

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