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## **Wisconsin Lawmakers Choose Tax Cuts for the Rich over Investing in our Children** *Wisconsin Ranks as One of the Worst States to Live for Black Children and Families*

**Madison, Wisconsin** — Analysis from the **2024 KIDS COUNT® Data Book** shows that despite ranking 11th for overall wellbeing, Wisconsin remains the worst state in the nation for Black children and families. The **2024 KIDS COUNT® Data Book** is a 50-state report of recent data developed by the Annie E. Casey Foundation analyzing how kids are faring in post-pandemic America.

“Considering Wisconsin’s historically strong fiscal position, decision makers should be focused on investing in our children and eliminating barriers to opportunity. However, the Republican-controlled state legislature has instead tried to push through tax cuts that would have widened racial disparities,” stated Michele Mackey, CEO for Kids Forward.

Troubling findings from Kids Forward’s analysis of the **Data Book** indicators for Wisconsin include:

- In 2018-22, Black children were 29 times more likely to live in high-poverty areas than white children. This disparity in likelihood of living in high poverty is the worst in the country.
- In 2022, Black children were 2.6 times more likely to be born with a low birth-weight than white children. This disparity in low birth-weight is the worst in the country.
- In 2022, 96% of Wisconsin’s Black 8th grade students were not meeting proficiency levels in math, in contrast to 59% of the state’s white students. This disparity in math test scores was the worst in the nation.
- In 2020-21, Black students were 5.5 times more likely to not graduate on time than white students. This disparity in on time graduation is the worst in the country.

“It wasn’t always this way in our state,” stated Mackey, “This is the result of decades of intentional decisions and inaction that built substantial barriers for Black families. These disparities underscore the urgent need to dismantle the structural barriers that perpetuate inequality.”

Until 40 years ago, Wisconsin’s Black residents actually earned more and had better jobs than their national counterparts. But since then, state and local decision makers have made it harder for Black families to get ahead by upholding racialized zoning, restricting the rights of workers to organize, shredding the floor under wages and benefits, and ignoring extreme housing segregation. These decisions, combined with the manufacturing collapse in the late 70s and outright racism, have created greater barriers to opportunity for Black families in Wisconsin. The result? Black families face some of the most extreme racial disparities in the country today and less economic stability than the generations before them.

“Many Black families thrive despite these barriers. But, they do make life more difficult for those making low and moderate incomes in Wisconsin than in other states,” stated Carte’cia Weaver, Senior Policy Analyst.

Each year, the **Data Book** presents national and state data from 16 indicators in four domains — economic wellbeing, education, health, and family and community factors — and ranks the states according to how children are faring. While Wisconsin is ranked 11th overall, this average alone masks Wisconsin’s disparities that disproportionately affect youth of color, kids in immigrant families, children from families with low-incomes, and children in high-poverty areas.

Kids Forward recommends the following to help eliminate the disparities:

- **Extend postpartum Medicaid coverage because healthy babies start with healthy parents.** New mothers are at risk of serious health conditions, and nearly three out of every four pregnancy-related

deaths occur postpartum. In Wisconsin, Black mothers are five times more likely to experience a pregnancy-related death than White mothers. Providing 12 months of postpartum Medicaid coverage would ensure that they have access to the care they need and would also help protect infants, ensuring that more babies can celebrate their first birthday as a healthy and whole child. Wisconsin is one of only three states that has refused to provide postpartum coverage for 12 months.

- **Address anti-Blackness in schools and train, hire, and retain Black teachers.** As shared in the [Race to Equity: 10-Year Report](#), “Students must have teachers who look like, understand, and believe in them. Teacher expectations of students can become self-fulfilling prophecies. For example, researchers found that Black teachers are more likely than white teachers to strongly endorse Black students, raising their chances of completing college.” Further from the 10-Year Report, “Research has shown that a combination of perceptions of belonging, the classroom disciplinary environment, course sequencing, and culturally relevant lessons are particularly important for math skill attainment among Black students.”
- **Invest in schools & communities with the resources they need.** Most school districts are experiencing staff shortages, overcrowded classes, and overdue renovations. Governor Evers’ most recent budget would have re-invested millions into our schools, but the Republican-controlled legislature chose handouts for the wealthy instead.
- **Ensure every child has the physical and mental health services they need to be well so they can focus on their education.** We can start to do this by:
  - Strengthen public school mental health infrastructure by sending more Medicaid dollars back to schools to better fund school health services. This decision would result in \$112 million in additional Medicaid reimbursement funds for school-based services.
  - Following the federal government’s lead and reversing the so-called “free care rule” for school-based services. Doing this could get Medicaid funding to cover services for more students. Right now, use of Medicaid funds is limited to students with disabilities who have an Individualized Education Plan (IEP) with specifically identified Medicaid reimbursable services, such as nursing, occupational and speech therapy, mental health services, transportation, and social work.

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#### **RELEASE INFORMATION**

The *2024 KIDS COUNT® Data Book* will be available at [www.aecf.org](http://www.aecf.org). Additional information is available at [www.aecf.org/databook](http://www.aecf.org/databook). Journalists interested in creating maps, graphs and rankings in stories about the *Data Book* can use the KIDS COUNT Data Center at [datacenter.aecf.org](http://datacenter.aecf.org).

#### **ABOUT KIDS FORWARD**

Kids Forward is a statewide antiracist policy center that inspires action and advocates for children and families of color and those furthest from opportunity in Wisconsin. We envision a Wisconsin where every child thrives. Visit [kidsforward.org](http://kidsforward.org).

#### **ABOUT THE ANNIE E. CASEY FOUNDATION**

The Annie E. Casey Foundation creates a brighter future for the nation’s young people by developing solutions to strengthen families, build paths to economic opportunity and transform struggling communities into safer and healthier places to live, work and grow. For more information, visit [www.aecf.org](http://www.aecf.org). KIDS COUNT® is a registered trademark of the Annie E. Casey Foundation.