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Child Well-Being Declines

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A new study says the well-being of New Mexico's children declined from 2000 to 2005.

The study, issued by the Annie E. Casey Foundation last month, takes a group of indicators including rates for infant mortality (ages 0-1), child mortality (ages 1-14), high school dropouts, children living in poverty, plus the number of teens not working or in school, and combines them into one value that rates child well-being in the state.

With an overall decline of 2 percent from the previous five-year period, 1995 to 2000, New Mexico was tied with four other states for 40th place. Eight states had steeper declines than New Mexico.

Lt. Gov. Diane Denish chairs the New Mexico Children's Cabinet, a collection of state social service agencies that monitors the condition of kids in the state.

"Governor Richardson and I have pushed for significant investments in programs and services that benefit children and young people. Investments in children are long term and do not produce immediate results; the information in this report includes data from 2000 to 2005, and I look forward to reviewing the data from 2005 to 2010," Denish said in a statement.

The child mortality rate showed the worst results in all the factors in New Mexico, rising steadily from 20 deaths per 100,000 children in that age range to 31 in 2005.

Lisa Adams-Shafer, a program director at New Mexico Voices for Children, said the state has taken good steps such as investing in pre-K programs but that more needs to be done.

"We're always near the bottom, and this report shows we lost some ground. There's always room for improvement," Adams-Shafer said.

There was no change up or down in the percentage of children in poverty, defined as the number of children younger than 18 who live in families with incomes below the U.S. poverty threshold. That number was at 26 percent in 2000 and 2005.

The state did show improvement in some categories, such as the teen birth rate, which measures births per 1,000 females ages 15-19. That number dropped from 66 in 2000 to 62 in 2005.

In many categories there was no discernible trend, as the statistics tended to fluctuate up and down over the five-year period.

The Annie E. Casey Foundation, which supports "fostering public policies, human-service reforms, and community supports that more effectively meet the needs of today's vulnerable children and families," according to its Web site, gathered its statistics from sources such as the U.S. Census Bureau and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

Percent increase or decrease in selected child well-being indicators from 2000 to 2005:

Child morality rate: 55 percent increase.

Teen birth rate: 6.1 percent decrease.
Children in poverty: no change.
Single-parent families: 12.1 percent increase.