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Kids Count mixed picture for state

By Sue Major Holmes

The Associated Press

ALBUQUERQUE — New Mexico's ranking in the well-being of its children has improved, but the 2009 Kids Count report still shows a mixed picture for the state.

New Mexico's overall ranking improved from 48th last year to 43rd this year — but it remains in the bottom five states in three of the report's 10 key indicators.

The state ranks 49th in the teen birth rate, although it improved slightly in that area between 2000 and 2006. It ranks 48th in the percentage of children living in single-parent families and 47th in the child poverty rate. In addition, it ranks 44th in the percentage of children in families in which no parent has a full-time, year-round job.

Gerry Bradley, research director for New Mexico Voices for Children, said child poverty cannot be viewed separately from family poverty.

"We're measuring things well but we have to decide how we're going to make things better for these people, for children in New Mexico," he said. "It's a very dangerous time."

The state and the nation are looking at reduced economic activity, he said.

Federal stimulus money is helping New Mexico with such programs as food stamps, unemployment insurance and Medicaid, helping the state avoid "drastic cuts in the state budget," Bradley said.

But, he said, "we're facing

a situation in which state has to increase revenue to support education and health care."

Officials of the Annie E. Casey Foundation, which publishes the databook each year, note the latest report is from data collected no later than 2007 and does not reflect the height of the economic downturn.

The foundation's senior vice president, Patrick McCarthy, also said during a Tuesday teleconference with reporters that the current way of measuring poverty is outdated, relying on a standard set in the 1960s based on how much a family spends on food.

Bradley agreed.

"In New Mexico, it costs twice the poverty level to live at some rudimentary level," taking into account expenses from food to health care to child care, Bradley said.

Despite its low ranking in children living in poverty, New Mexico improved in the areas of infant mortality rate, teen death rate, teen birth rate, high school dropout rate as well as teens not in school and not working.

But the state showed a declining trend in three areas: the percent of low-birth-weight babies, the death rate for children ages 1 to 14 and the percentage of children living in single-parent families.

The state was static in the percent of children living in families in which no parent has a full-time, year-round job.

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Associated Press Writer

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On the net:

Kids Count: <http://data-center.kidscount.org>

Kids Count report paints a mixed picture for New Mexico children

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The Associated Press

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In Grant County, the report indicates that 28.6 percent of children were living in poverty in 2007 — slightly higher than the state's rate of 25.2 percent — ranking it 16th out of 33 New Mexico counties.

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New Mexico children in poverty in 2007

County	Children in poverty		
1. Los Alamos	2.7%	17. Union	29.1%
2. Sandoval	13.8%	18. Chaves	30.0%
3. Bernalillo	20.4%	19. Guadalupe	30.1%
4. Harding	21%	20. San Miguel	31.0%
5. Santa Fe	21.1%	21. Roosevelt	31.1%
6. Eddy	21.2%	22. Otero	31.2%
7. Valencia	23.0%	23. Cibola	31.4%
8. San Juan	23.9%	24. Mora	32.9%
9. Curry	24.6%	25. Torrance	33.6%
9. Lea	24.6%	26. Doña Ana	34.6%
11. Rio Arriba	25.3%	27. Hidalgo	34.8%
12. Lincoln	26.6%	28. McKinley	35.6%
13. Taos	26.7%	29. Quay	36.1%
14. Colfax	27.8%	30. Sierra	40.4%
15. De Baca	28.4%	31. Catron	41.3%
16. Grant	28.6%	32. Socorro	42.1%
		33. Luna	53.5%

Source: datacenter.kidscount.org

Kids

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Sun-News reporter **Amanda L. Husson** contributed to this report.

County:
Grant