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Report Urges Changes To Help N.M. Kids

More Support For Families Pushed

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Combining health, education, human services and family support programs during a child's formative years will help lift New Mexico from the bottom of rankings for child well-being, a new report said.

The annual New Mexico Voices for Children Kids Count report said that while the state has languished for years at the bottom of nearly every ranking for child well-being, the Legislature should try to better fund pre-K educational programs.

The report said the investment will pay off by producing

citizens who are better educated and can hold better jobs in their adult lives.

"Overall, we believe the best way to improve outcomes for our children and youth is to invest more resources in the early years, when most of the key brain development is occurring," said Voices for Children Kids Count director Chris Hollis.

A national Kids Count report, published in July by the Annie E. Casey Foundation, said New Mexico dropped in the rankings for child well-being from 43 to 46.

CYFD Cabinet Secretary Designate Yolanda Berumen-Deines said in a statement she was pleased with what the Kids Count report said.

"The report highlights positive outcomes in the Pre-K program," Berumen-Deines

said.

The report also showed:

- Children age 5 and younger living in poverty in 2009 — 29.4 percent
- Reading proficiency skills of fourth-graders — 80 percent below proficient
- Children under the age of 19 without health insurance — 23.6 percent
- Children ages 3 to 4 years old who are in some type of school — 42 percent

The report pointed to successful models in states that used a combination of corporate, public and foundation funding to support some of its early childhood education programs. Other states have included pre-K education in their education funding formulas. Still others have created a fund from certain taxes to pay for the programs.

