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## Branch County ranked 53rd statewide in child well-being by 2018 Kids Count book

LANSING—Branch County ranked 53rd for child well-being by county, according to the *2018 Kids Count in Michigan Data Book* released by the Michigan League for Public Policy. No. 1 is the best in the state.

The Michigan League for Public Policy has been compiling and releasing the annual *Kids Count in Michigan Data Book* for more than 25 years to analyze and evaluate the well-being of children in the state and its counties. The 2018 book primarily compares data from 2010 to 2016 and analyzes 16 key indicators across four domains. New to the 2018 data book is the trend indicator on college readiness.

The report also ranks 82 of the 83 counties for overall child well-being (Keweenaw County lacks sufficient data). The overall child well-being rank is based on a county's rank in 14 of the 16 measures; infant mortality and child and teen deaths are excluded as many counties do not have sufficient data on these two indicators. **With several changes to the data this year, rankings from previous years cannot be compared.**

The top five counties for child well-being in 2018 are Livingston (1st), Ottawa (2nd), Clinton (2nd), Oakland (4th), and Washtenaw (5th). The bottom five counties in 2018 are Lake (82nd), Clare (81st), Muskegon (80th), Calhoun (79th) and Oceana (78th).

Here is how Branch County ranked out of 82 counties in each Kids Count in Michigan child well-being indicator:

Indicators	2016 Rate	Percent Change from 2010 (Negative Number Means Rate Decrease)	County Rank**
<b>ECONOMIC SECURITY</b>			
Children in poverty, ages 0-17	25%	-11.7%	57
Young children, ages 0-5, in the Food Assistance Program	21.1%	-46.2%	24
Students receiving free/reduced-price school lunches	52.7%	3%	47
<b>HEALTH</b>			
Less than adequate prenatal care	45.7%	2%	78
Low-birthweight babies	6.4%	-6.9%	25
Infant mortality (per 1,000)	6.7	36.1%	29

Child/Teen deaths, ages 1-19 (per 100,000)	30.9	72.4%	34
<b>FAMILY AND COMMUNITY</b>			
Births to teens, ages 15-19 (per 1,000)	38.1	-12.4%	75
Child abuse/neglect: Children in investigated families (per 1,000)	133.8	6.9%	30
Child abuse/neglect: Confirmed victims (per 1,000)	24.8	-42.4%	47
Child abuse/neglect: Children in out-of-home care (per 1,000)	6.9	-3.2%	51
<b>EDUCATION</b>			
3- and 4-year-olds not in preschool	63.3%	5.5%	72
Students not graduating on time	18.3%	21.9%	42
Not proficient (M-STEP): Third-graders (English Language Arts)	69%	3.3%	51
Not proficient (M-STEP): Eighth-graders (Math)	60.4%	1.2%	60
Students NOT College Ready	67%	-5.1%	33

\*Sometimes a rate could not be calculated because of low incidence of events or unavailable data.

\*\*Number of counties ranked varies by indicator (45 for infant mortality, 51 for child/teen deaths).

Comparing counties from 2010 to 2016, only 11 counties improved in third-grade reading proficiency and 63 counties saw no improvement on the rate of confirmed victims of abuse or neglect, while 73 counties improved in child poverty and 74 counties saw teen birth rates go down.

The 2018 data book outlined raising the age of juvenile jurisdiction from 17 to 18 years old as a top policy change to better serve Michigan kids. Michigan is one of only five states yet to do so, and a bipartisan package of bills to change the law has already been introduced and is awaiting action.

“By passing the ‘raise the age’ bills, lawmakers could make a difference in improving the lives of Michigan’s kids and bettering our state,” said Alicia Guevara Warren, Kids Count in Michigan project director. “Regardless of their offense, 17-year-olds in our state are being punished for a lifetime, facing traumatic experiences, getting a criminal record and missing out on education and rehabilitation services. However, with age-appropriate treatment, many will have the opportunity to be productive and help strengthen their communities.”

Some other key findings from the 2018 report on statewide child well-being include:

- Child poverty in Michigan has improved by 11.5 percent since 2010;
- More than 1 in 5 kids in Michigan—including 42 percent of African-American kids and 30 percent of Latinx kids—still lived in poverty in 2016;
- 31 percent of children in Michigan lived in families without year-round, full-time employment;
- Nearly 53 percent of the state’s 3- and 4-year-olds are not in preschool;
- About 56 percent of the state’s third-graders are not proficient in reading, including about 70 percent of kids of color compared to 48 percent of White third-graders;
- And 65 percent of Michigan’s students are not career- and college-ready.

“The 2018 Kids Count Data Book provides an important counterpoint to the conversation on Michigan’s economic recovery,” said Gilda Z. Jacobs, President and CEO for the Michigan League for Public Policy. “While poverty has dropped slightly, it’s still affecting nearly half of all African-American kids, and nearly a third of all Michigan kids don’t have any family member steadily working. As lawmakers work on the budget over the next few months, they must place a greater emphasis on supporting struggling families and their kids.”

The *2018 Kids Count in Michigan Data Book’s* key recommendations for policymakers to support parents and improve child well-being are:

- “Raise the Age” of juvenile jurisdiction from 17 to 18 years old.
- Strengthen policies that support work, such as the Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC). Allowing families to keep more of what they earn improves educational and health outcomes for kids.
- Ensure access to affordable, high-quality child care.
- Expand home visitation programs to help provide additional support to families, remove barriers that prevent access to prenatal care, and reduce risk for child abuse and neglect.
- Provide sufficient funding for early interventions to improve third-grade reading using a birth-to-8 framework and adequately fund public schools, targeting resources in high-need areas and fully fund the At-Risk program.

For additional information on the *2018 Kids Count in Michigan Data Book*, including the full report, state, county and regional rankings, charts and images, resources for advocates, and county-specific profiles and press releases for 82 counties, go to [www.mlpp.org/kids-count/michigan-2/2018-kids-count-in-michigan-data-book](http://www.mlpp.org/kids-count/michigan-2/2018-kids-count-in-michigan-data-book).

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