La. ranks 49th in children's wellbeing

BY CHARLES LUSSIER
Advocate staff writer

Louisiana once again ranks 49th in the nation when it comes to the wellbeing of its children, according to the annual Kids Count survey.

It's the 10th year in a row Louisiana has ranked second-to-last on this annual survey of indicators collected by the Annie E. Casey Foundation. Mississippi has continued as 50th while New Hampshire once again ranks first.

The 22nd installment of the Kids Count survey, however, reveals that while Louisiana is about the same, even slightly improved, compared with its standing a year ago, the national economic downturn has pulled several other states down closer to Louisiana levels.

Louisiana's high rate of child poverty — the percentage of children living below the federal poverty line, which is $21,756 for a family of four — has always pulled the state down on these surveys. But between 2000 and 2009, Louisiana's child poverty rate declined from 27 to 24 percent, while the rate nationwide increased from 17 to 20 percent over that same time period.

Teresa Falgoust, of New Orleans, coordinator of the Kids Count program in Louisiana, said Louisiana usually lags behind the rest of the country. She noted that the latest Kids Count data stops in 2009, but Louisiana has seen its unemployment rate get worse since then.

"Unfortunately, we will probably see our good fortune backslide as the rest of the country continues to improve," she said.

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