Massachusetts, Minnesota, New Hampshire and Vermont each appear in the top five in two recent publications by Wallethub [2] and KIDS COUNT [3], a project of the Annie E. Casey Foundation. Much can be learned from the select group of states highly ranked in both reports about providing children with the highest quality of life possible.

Organizations have routinely tried to distinguish the best states in which to raise a child by comparing data across a wide range of indicators. Typically, these indicators include all aspects of life that play a significant role in raising a child. Examples include, the economic activity of the state, the health of the citizens or the current state of the healthcare system in place, the education system, divorce rate of parents, violent crime rates, and other socioeconomic factors.

These reports indicate a steady improvement in the well-being of children across the country. Despite the steady improvements there were data points that have decreased in recent years. For example, the nation saw a rise in the percentage of children not attending school and the number of 8th graders who cannot read at a proficient level. Additionally, inequalities based on race and income persist. In nearly all indicators included in the KIDS COUNT report, African-American, Latino, and Native American children were below national averages on more frequent basis than white counterparts.

Maps provided in each article also reveal a geographic pattern to the rankings. The Northeast accounted for half the top 10 rankings. The Southern states accounted for virtually all the lowest rankings, comprising six of the bottom 10 in both respective reports. The overall rankings of child well-being seem to have the same distributional pattern as does income. Pictured below is the map that denotes the rankings that states received in the KIDS COUNT report.

KIDS COUNT included policy recommendations centered around decreasing the levels of child poverty. Annie E. Casey Foundation Vice-Director Laura Speer said in an interview with PBS, “The U.S. continues to have one of the highest child poverty rates among all developed countries. This unfairly burdens our young people and the nation, costing an estimated $500 billion a year in reduced economic opportunities and increased health and criminal justice-related costs.”

The data collected by these two institutions shows states’ areas of proficiency and where improvement needs to be made. Having a better understanding of what is - or is not - working, will allow for state policymakers to have a better sense of what can be done to improve the lives of their children.
A STATE-TO-STATE COMPARISON OF OVERALL CHILD WELL-BEING: 2017


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