

Child care gets low and high marks

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A report says Oregon slips in a ranking of how its children fare state-to-state

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SPECIAL REPORT

Oregon has slipped to the middle of the pack in an annual study of how children fare state-to-state.

For the fifth straight year, Oregon's ranking has dropped in the Kids Count report.

The report assesses the status of children based on 10 indicators, including dropout, infant mortality, poverty and juvenile violent crime arrest rates based on 1995 data, the latest available nationally.

"We're obviously losing ground in the area of children's well-being," said Tonia Hunt, a public policy associate for Children's First for Oregon, a public awareness and advocacy group. "It does raise some alarms and some questions."

New Hampshire ranked first and the District of Columbia and Louisiana ranked last in the study released today by The Annie E. Casey Foundation, a nonprofit Baltimore-based group advocating for disadvantaged children and families.

In 1993, Oregon ranked 14th among the nation's 50 states plus the District of Columbia. But Oregon dropped to

23rd in the latest report.

As in reports from recent years, Oregon particularly rates poorly when it comes to its teens. The state's rates for teen births, juvenile crime and high school dropouts are worsening. For example, Oregon ranked 36th for the rate of teens failing to finish high school.

Oregon's best ranking continues to be in the category of low birth-weight babies, ranking fourth among states.

When the foundation first issued the report in 1990, Oregon ranked 24th. Oregon then improved every year for five years, reaching 14th in 1993, before it started to slide.

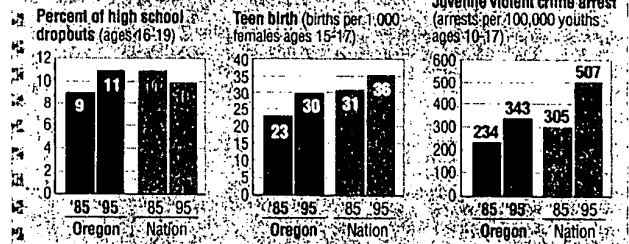
"It is very distressing and important news for policy-makers," said Mike Greenfield, chairman of the Oregon Commission on Children and Families since March.

The commission is charged with addressing a variety of problems such as child abuse, juvenile crime, teen pregnancy, adequate prenatal care and high school dropouts. It funnels money to

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Oregon child welfare slips

Oregon's ranking has dropped for the fifth straight year in the annual Kids Count report, which rates states on a variety of child welfare indicators. Of particular concern to Oregon's child advocates, teens seem to be faring worse in several areas.



	1985		1995	
Indicator	Oregon	Nation	Oregon	Nation
Percent low birth weight babies	5.1	6.8	5.5	7.3
Infant mortality (deaths per 1,000 live births)	9.9	10.6	6.1	7.6
Child death rate (deaths per 100,000 children ages 1-14)	29	34	27	28
Rate of teen deaths by accident, homicide and suicide (deaths per 100,000 teens age 15-19)	73	63	75	65
Percent of teens not attending schools and not working (ages 16-19)	11	11	10	9
Percent of children in poverty	18	21	16	21
Percent of families with children headed by a single parent	23	22	25	26

Source: The Annie E. Casey Foundation

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Children: Panel addresses problems such as abuse, crime

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similar county commissions, which set priorities and make grants to local service agencies.

Greenfield said the state commission has concentrated its efforts on encouraging better coordination among state agencies and local groups serving children and families.

Oregon Senate President Brady Adams, R-Grants Pass, said he doesn't know why the study shows the state faltering when it comes to its children. But he thinks the report could help identify specific areas to study before the Oregon Legislature meets next year.

Hunt worries that perhaps Oregon-

ians are becoming accustomed to troubles for children and youth and have lost hope.

She thinks while the study does not offer program suggestions in various efforts, it shows there are lessons to be learned from other states and the importance of a vigilant focus on the needs of children.