

Annual survey shows mixed results for Oregon's children

5038
PORTLAND (AP) — Oregon showed definite improvement on some child welfare issues in the 1990s, but slipped backwards on others, according to the results of a new national assessment.

The state continues to have one of the lowest rates of underweight newborns in the nation, but also posted one of the nation's highest rates of children living in families with parents who have no full-time employment, according to data from the Kids Count report.

"We can see some direct links between child well-being, outcomes and economic health," said Marie Hoeven, executive director of Children First for Oregon, a children's advocacy group based in Portland. "With Oregon's safety net in tatters, families are facing twice as high a hurdle due to economic instability."

According to the survey's results, Oregon fares relatively well when it comes to issues involving infants and young children. The state's infant mortality rate in 2000, 5.6 for every 1,000 births, was lower than the national average of 6.9. And Oregon's rate of 6 percent of children living far below the poverty level in 2000 compares favorably with the national average of 7 percent.

For Oregon teenagers, the results of the survey are more muddled. The report cites an extraordinarily high dropout rate for teens ages 16 to 19 — 12 percent, placing Oregon 43rd in national rankings. But state numbers collected by the state Department of Education tell a different story, pegging Oregon's high school dropout rate at 4.9 percent for the 2001-02 school year, which would give the state one of the lowest drop-out rates.