

KIDS COUNT Data Shows USVI Gains in Graduation and Employment, but Math Scores, Wages and Housing Pressures Remain Concerns

St. Croix Foundation's KIDS COUNT USVI findings show unemployment fell and graduation rates rose from 2019 to 2024, while math performance weakened, 546 students dropped out and data gaps continue to keep the territory outside the national scorecard.

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New KIDS COUNT data shows a mixed picture for children and families in the U.S. Virgin Islands, with progress in unemployment, public school graduation rates and English Language Arts performance, but continuing concerns over wages, math scores, student dropouts and housing pressures.

The local findings, highlighted by St. Croix Foundation's KIDS COUNT USVI team, cover trends from 2019 to 2024 and were released alongside the Annie E. Casey Foundation's national 2026 KIDS COUNT Data Book, which was published on June 8.

In economic well-being, the territory's unemployment rate declined from 6 percent to 4 percent. However, average hourly wages remained 24 percent lower than the national U.S. average.

In education, public school graduation rates increased from 70.9 percent to 81 percent. The territory also recorded an increase in English Language Arts scores, resulting in the highest percentage of proficient students for tested grade levels since school year 2020-21. Math results, however, moved in the opposite direction, with overall scores and the percentage of students proficient coming in lower than in school year 2020-21.

The data also show that 546 students dropped out of the public school system between the 2020-21 school year and the 2023-24 school year. Annual dropout rates during those years ranged from 2.2 percent to 4 percent.

In health, the V.I. Department of Health reported that the fertility rate decreased in 2023. The overall number of live births also continued to decline, along with the overall USVI population. The department also reported that 5.3 percent of babies born in 2023 were at low birthweight.

In family and community indicators, the number of households with children living in public housing increased, even as the overall number of children declined. St. Croix Foundation said that signals a higher percentage of children living in economically disadvantaged housing.

The national 2026 KIDS COUNT Data Book is a 50-state report examining how children and families are faring in the post-pandemic period. For the first time, states receive a comprehensive score from 0 to 1,000, in addition to rankings, to measure progress across 16 indicators in four domains: economic well-being, education, health, and family and community.

The scores track changes over a five-year period from 2019 to 2024, giving states a way to assess whether policies and public investments are improving children's lives, rather than only showing how one state compares with another.

The U.S. Virgin Islands, however, is not part of the national scoring because the Data Book relies on the American Community Survey, which is not conducted in the territory. The Virgin Islands is included in the KIDS COUNT Data Center, which houses key child well-being data points, and St. Croix Foundation's KIDS COUNT USVI team publishes local data products to supplement the national data that is available.

To date, St. Croix Foundation has published five KIDS COUNT USVI Data Books and Spotlights. In 2024, the organization released the territory's first online, interactive KIDS COUNT USVI Data Dashboard.

In the introductory letter to the 2026 Data Book, Annie E. Casey Foundation President and CEO Lisa M. Lawson emphasized the importance of current and meaningful data to assess progress, set priorities and budgets, plan services and develop policy solutions. St. Croix Foundation said the same issue has been repeatedly highlighted in local KIDS COUNT publications, which have pointed to the Virgin Islands' omission from some national datasets, including the American Community Survey; delays in the release of collected data; outdated data collection and tracking systems; and a lack of coordinated systems for sharing and analyzing information across agencies.

Nationally, the 2026 KIDS COUNT Data Book, now in its 37th year of publication, provides statewide numbers intended to help leaders identify where progress is being made, where greater support is needed and which strategies are producing results.

“Behind every number in this report is a child who is either hungry or fed, housed or homeless, progressing academically or falling behind. No state is consistently getting this right,” said Lisa M. Lawson, President and CEO of the Annie E. Casey Foundation. “The Data Book challenges us to follow the evidence and do what delivers results.”

The Foundation said the Data Book is intended to serve as a road map for policymakers, advocates and communities as they make decisions affecting children and young people.

The 2026 national KIDS COUNT Data Book can be accessed at www.aecf.org/databook. Virgin Islands KIDS COUNT publications and the local Data Dashboard are available through St. Croix Foundation at www.stxfoundation.org/kids-count-usvi/. Journalists interested in creating maps, graphs and rankings related to the Data Book can use the KIDS COUNT Data Center at datacenter.aecf.org.

The Annie E. Casey Foundation says it works to create a brighter future for young people by developing solutions to strengthen families, build paths to economic opportunity and transform struggling communities into safer and healthier places to live, work and grow. KIDS COUNT is a registered trademark of the Annie E. Casey Foundation.

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