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## Study ranks Ala. 48th in life quality for children

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MONTGOMERY, Ala. (AP) — MONTGOMERY, Ala. — While the state is showing improvement in some areas, a new study shows children in Alabama still face an uphill challenge compared to the rest of the country in areas like education, health care and poverty.

The latest Kids Count survey by [The Annie E. Casey Foundation](#) shows Alabama children rank 48th overall among the 50 states in quality of life issues like health care, education and poverty.

Alabama ranked 47th in the annual study in 2010.

"We actually are getting better. It's just that while we're getting better other states are getting better as well," said [Linda Tilley](#), executive director of the advocacy group VOICES for Alabama Children. "It's just that we were so behind to start with."

The Kids Count survey ranked the state in a number of areas involving children including percent of low-birth weight babies, which was 10.6 percent in 2008, compared to 9.7 percent in 2000. Alabama was above the national percentage of low birth rate babies, which was 8.2 percent, and ranked 48th out of 50 states in that category. Alabama was 49th in infant mortality, based on 2007 figures showing 9.9 deaths for every 1,000 live births.

But [State Health Officer Don Williamson](#) said the Kids Count survey based the infant mortality ranking on 2007 statistics and that the rate dropped to 8.2 percent in 2009. Nonetheless, he said that's still too high.

He said the infant mortality rate is influenced by a number of factors including low weight births, women smoking during pregnancy, underlying medical conditions like diabetes, and the income of the family.

Williamson said he found it encouraging that Alabama was improving in some education categories.

"We are still beset with high poverty," Williamson said, pointing out that the state ranked 46th in the percent of children living in poverty and 46th in the percent of children living in single-parent families.

"The things we continue to have problems with relate to poverty," Williamson said.

Tilley said she believes the state will improve in the quality of life for children and pointed to improvements in recent years in reading achievement in state schools. Such improvements, she said, would eventually show up in an improved graduation rate.

She also said her organization will continue to pursue legislation to make child care available to more young children and to ban smoking in stores, restaurants and other public places, which she said would improve the state's rankings on the study.

"It's a marathon. We need to not be discouraged. We have the right things in place to improve," Tilley said.

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