



Save the Children®

# CHILDHOOD IN THE TIME OF COVID



U.S. COMPLEMENT TO THE GLOBAL CHILDHOOD REPORT 2021

# Every Child Has a Right to a Childhood

Childhood should be a time when our nation’s youngest citizens develop into the adults who will care for and lead our country, our world, and our shared future. Every child deserves love, care and protection so they can develop to their full potential. Yet for millions of children in the United States – and hundreds of millions more children around the world – childhood is ending too soon.



**Introduction** ..... 2

**Deepening Crises for America’s Children** ..... 4

**National and State Findings**..... 7

    Millions more kids are going hungry ..... 7

    Students struggling to learn, sliding backwards..... 7

    Families losing income, facing homelessness. .... 9

    Devastating impact on emotional health ..... 10

**Where Are Kids Faring Best and Worst During COVID?** . 12

**Recommendations – Advocating for America’s Kids**..... 19

**COVID Child Protection Ranking 2020** ..... 21

**COVID Child Protection Ranking 2020 – Year-End View** .. 22

**COVID Child Protection Ranking 2020 – 4-Month View** .. 23

**Methodology and Research Notes**..... 24

**Endnotes**..... 25

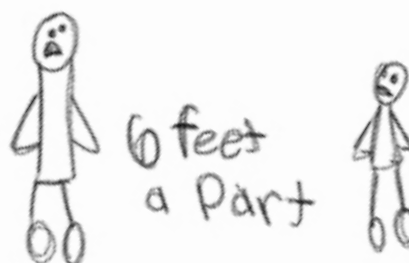


Published by Save the Children

501 Kings Highway East, Suite 400  
 Fairfield, Connecticut 06825  
 United States  
 (800) 728-3843  
 savethechildren.org

© Save the Children Federation, Inc.

ISBN: 1-888393-40-8



# Childhood in the Time of COVID

A generation of children in America are experiencing multiple hardships brought on by the coronavirus. Many millions more children are now hungry, missing out on school and worried about their family's economic future. For children who were struggling before COVID-19, things have gotten worse. Going back to “normal” will not be enough for these kids. Massive investments are needed to help the most disadvantaged children to recover and catch up. Without these investments, the future of our children and our nation is at risk.

## America's kids are in trouble

As we approach the one-year mark of nationwide school closures and stay-at-home orders, Save the Children examined how the unprecedented events of 2020 impacted families with children across America.

We present a child-focused analysis of U.S. households and a first-ever ranking of states showing where kids are faring best and worst during the pandemic. The *COVID Child Protection Ranking* examines three hardships that are making it more difficult for children to reach their full potential: hunger, lack of tools for remote learning and trouble making ends meet.

Evaluating four months of data on these three factors in all 50 states, Save the Children found families are suffering in every state and at every income level. But the poorest families are struggling the most.

The best states for children during the pandemic are Minnesota, Utah, Washington and New Hampshire. The worst states for children are Louisiana, Mississippi, Texas and New Mexico.

Where a state lands on this COVID ranking is strongly linked to its placement on last year's *End of Childhood State Ranking*. Seven states are in the bottom 10 on both rankings. This shows that many of our worst fears for vulnerable children have become realities during the pandemic. Huge disparities along geographic, income and racial/ethnic lines – “childhood equity gaps” – are depriving children of the futures they deserve.

Children who are poor, children who live in rural areas and children from communities of color appear to be faring worst through the pandemic. They are more likely to be food insecure, are disproportionately affected by the digital divide and are likely to experience the greatest learning loss. Their families are more likely to become sick with and die from COVID, to be affected by job and income losses, to be struggling with housing costs, and/or to have fewer child care options. As a result, childhood equity gaps are likely to grow.

This year's analysis also finds states where children are faring best are not necessarily the ones with the lowest COVID case rates. What matters more are the resources and protections in place for children and families. Similarly, the states where children are faring worst are not necessarily the ones with the highest COVID case rates, pointing to widespread devastation where safeguards are not as strong.

For example: Utah, North Dakota and South Dakota have had some of the highest COVID case rates in the country, yet they all scored in the top 10 for protecting their kids from the worst ravages of the pandemic. Meanwhile, New York and West Virginia have had relatively low rates of the disease, yet much more suffering among children and families, compared to other states.

A full analysis of the findings begins on page 12, and the ranking is on page 21.

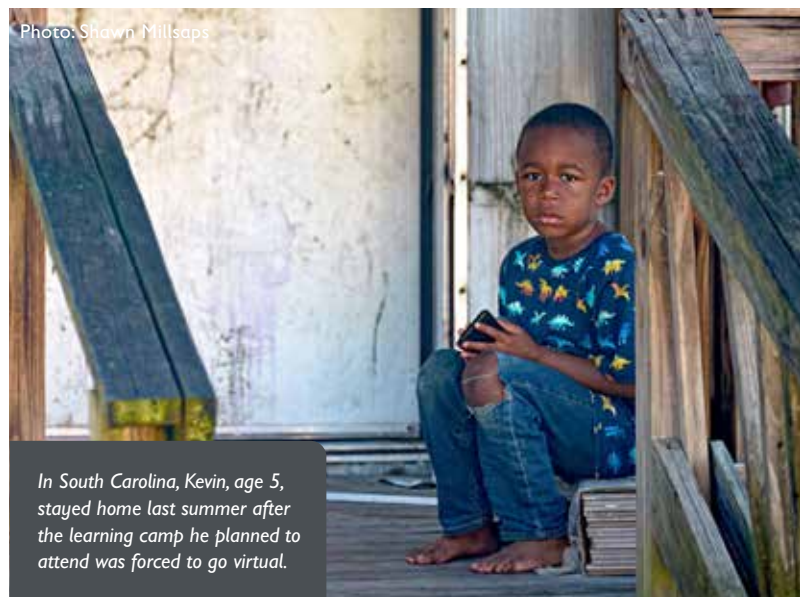


Photo: Shawn Millsaps

*In South Carolina, Kevin, age 5, stayed home last summer after the learning camp he planned to attend was forced to go virtual.*

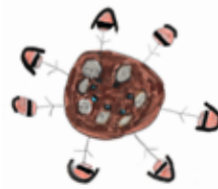
## KEY FACTS ABOUT U.S. KIDS AND COVID

- The U.S. has 4% of the world's population but 24% of global COVID cases and 19% of COVID deaths.
- 18% of America's families have lost a family member or close friend due to COVID.
- Over 2 million U.S. children have had COVID – 1 in 8 cases nationwide.
- Families are suffering in every state and at every income level.
- Two-thirds of families are having difficulty making ends meet.
- Close to 1 in 5 families doesn't have enough to eat.
- 1 in 3 families has had trouble accessing medical care.
- 3 in 4 families report symptoms of anxiety. Over half report symptoms of depression.
- 1 in 5 parents/caregivers who aren't working say it's because they are caring for children home from school or not in daycare.
- Over half of families say their children are spending less time learning.
- COVID has hit the poorest families the hardest. They are about 15 times as likely to struggle with hunger as the wealthiest families, 4 times as likely to lack internet for educational purposes and 9 times as likely to have difficulty paying bills.
- Black and Hispanic families are more likely to be affected by school closure and job loss, to lack enough food, to have inadequate tools for remote learning and to be struggling with housing costs.
- Over 85% of U.S. counties with the highest COVID case and death rates in 2020 were rural.

Sources: American Academy of Pediatrics, The Annie E. Casey Foundation, Children's Hospital Association, Johns Hopkins University, Social Policy Institute, USAFacts.org and U.S. Census Bureau.

“  
Ever since  
COVID started  
we've all been  
sad and lazy.”

– Khloe, age 10



## About the 2021 Global Childhood Report and Index

Save the Children's fifth annual *Global Childhood Report* evaluates the best and worst countries for children by examining factors that rob children of their childhoods around the world (ill health, malnutrition, exclusion from education, child labor, teen births, early marriage and violence). The United States consistently trails other advanced countries in helping children reach their full potential.

In this year's analysis, the U.S. scores 948 out of 1,000 and ranks 43rd out of 186 countries. This is at least 25 points behind most Western European countries and is also lower than Belarus, Croatia and Lebanon.

Save the Children's *End of Childhood State Ranking* in 2020 looked at the major reasons why childhoods were ending too soon in America, using data for five indicators (infant mortality, child food insecurity, failure to graduate high school on time, teen births, and child homicides and suicides). This was a pre-COVID baseline for how children in America were doing before the crises of 2020. The results largely predicted where children would suffer the most during the pandemic. States where COVID has hurt families the most are those where childhood was already at greatest risk. Seven states are in the bottom 10 on both the 2020 *End of Childhood State Ranking* and the *COVID Child Protection Ranking*. This suggests the *End of Childhood Ranking* could be used as an "early warning system" to help decision-makers target investments to the most vulnerable children who need help most.

# Deepening Crises for America's Children

Even before the pandemic, the U.S. was failing many of its children. Each year, Save the Children's *Global Childhood Report* evaluates and ranks 180+ countries on how well they protect and provide for their children. The U.S. consistently scores far below other advanced nations on measures of child well-being that include health, hunger, education, teenage childbearing and violence.

After the first known cases of COVID in America were discovered in January 2020, the U.S. failed to contain the virus. By the end of that year, the U.S. led the world in COVID cases and deaths. At that time, it had 4% of the world's population, but 24% of global confirmed cases and 19% of total deaths. It also had the seventh highest cumulative case rate and the 14th highest death rate of any country in the world.<sup>1</sup>

A survey conducted in November and December of 2020 found 18% of U.S. households with children had a family member or close friend die due to COVID. For Black families, the rate was 19%. For Hispanic families, it was 24%.<sup>2</sup>

The U.S. has lagged behind most peer countries in meeting the needs of children and families during the pandemic. At its peak, unemployment in the European Union (EU) increased by 20%, while in the U.S. it shot up 320%.<sup>3</sup> Most peer countries are providing broad economic relief packages that include stopping loan payments, preventing the shut-off of utilities and banning evictions. The U.S., by comparison, provided only narrow federal relief in 2020.<sup>4</sup>

Also, unlike the U.S., most peer countries are providing internet to students at low or no cost.<sup>5</sup> As a result, students in the U.S. are more disconnected than students in other high-income countries. Only two EU countries have lower levels of internet access than the U.S. – Bulgaria and Romania.<sup>6</sup> At the start of the pandemic, upwards of 15 million K-12 U.S. public school students lacked adequate internet for distance learning at home.<sup>7</sup>

Peer countries are doing better than the U.S. in supporting students and parents during COVID. The vast majority of high-income OECD countries with data available are taking additional measures to minimize the impact of school closures on the well-being of students, including providing mental health support to learners, additional child protection services and support to counter interrupted school meals. Nearly all countries

also offer additional support for parents and caregivers. Over 60% of countries surveyed report child care services remain open for children who need them and half of the remaining countries have emergency child care available for frontline workers. A handful of countries are even offering financial support to families to pay for private child care.<sup>8</sup>

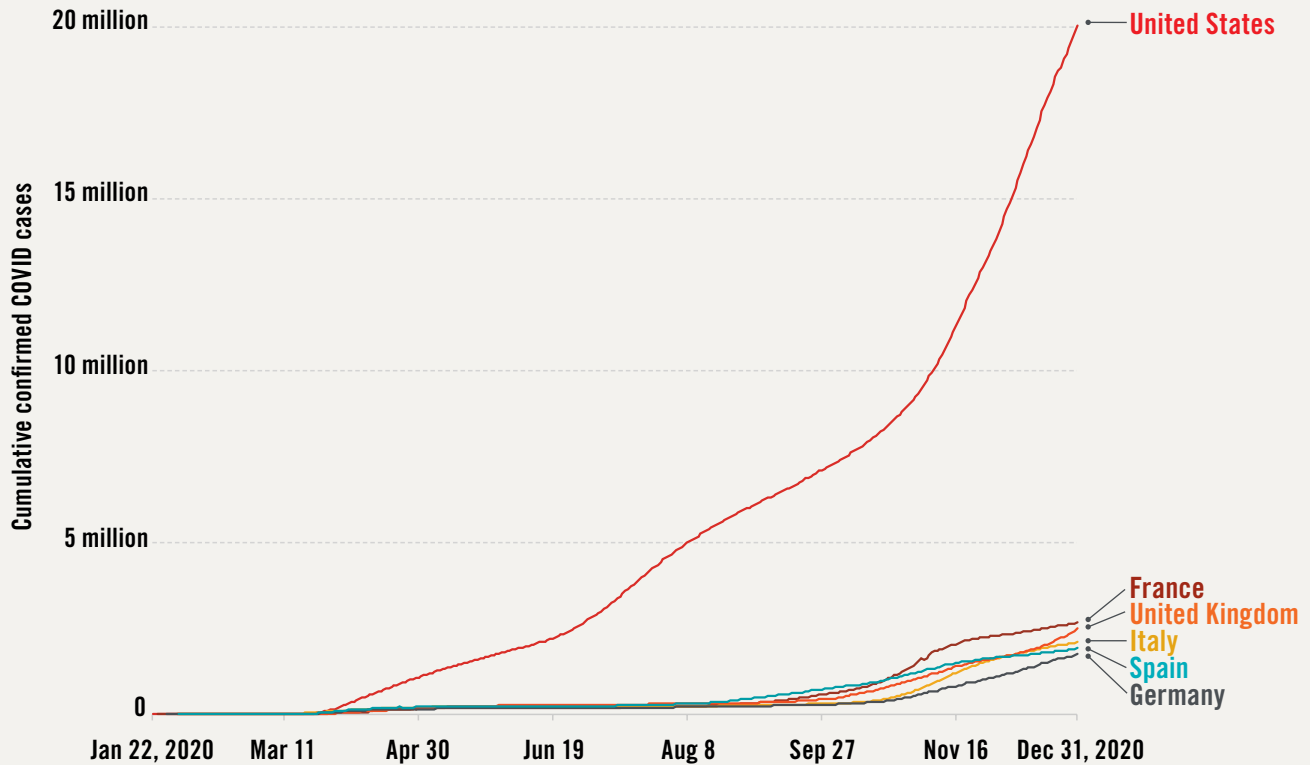
The impact of COVID on America's families has been devastating. Poverty and hunger increased in America in 2020. Child poverty decreased in the early months of the pandemic because of stimulus payments and enhanced unemployment benefits, but it rose by 2.6 million between June and December 2020 – the fastest increase in history.<sup>9</sup> Compared to before the pandemic, about 9 million more families with children under age 18 are struggling to pay their bills.<sup>10</sup> And 2.7 million more families are going hungry.<sup>11</sup>

Photo: Shawn Millsaps



10-year-old Perry arrives at school. He is on a modified schedule due to the pandemic and only attends classes on Mondays and Tuesdays.

## U.S. HAS HAD TWICE AS MANY COVID CASES AS THE 5 HARDEST-HIT EU COUNTRIES COMBINED



By the end of 2020, the U.S. had nearly twice the number of confirmed COVID cases as the five most-burdened EU countries – France, UK, Italy, Spain and Germany – combined (20 million vs. 11 million), despite having roughly the same population (327 million in the U.S. vs. 324 million in these countries).

Source: Johns Hopkins University CSSE COVID-19 Data

“

First Mommy takes my temperature. Then I put on my mask. Next I use sanitizer. And we stay 6 feet apart.”

– Briley, age 6



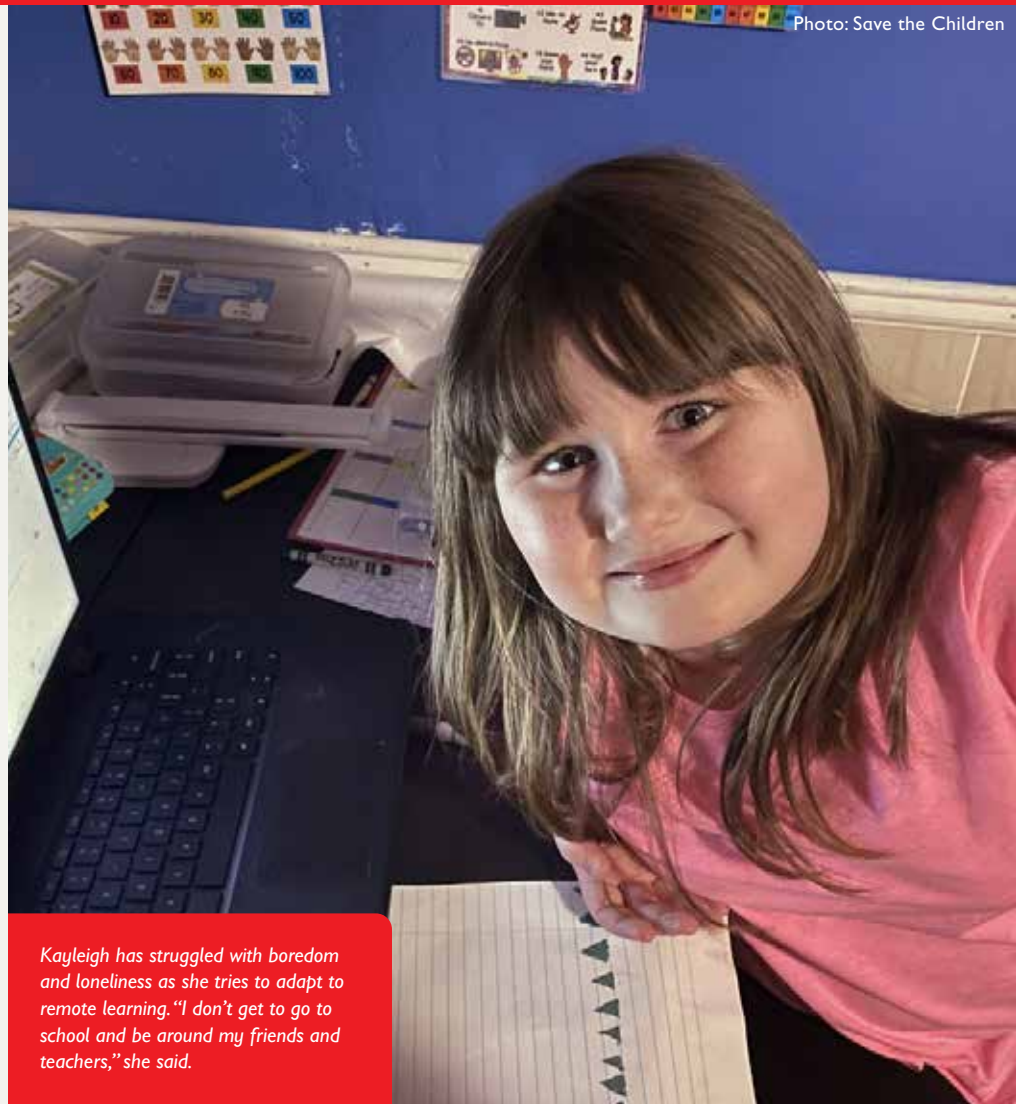
## Support During Hard Times in South Carolina

**K**ayleigh, a 6-year-old in southwestern South Carolina, is one of millions of children whose life has been dramatically changed as a result of COVID. Due to business slowdowns, Kayleigh's parents are working fewer hours, which has led to difficulty in paying the bills and providing for their daughter's needs. As a result, Kayleigh has had to move in with her Aunt Jessica and Uncle Fred.

Experiences like this are increasingly common. Nationwide, two-thirds of families with children are having difficulty making ends meet. In South Carolina, 73% of families say it has been difficult to pay for usual household expenses.<sup>12</sup>

Along with the challenges of her new living situation, Kayleigh has also faced some hardships with remote learning. She misses the classroom, and virtual school is only four days a week, three hours a day. She has struggled with her reading, and has had a tough time with three- and four-letter words.

And like so many kids, Kayleigh misses ordinary life before COVID. "I don't get to go places. I don't get to go to the playground or eat in restaurants," said Kayleigh. "I don't get to see my brothers much because I'm doing virtual school at my aunt and uncle's house. I don't get to go to



*Kayleigh has struggled with boredom and loneliness as she tries to adapt to remote learning. "I don't get to go to school and be around my friends and teachers," she said.*

school and be around my friends and teachers."

Her Aunt Jessica said "keeping Kayleigh excited about school and making sure she's getting the education she needs to be successful" has been one of her biggest challenges. She added, "I want her to have the best of life. I want her to graduate from high school. I want her to be successful in all that she does."

Fortunately, participation in Save the Children's programs, including School Age Literacy, Afterschool and SummerBoost Camp, has provided Kayleigh with structured opportunities that have helped her adjust to her new circumstances. She was reluctant and shy when she started the

programs, but thanks to the academic support Kayleigh has received from Save the Children, she is now a more confident student.

"Save the Children has helped Kayleigh continue to increase her reading ability. Her confidence has grown, and she now has a desire to read more," said Luther, a program coordinator at Kayleigh's school.

In addition to the learning support Kayleigh is receiving, her family and families across her community have also benefited from the many distribution events that Save the Children has hosted, providing books, shoes, soap, hand wipes and other much-needed items.

# National and State Findings

COVID has taken a tragic toll on America's children. It has brought illness, loss and desperation to millions of families. Children are missing out on the social, emotional and academic fundamentals of childhood. Too many are experiencing hardships and trauma that will echo through their lives and communities for years to come.

The pandemic has left millions of families financially strapped and stretched parents to the limit as they juggle work and helping kids with remote learning. It has shut children out of schools that taught them and cared for them. It has deprived children of playtime with friends and hugs from grandparents. And it has brought depression and anxiety into their homes. In short, the pandemic has robbed kids of the normalcy that is essential to their healthy growth and development.

## Millions more kids are going hungry

Close to 1 in 5 U.S. families reported they did not have enough food to eat in December 2020. There are an estimated 17 million hungry children now in America – 6 million more than before the pandemic.<sup>13</sup> Food scarcity is highest in Louisiana (25%), Arkansas (23%), and Kentucky, Maryland, Oklahoma and Washington, D.C. (all 22%).<sup>14</sup>

The nation's poorest children are upwards of 15 times as likely as the wealthiest kids to be hungry. 41% of families making less than \$25,000 a year report they do not have enough food, compared to less than 3% of families earning \$200,000 a year or more.<sup>15</sup> In California, estimates suggest all of the wealthiest families have enough to eat, but half of the poorest do not.

Children of color are twice as likely as white children to face hunger. 28% of Black families and 25% of Hispanic families said they sometimes or often don't have enough food to eat, compared to 13% of white families.<sup>16</sup>

Children from poor families who relied on meals served at school as part of the National School Nutrition Program face especially daunting obstacles. Many studies have shown that hungry children have a hard time learning. They have less energy, are more easily distracted and less interested in schoolwork.<sup>17</sup> Hunger makes it even more difficult for disadvantaged children to overcome the significant challenges of remote learning.

## Students struggling to learn, sliding backwards

An entire generation of children has had their education disrupted, from preschool to senior year of high school. For any child, being cut off from school, teachers, friends and normal routines can be difficult. For the most vulnerable children – many of whom were already behind – it's devastating.

High-quality child care, pre-K, Early Head Start and Head Start programs were already in short supply before the pandemic hit. For low-income children especially, these programs provide essential preparation for success in kindergarten and beyond. In 2020, child care providers faced increased costs and decreased revenue from low enrollment and new safety requirements. By April 2020, 60% of child care providers across America had closed their doors, and most that remained open had reduced spaces or hours.<sup>18</sup> In July, 41,500 program closures were reported, totaling over 1.7 million spots, or one-third of



Save the Children staff in Tennessee prepare food to distribute to students and their families.

Photo: Alisha Messer / Save the Children



“

When the pandemic is over I will be so glad not to wear a mask all the time!”

– Collin, age 9



the child care capacity in states with available data.<sup>19</sup> In December 2020, nearly 1 in 5 parents/caregivers who were not employed said the main reason they were not working was because they were caring for children home from school or not in daycare.<sup>20</sup>

Students in kindergarten through 12th grade faced myriad obstacles, with the most vulnerable being the worst-affected by learning losses. Nationwide, 28% of families with children in this age group reported in-person classes were canceled for the 2020-2021 school year. 40% of families in Kentucky said in-person classes were cancelled. The rate is 39% in Alaska and 37% in Arizona, Michigan, New Mexico and Washington, D.C.<sup>21</sup>

At least 1 in 4 children do not always have the tools they need for distance learning (internet and/or computer), with rural kids the most disconnected.<sup>22</sup> And the poorer a family is, the greater the likelihood that kids are missing out – 38% of families making less than \$25,000 a year say they do not always have a computer available for educational purposes and 43% say internet is not always available. The digital divide is largest in West Virginia, where 40% of families do not always have internet available for school. The rate is over one-third in Montana, Oklahoma and Texas.

Nationwide, more than half of all families say their children in grades K-12 are spending less time on learning activities now compared to a typical school day before COVID. The problem is most severe in West Virginia and

Oregon, where 70% and 65% of families, respectively, say children are spending less time on learning. In eight other states, the share is over 60%.<sup>23</sup>

Early in the pandemic, only 60% of low-income students were regularly logging into online instruction, compared to 90% of high-income students. Engagement was also lagging behind in schools serving predominantly Black and Hispanic students, with just 60-70% logging in regularly.<sup>24</sup> Lower-income students are also less likely to have a conducive learning environment, such as a quiet space with minimal distractions, devices they do not need to share, high-speed internet, and parental academic supervision.<sup>25</sup>

Black and Hispanic students are more likely to be learning remotely. They are also more likely than white students to have no live access to teachers. Most experts agree that without any live instruction, many students will struggle to progress. The reality is that many months of learning have already been lost. If the status quo continues, students of color stand to lose 11 to 12 months of learning by the end of the school year, compared to 7 to 8 months for white students.<sup>26</sup>

These catastrophic learning losses mean high school drop-out rates will probably increase, resulting in up to 1 million more dropouts.<sup>27</sup> The virus is disrupting many of the supports that can help vulnerable kids stay in school: academic engagement and achievement, strong relationships with caring adults, and supportive home environments. In normal circumstances, students who miss 10% of school days, or more, in any year between 8th and 12th grade are 7 times more likely to drop out.<sup>28</sup> In the



Photo: Shawn Millsaps

Second grader Aryania reads a book during Save the Children's guided independent reading program at her school.

wake of school closures following natural disasters, such as Hurricane Katrina (2005) and Hurricane Maria (2017), some 12-20% of students never returned to school.<sup>29</sup>

Troubling data from California suggest nearly 1 in 5 elementary school students statewide has missed at least 10% of classes – at least double the rate in 2019 – which studies show can lead to devastating lifelong consequences.<sup>30</sup> Public school enrollment, especially in preschool and kindergarten, has dropped sharply in states and big cities across the country, including Arizona, Massachusetts, Missouri, Montana, New York City, Ohio and Wisconsin.<sup>31</sup>

Nationwide, an estimated 3 million vulnerable students – who are homeless, in foster care, have disabilities or are non-native English speakers – appear not to be in school at all.<sup>32</sup>

## Families losing income, facing homelessness

Early in 2020, it was estimated that almost 12 million children in America were living in poverty – a burden borne disproportionately by Black and Hispanic kids, as well as those living in rural areas. Then COVID forced

even more parents out of work. By the end of the year, over half of all households with children (56%) said they had lost income since the pandemic started and more than a third expected further loss of income in the future (36%).<sup>33</sup> Rates are highest in Nevada, where 68% of families lost income, followed by Michigan (66%), California and Hawaii (both 64%).<sup>34</sup>

Nationwide, two-thirds of U.S. families are having difficulty making ends meet. 69% of households with children report difficulty paying for usual household expenses, while 45% of families say it's been somewhat or very difficult to keep up with expenses for food, supplies and bills.<sup>35</sup> Families in Louisiana, Mississippi, Nevada, New Mexico and Oklahoma are struggling the most to keep up with expenses. Over half of families in these states say it's been somewhat or very difficult to pay bills.<sup>36</sup>

In addition, 1 in 4 families that rent are behind on payments – almost twice the rate for households without children.<sup>37</sup> Rates are highest in Washington, D.C., where an estimated 45% of renter families are behind on their rent. States with similarly high rates include Tennessee (36%) and Connecticut (35%).

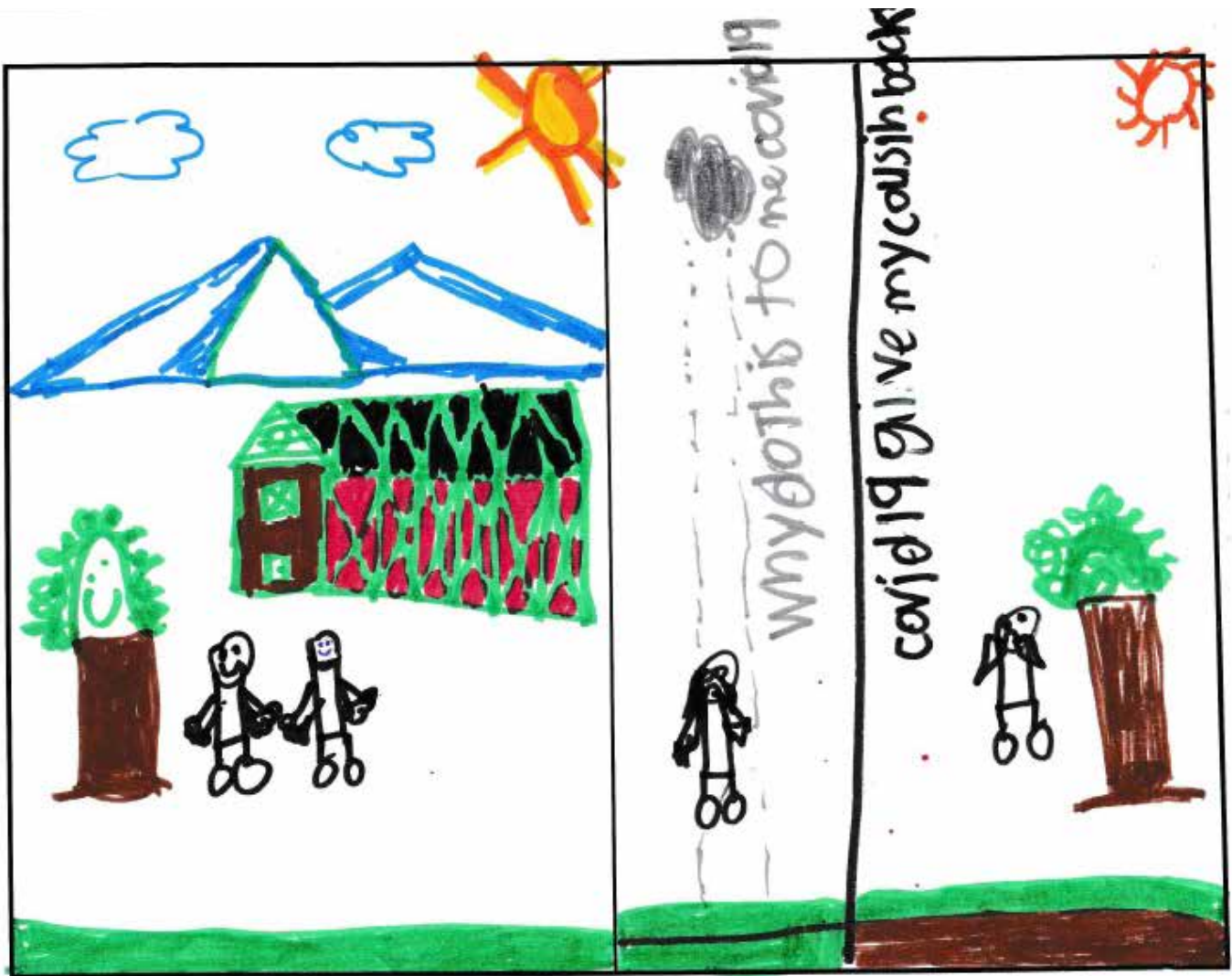
Black and Hispanic families are having an especially difficult time making rent payments. Nationwide, 28% of

“

When corona wasn't out I played with my friends and saw them, but now I can't do all those things.”

– Isabella, age 8





Black households that rent and 24% of Hispanic households that rent are behind on their payments, compared to 12% of white households.<sup>38</sup>

Fear of eviction weighs heavily on those who are behind on their rent and millions of families with children may be forced from their homes in 2021.<sup>39</sup>

## Devastating impact on emotional health

In December 2020, 3 in 4 parents and caregivers in America were experiencing high levels of anxiety – feeling nervous, anxious or on-edge for at least several days a week. More than 60% said they were not able to stop or control worrying. Symptoms of anxiety were especially prevalent in Louisiana (81%), Maine and Michigan (both 79%).<sup>40</sup>

Families also reported widespread depression. In late December, 3 in 5 adults in households with children nationwide said they had little interest or pleasure in doing things for at least several days over the past week. Rates were highest in Michigan, Montana, New Mexico and West Virginia, where 68% to 70% – over two-thirds of families – reported feeling down, depressed or hopeless.<sup>41</sup>

Studies have shown that parental depression can have a far-reaching effect on child development, with implications for future success in life. When parents suffer depression, kids may become anxious or sad. They may have behavior problems. Health may suffer. And grades may decline, too. One large study found that at age 16, children of parents who had experienced depression scored 4 to 4.5 percentage points lower in their school grades than children of non-depressed parents. These small grade differences can be important, sometimes making the difference between an A grade or B, or between a C and D, which can shape decisions about whether to stay in school or quit altogether.<sup>42</sup>

The quality of education can make a difference well beyond school years. Better-educated individuals have higher earning potential, so they can provide better for their families and contribute more to the overall economy. They are less likely to develop unhealthy habits or to be obese than those who don't finish high school. They also tend to have a lower risk of heart disease and diabetes.<sup>43</sup>

*Braydon, age 9, drew pictures of his life before and during the pandemic. He wrote “Why do this to me COVID 19?” and “COVID 19 give my cousin back.”*

## “I remember thinking ‘Is this the end of the world?’”

In June 2020, as coronavirus outbreaks began to spread rapidly across agricultural communities in California’s Central Valley, Olga and her husband Ramon both tested positive for the disease. The doctor told them the entire family – including three children aged 7, 4 and 3 – had to quarantine.

“I felt as if my world was crumbling under my feet,” said Olga. “How were we going to be able to care for our children? What if we both died? What would happen to our children?”

Their 7-year-old son Ivan had to become the adult in the family, taking care of his younger sisters, making sure they wore their masks, feeding them meals Olga prepared, and getting them ready for bed.

The family required more food with everyone at home. Olga and Ramon are seasonal farmworkers who work full-time and did not qualify for unemployment benefits or stimulus payments. They got by with the help of Olga’s sisters, who left boxes of food on their doorstep.

One day before quarantine was to be lifted for the family, Olga’s father passed away from COVID, leaving the family devastated emotionally and financially. Olga’s father had been an integral part of the family’s support system as he was often the caregiver for the children while Olga and her husband worked. The family relied on him to care for the children before and after school.

Food continued to be a problem, either because it was too expensive or not available. “It was a struggle to find household items and food at the

Photo: Photo: Jose Alcantar / Save the Children



*Ramon, Olga and their young children have endured multiple hardships. The couple both had COVID. Olga lost her father to the disease. And it’s been hard to pay bills and afford food.*

markets. All the shelves were empty. I remember thinking ‘Is this the end of the world?’” Waiting in long food pantry drive-through lines became the family’s normal way of getting the food they needed. Often they had to travel to neighboring towns.

The couple’s two daughters – Alexa and Stephanie – participate in Save the Children’s early learning programs, so the family’s struggles were well known to staff. When Save the Children launched a pilot cash transfer program in July, it came just in time. The payments – totaling \$1,000 – were the lifeline the family needed to purchase food and catch up on bills. As part of the pilot, families

also received training on nutrition and financial wellness, as well as a cookbook with healthy recipes using inexpensive ingredients.

Olga is grateful for the help of Diana, the Save the Children staff member who checks in on the family regularly. “Not only did she guide me to resources ... but she has helped me stay focused on my role as a parent with virtual home visits, check-up calls to provide emotional support, and listening to me when I was so down. Today, I live every day with caution, but look forward to the fun and learning my children and I get to participate in.”

# Where Are Kids Faring Best and Worst During COVID?

The U.S. Census Bureau conducts a bi-weekly Household Pulse Survey to understand the social and economic effects of COVID. Save the Children analyzed these data in detail, focusing on households with children under age 18 (hereafter referred to as “families”). To better assess where children have been most and least protected during COVID, and to illustrate how disparate the effects of COVID have been on families, we looked at four months of survey data and developed Save the Children’s *COVID Child Protection Ranking*. We also evaluated how racial and income inequality impacts families nationally and within each state.

The *COVID Child Protection Ranking* uses three indicators that are particularly important to children during the pandemic: food scarcity, lack of access to tools for remote learning and difficulty paying for household expenses. Having access to enough food and continuing to learn are essential for a child’s healthy growth and development. When a family can’t meet its regular expenses – including housing – it creates a level of stress and trauma that further threatens a child’s ability to thrive. The ranking reveals where hunger, learning loss and financial stress are most widespread. This analysis also shows how risks have multiplied for the most vulnerable children and identifies where inequities are greatest.

Here are 10 things to know about COVID and its impact on kids in America:

1. **Families are suffering in every state and at every income level. But the poorest families are struggling the most.** Estimates suggest families making less than \$25,000 per year are about 15 times as likely to struggle with hunger as families making \$200,000 or more per year. Their children are 4 times as likely to lack internet for remote learning and to have no live contact with teachers. The poorest households are twice as likely to have lost jobs or wages during the pandemic compared to the wealthiest households. They are 9 times as likely to have trouble paying their bills and 12 times as likely to be behind on rent. They are about twice as likely to report

Photo: Shawn Millsaps



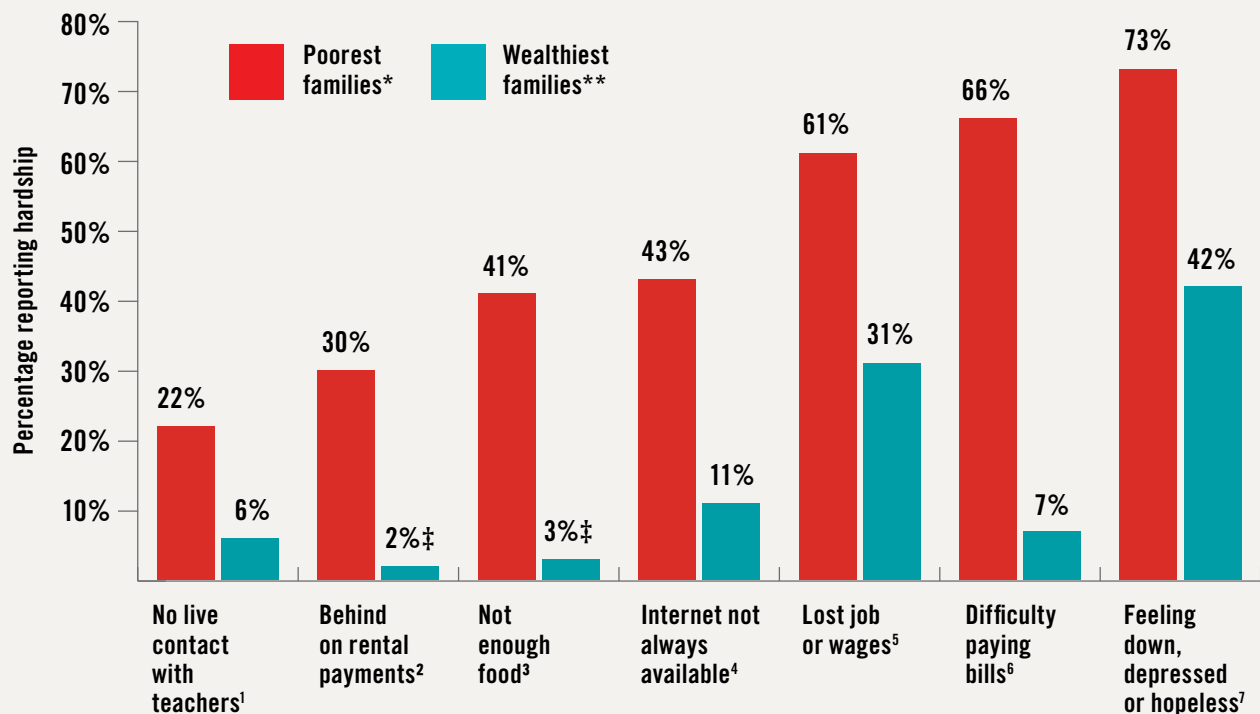
9-year-old Alina from eastern Tennessee only attends school two days a week.

symptoms of depression. Poor communities are also getting sick with and dying from COVID at higher rates.<sup>44</sup>

2. **Over the last five months of 2020, Minnesota, New Hampshire, Utah and Washington consistently ranked among the 10 best states for families.** The worst states for families were Mississippi and Louisiana – the only two states to always place in the bottom 10.



## THE POOREST FAMILIES ARE MANY TIMES MORE LIKELY TO EXPERIENCE PANDEMIC-RELATED HARDSHIPS



\* 2019 household income under \$25,000 \*\* 2019 household income of \$200,000 or more

1 Adults living in households with at least one child attending public, private or home school for kindergarten through 12th grade reporting students in their household had no live contact with teachers (not in person, by phone or by video) in the last seven days

2 Adults in renter households reporting the household is not currently up-to-date on rent payments

3 Adults living in households with children aged 0-17 reporting their household sometimes or often did not have enough food to eat in the past seven days

4 Adults living in households with at least one child attending public, private or home school for kindergarten through 12th grade reporting that internet is not always available to children for educational purposes

5 Adults reporting they or someone in their household has experienced a loss of employment income since March 13, 2020

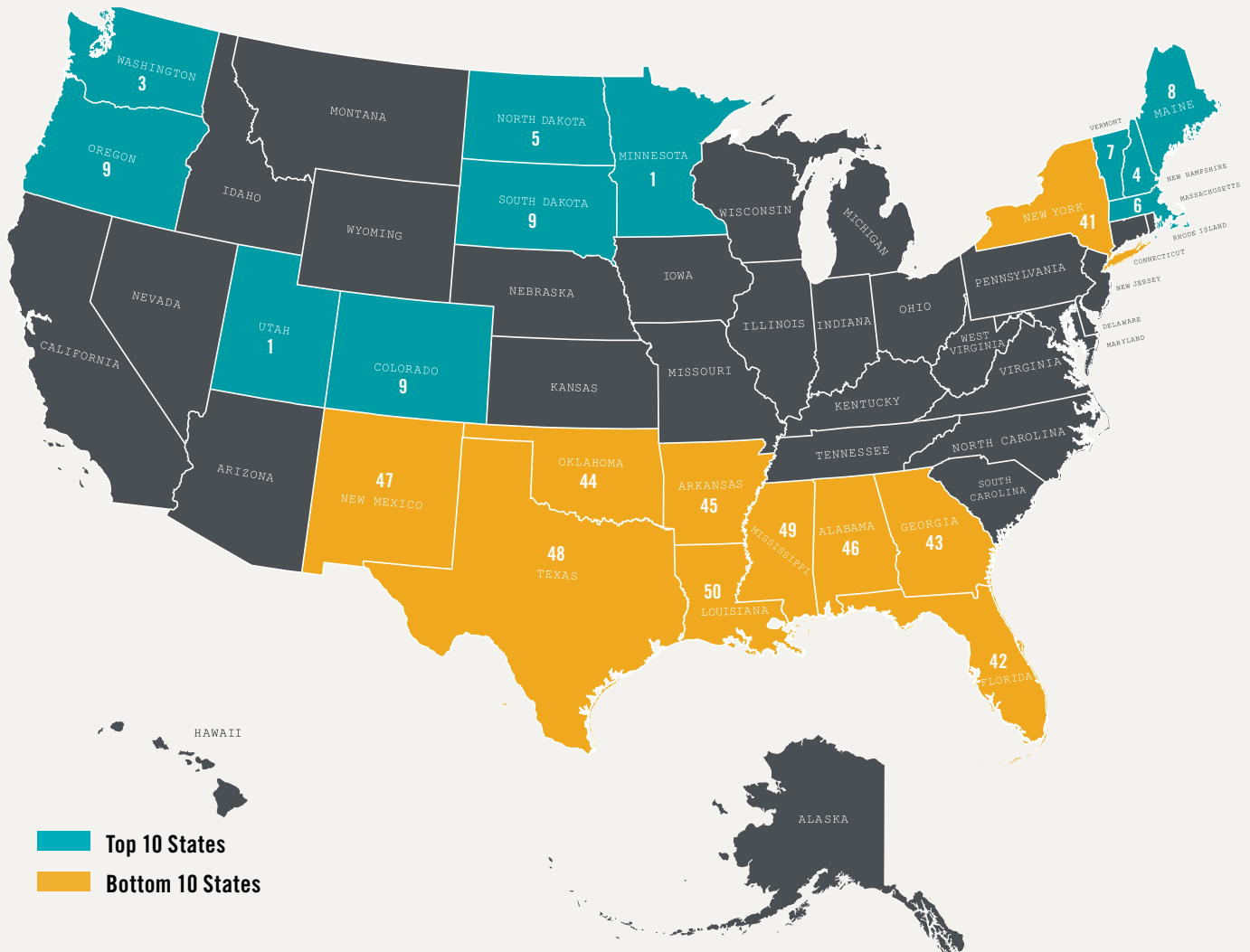
6 Adults reporting it has been somewhat or very difficult for the household to pay for usual household expenses, including but not limited to food, rent or mortgage, car payments, medical expenses and student loans in the past week

7 Adults reporting feeling down, depressed or hopeless for at least several days over the last seven days

‡ Coefficients of variation for these estimates are large and may indicate serious data quality issues related to sampling error.

Source: Save the Children's analysis of the U.S. Census Bureau, Household Pulse Survey, Week 21 (December 9-21, 2020). Only respondents who provided a valid response are included.

## WHERE CHILDHOOD IS MOST AND LEAST PROTECTED DURING COVID



**3. Families in Louisiana are hurting the most.** The state ranks last on hunger and tools for remote learning and in the bottom 5 on difficulty paying bills. 25% of families do not have enough to eat, 25% usually do not have access to the internet or a digital device for educational purposes and 50% are struggling to pay for household expenses. And the poorest in the state are even worse off. 72% of the poorest households are struggling to keep up with usual expenses; over half say it's very difficult to pay for things like food and rent. The wealthiest families in Louisiana, by comparison, are all getting enough to eat, and with few exceptions, can meet their regular household expenses.

**4. State-level ranks hide huge disparities.** Even in the best states, the poorest families are often much more likely to suffer the negative effects of COVID than the wealthiest families. In Oregon (which ranks 9th), for example, 70% of the poorest households have lost jobs or wages during the pandemic, compared to 35% of the wealthiest households. In Colorado (which also ranks 9th), 83% of the poorest households are having difficulty making ends meet, compared to 21% of the wealthiest households. In Vermont (which ranks 7th), only 44% of the poorest families say a computer or learning device is always available for educational purposes, compared to 90% of the wealthiest families. In Minnesota (which is 1st), 78% of the poorest

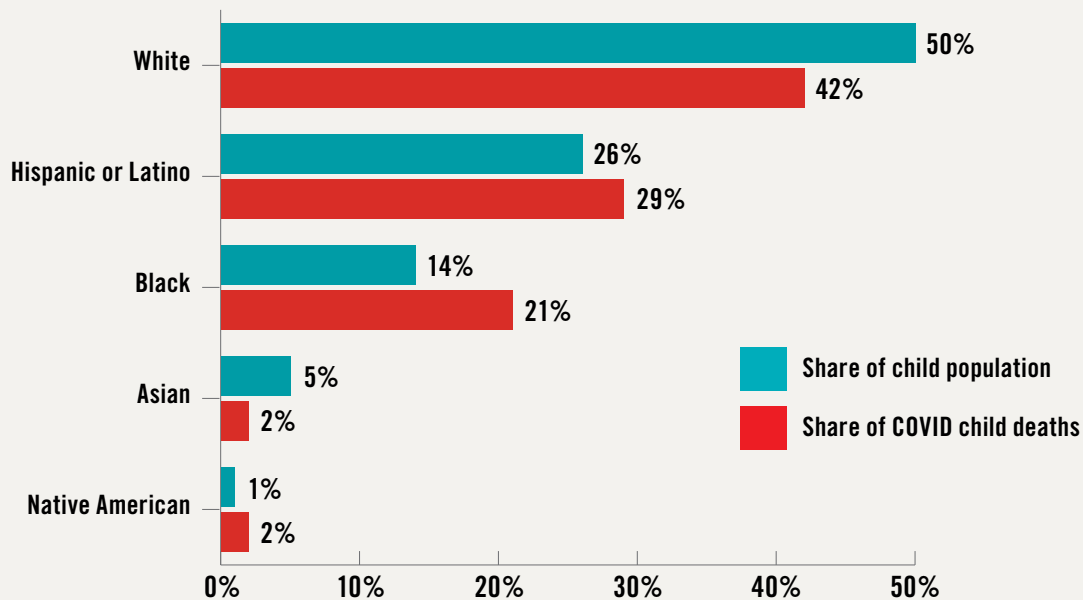
households are not able to stop or control worrying, compared to 35% of the wealthiest households. And in Utah (which also ranks 1st), 81% of the poorest households are feeling down, depressed or hopeless, compared to 28% of the wealthiest households.

**5. Children in Black and Hispanic families have been disproportionately affected by the pandemic.** These families are twice as likely as white families to lack enough food and are about 1.5 times as likely to have difficulty paying bills and to lack the tools needed for remote learning.<sup>45</sup> Equity gaps are even greater within many states. In Maryland, Hispanic and Black families are almost 4 times as likely to face hunger compared to white families (rates are 35%, 34% and 9% respectively). Hispanic families are similarly disadvantaged in New York, where 38% do not have enough food, compared to 11% of white families. In Washington,

D.C., Black families are 6 times as likely to struggle paying bills as white families (rates are 62% vs. 10%) and 8 times as likely to lack the tools they need for remote learning (rates are 19% vs. 2%). In Connecticut, Black families are 4 times as likely to lack internet and digital devices (23% usually don't have them available vs. 6% of white families). In New York, estimates suggest they are three times as likely to lack the tools they need to learn from home (rates are 20% for Black families vs. 6% for white families).<sup>46</sup>

Communities of color are also more likely to be affected by school closure and job loss. 1 in 3 Black and Hispanic families (31% and 32%) report cancelled classes, compared to 1 in 4 white families (26%). Two in 3 Black and Hispanic families (63% and 67%) report losing employment income, compared to 50% of white families.<sup>47</sup> Families of color are also twice as likely to be struggling with housing costs.<sup>48</sup>

## MOST CHILDREN WHO HAVE DIED FROM COVID ARE CHILDREN OF COLOR



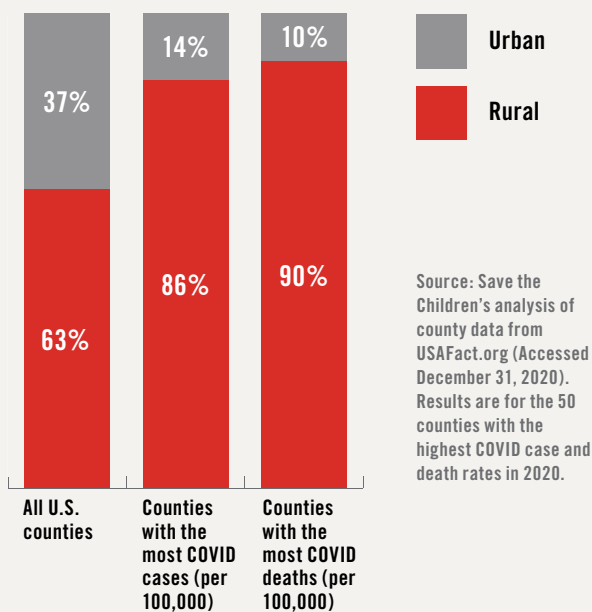
Over half of all children who died from COVID in 2020 were children of color. 14% of children in the U.S. are Black, yet they account for 21% of COVID child deaths for which race is known. Similarly, 26% of children in the U.S. are Hispanic but they account for 29% of COVID deaths among children for which ethnicity is known.

Note: Racial and ethnic groups represented in this table are mutually exclusive. Race/ethnicity was available for 80% of all COVID deaths. These data represent the geographic areas that provided it and are not necessarily generalizable to the entire U.S. child population.

Source: Save the Children's analysis of data from the CDC COVID Data Tracker (Accessed December 31, 2020) and population data from The Annie E. Casey Foundation. KIDS COUNT Data Center. <https://datacenter.kidscount.org>



## COUNTIES WITH THE HIGHEST COVID CASE AND DEATH RATES ARE RURAL



6. **Urban areas were hardest hit in the early months of the pandemic, but rural case rates rose sharply during the summer of 2020 and by year's end, total COVID case and death rates were higher in rural areas.**<sup>49</sup> In fact, 85 of the 100 counties with the most cases per 100,000 people are rural, as are 89 of the 100 counties with the most COVID deaths per 100,000.<sup>50</sup> Rural communities are much more likely to have underlying health problems, aging populations, and to have difficulty accessing health care because they lack health insurance and/or live far from hospitals, making them more vulnerable to severe illness or death from COVID than urban areas.<sup>51</sup>

Some 43% of rural households have lost jobs or wages since the start of the pandemic and 42% are having serious financial problems, including depleting savings and struggling to pay for food and housing. 17% of rural households report missing or delaying payment of major bills to ensure everyone had enough to eat. 54% of rural households with children report they have experienced serious problems caring for their children, including one-third who say they face serious problems keeping their children on track with education. 40% of rural households with children report either serious problems with their internet connection or no high-speed internet connection at home.<sup>52</sup>

“

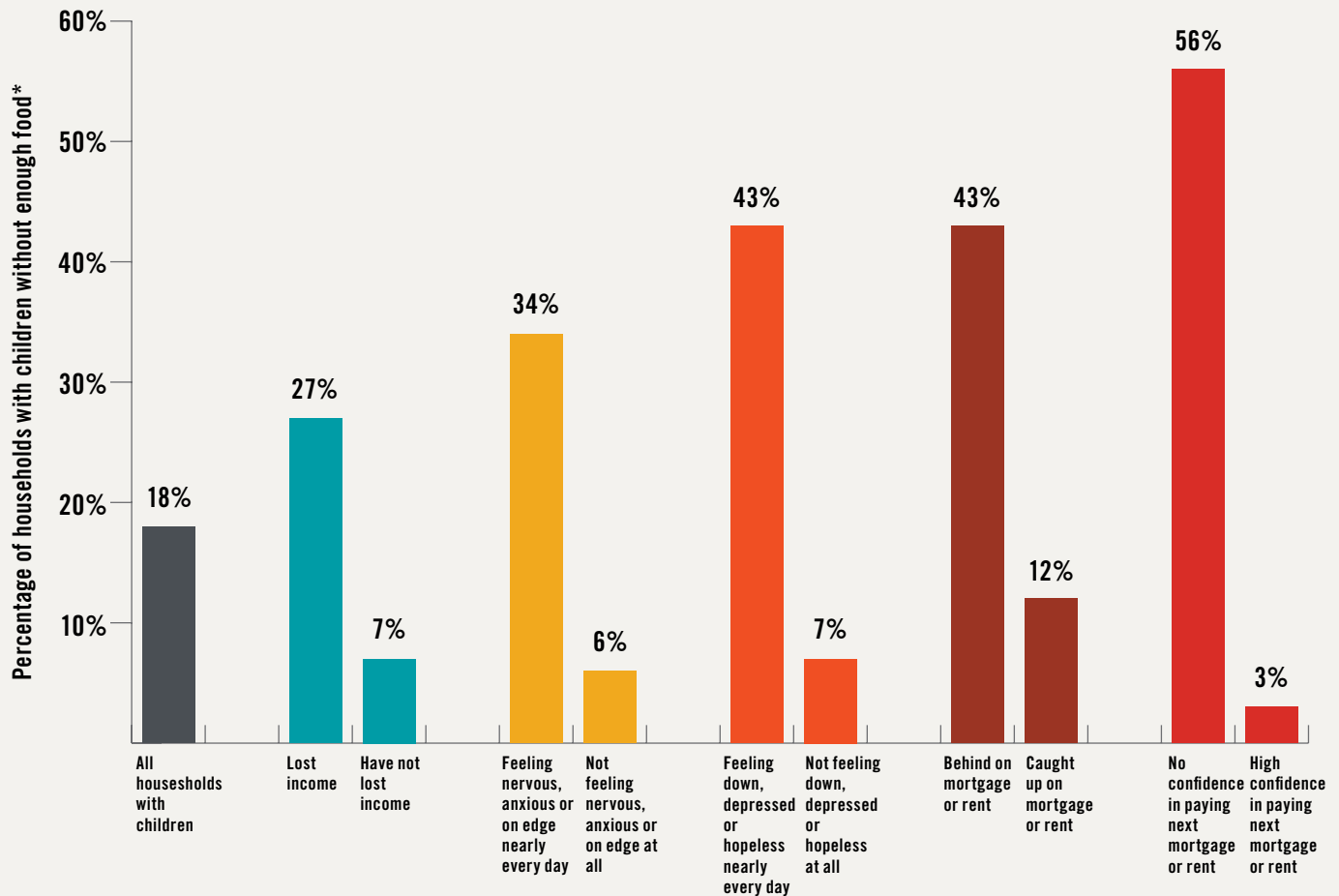
**Before COVID my cousins and I played on my grandparents' farm. Since COVID, we cannot see our grandparents or play together.”**

– Braydon, age 9



7. **While there has been a dramatic increase in poverty overall in the second half of 2020, families with children were especially hard hit.**<sup>53</sup> The number of households with children that had trouble paying bills doubled over the course of 2020. Households with children were 40% more likely to experience this type of economic hardship compared to households without children.<sup>54</sup> Hunger in households with children is also up by almost two-thirds compared to before the pandemic, and households with children are 70% more likely than households without children to lack enough food.<sup>55</sup> They are 80% more likely to be behind on rent payments.
8. **Many families with children in America are facing multiple and overlapping disadvantages during the pandemic.** For example, half of all kids who struggled with hunger before the pandemic also lack consistent internet for educational purposes – twice as many as those who were getting enough to eat pre-pandemic.<sup>56</sup> Kids whose families have lost jobs during the pandemic are about twice as likely to face eviction<sup>57</sup> and 4 times as likely to go hungry as kids whose families did not lose income. And families who are frequently feeling anxious or depressed experience hunger at 5 to 6 times the rate of families who are not experiencing these symptoms at all.

## RISK OF HUNGER IS MUCH HIGHER FOR FAMILIES EXPERIENCING OTHER PANDEMIC-RELATED HARDSHIPS



\*The percentage of adults living in households with children aged 0-17 who reported that their household sometimes or often did not have enough food to eat in the past seven days. Only respondents who provided a valid response are included.

Source: Save the Children's analysis of the U.S. Census Bureau, Household Pulse Survey, Week 21 (December 9-21, 2020)

**9. States where COVID has negatively affected families the most are those where childhood was already at great risk**, based on the findings of *The Land of Inopportunity: Closing the Childhood Equity Gap for America's Kids: 2020 U.S. Complement to the Global Childhood Report*. Seven states scored in the bottom 10 on both rankings: Alabama, Arkansas, Georgia, Louisiana, Mississippi, New Mexico and Oklahoma. This supports the finding in last year's report that the *End of Childhood State Ranking* can serve as an early warning system – helping decision-makers to target investments where they are needed most.

**10. By the end of 2020, more than 2.1 million children in America had tested positive for COVID-19**, representing 12% of all cases in states reporting cases by age.<sup>58</sup> This translates to an overall rate of 2,828 cases per 100,000 children. Child case rates are lowest in Hawaii, Maine and Vermont. Rates are highest – at least twice the national average – in North Dakota, South Dakota and Tennessee. Children in these highest-rate states are at least 5 times as likely to test positive for COVID as children in the lowest-rate states. At least 211 children died from COVID in 2020.<sup>59</sup>

## Remote Learning Help for Working Parents in Mississippi

Working parents are in a tough situation. They must make difficult decisions regarding their need to earn a living and support their children's learning. The challenges are particularly risky for single parents with fewer resources, having to navigate these extraordinary circumstances on their own.

This is the scenario that Ilesha, a single mom in the Mississippi Delta, found herself in last summer. "Finding a balance between working a full-time job and helping my son succeed in school has been the biggest challenge for me," she said.

In Mississippi, 47% of families say their children are spending less time on learning activities compared to a typical day before COVID. When the pandemic struck, half of all K-12 students in Mississippi lacked the tools they needed for remote learning – the highest rate of any state.<sup>60</sup>

Ilesha's 5-year-old son Raheem is described as being an "energetic, smart and curious" child. But he was not reading any books at all. He was easily distracted and found it difficult to stay focused on learning. "My child was just sitting at home with nothing educational to do," said Ilesha.

He was in need of resources and learning materials at home to ensure that he would be prepared for the start of kindergarten in the fall. "In my rural community, we have limited

Photo: Save the Children



*After a rough start with at-home learning, Raheem is now reading and getting ready for kindergarten in the fall.*

resources such as books, technology and internet access," said Ilesha.

Fortunately for Ilesha and Raheem, help was on the way through Save the Children's KinderBoost. Ilesha enrolled Raheem in the kindergarten readiness program that offers children a curriculum in math, literacy and motor skills. Save the Children's national education team modified the curriculum to be successful in a remote setting,

with children participating from home. Learning packets and activity kits were available for pick up and in some communities delivered directly to homes.

KinderBoost made learning exciting for Raheem. He's now reading at kindergarten level, and looks forward to learning every day. He especially enjoys his favorite book, *Pete the Cat*. Raheem said the program has made him "feel like a smart kid."

# Recommendations – Advocating for America’s Kids

Every child deserves a bright future, yet COVID has been a horrific disruptor to progress for kids. The childhood equity gap in America puts many children at a disadvantage simply based on who they are and where they live. Urgent action is needed to ensure all of America’s children can reach their full potential.

## Save child care

The impact of COVID on the child care industry, as well as children and families across the country, is unprecedented and continues to worsen. Countless child care programs – already operating on tight budgets – now face the real threat of not being able to pay their staff, rent and other expenses. As a consequence, they are confronted with the possibility of having to close their doors permanently. Experts estimate that if child care providers do not receive emergency relief funding, around 4.5 million child care slots could disappear, accounting for roughly half of all licensed child care slots.<sup>61</sup> Mass closures of child care programs following the pandemic would be devastating to working families and their employers. Even prior to the pandemic, inefficiencies in our child care system cost the economy \$57 billion a year due to lost earnings, productivity and revenue.<sup>62</sup>

So far, federal stimulus funding has not gone far enough to support state budgets this year and beyond. Many states are signaling multibillion-dollar budget cuts that will result in families losing access to child care, preschool and full-day kindergarten.

High-quality early childhood education has been shown to improve school readiness by providing comprehensive educational, health and development services. Lack of school readiness is one of the main factors in the academic achievement gap between white students and Black and Hispanic students which starts in the early years of life. Access to high-quality early learning and preschool is a crucial factor in helping to narrow this gap. In particular, according to a Head Start Impact Study, programs like Head Start help reduce this racial/ethnic gap by providing access to high-quality programs.<sup>63</sup>

Without robust funding, irreparable harm will be done to the kids and families who need high-quality early childhood interventions most.

## Nourish the nation by combating child hunger

For over a decade, child hunger in America trended downward. Since the Great Recession in 2007, according to the U.S. Department of Agriculture, the number of households with children that reported struggling with food security steadily declined, dropping to a two-decade low of 13.6% in 2019, about 1 in 7 kids.<sup>64</sup> Today, almost 1 in 5 young children are not getting enough to eat – 3 times higher than during the worst period of the Great Recession.<sup>65</sup> According to research done for this report, food insecurity has disproportionately impacted Black and Hispanic families, who are twice as likely to struggle with hunger during the pandemic as white families.



*Save the Children staff and volunteers distribute food boxes in eastern Kentucky.*

Photo: Shawn Millsaps



*Jaylah, age 11, drew this picture of her virtual classroom. Describing her typical day, she said: "I get on Zoom and do my school work."*

Pre-pandemic, nearly 90% of the nation's counties with the highest rates of child food insecurity were rural. This hasn't changed.<sup>66</sup> With many schools closed, getting nutritious meals to children outside school buildings proved one of the biggest challenges to overcome during widespread school closures last spring.

Unfortunately, nonprofits and generous individuals cannot fill the food gap. Specific, focused investment at the federal and state level is essential to ensure children do not continue to go hungry. The federal government has stepped up to increase benefits and funding for the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) and the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) as well as providing much-needed waivers to allow schools to continue to provide

at-home, free and reduced-price meals to children who would normally receive them in school.

Every SNAP dollar spent generates about \$1.54 in economic activity, so this investment helps local communities and economies, too. It is also critical for helping children grow and breaking the cycle of poverty. Meeting children's basic nutritional needs helps ensure they are healthier and better able to succeed in school. When children grow up smarter, stronger and healthier, our nation is smarter, stronger and healthier, too.

But this problem will not end even when the last of the vaccine is distributed. The additional benefits and supports for these children and families will need to be made permanent until all children have access to the food they need.

# COVID Child Protection Ranking 2020

		2020 COVID-19 CASE RATE†	
	United States	5,923	
1	Minnesota	7,325	
1	Utah	8,482	
3	Washington	3,182	
4	New Hampshire	3,180	
5	North Dakota	12,138	
6	Massachusetts	5,259	
7	Vermont	1,166	
8	Maine	1,799	
9	Colorado	5,745	
9	Oregon	2,662	
9	South Dakota	11,159	
12	Wisconsin	8,866	
13	Connecticut	5,151	
14	Virginia	4,096	
15	Idaho	7,826	
16	Rhode Island	8,302	
17	New Jersey	5,317	
18	Hawaii	1,473	
19	Pennsylvania	4,932	
20	California	5,614	
21	Wyoming	7,626	
22	Montana	7,607	
23	Iowa	8,842	
24	Nebraska	8,545	
25	Missouri	6,336	
26	Alaska	6,147	
27	Illinois	7,539	
28	Indiana	7,502	
29	Kansas	7,635	
30	Maryland	4,576	
31	Ohio	5,909	
32	Michigan	5,293	
33	South Carolina	5,894	
34	North Carolina	5,080	
35	Delaware	5,812	
36	Arizona	7,041	
37	Kentucky	5,937	
38	West Virginia	4,700	
39	Nevada	7,227	
40	Tennessee	8,505	
41	New York	4,861	
42	Florida	5,977	
43	Georgia	6,167	
44	Oklahoma	7,510	
45	Arkansas	7,371	
46	Alabama	7,277	
47	New Mexico	6,733	
48	Texas	5,992	
49	Mississippi	7,251	
50	Louisiana	6,695	
33*	District of Columbia	4,075	

Photo: Save the Children



Jansen, who is enrolled in a Save the Children Head Start program in Louisiana, helps his mother carry food into their home from a Save the Children school bus delivery.

10 Best States  
10 Worst States

Low  
Medium  
High

\* Result for D.C. had it been included in the ranking

† COVID-19 case rate reported to the CDC (per 100,000 population) from January 21, 2020 to December 31, 2020

Sources: Save the Children's analysis of data from The Annie E. Casey Foundation, KIDS COUNT Data Center, <https://datacenter.kidscount.org>, and CDC COVID DATA Tracker

# COVID Child Protection Ranking 2020 – Year-End View

NOVEMBER 25–DECEMBER 21

		Not enough to eat <sup>1</sup>	Inadequate tools for remote learning <sup>2</sup>	Difficulty paying bills <sup>3</sup>
	United States	17.9%	12.2%	45.1%
1	Washington	11.0%	7.4%	36.4%
2	Connecticut	13.1%	7.0%	36.6%
3	New Hampshire	13.8%	6.4%	36.6%
4	Maine	9.3%	10.3%	35.9%
5	Minnesota	13.2%	5.5%	40.3%
6	South Dakota	11.7%	10.2%	36.5%
7	Utah	11.5%	11.9%	32.6%
8	North Dakota	14.3%	10.2%	36.0%
9	Massachusetts	14.4%	9.0%	38.6%
10	Wisconsin	13.3%	10.8%	38.1%
11	Virginia	14.2%	11.1%	39.1%
12	Oregon	15.8%	6.7%	44.1%
12	Rhode Island	13.3%	8.7%	46.3%
14	Idaho	13.5%	16.0%	34.9%
15	Missouri	15.6%	11.5%	39.1%
16	New Jersey	15.7%	9.3%	43.7%
17	Kansas	16.8%	11.8%	38.3%
18	Alaska	14.3%	12.2%	42.5%
18	Colorado	16.2%	9.7%	44.0%
20	Illinois	17.2%	10.4%	41.2%
21	Vermont	13.2%	18.6%	40.3%
22	Ohio	17.7%	12.2%	39.9%
23	Montana	15.3%	14.3%	42.1%
24	Wyoming	16.7%	12.2%	43.7%
25	Pennsylvania	19.9%	10.2%	43.1%
26	Nebraska	16.2%	16.1%	41.5%
27	California	17.3%	9.9%	48.9%
28	Indiana	15.0%	13.9%	47.4%
29	New York	19.1%	8.3%	49.4%
30	Hawaii	19.7%	7.9%	49.7%
31	Georgia	18.6%	13.9%	43.3%
31	Iowa	16.3%	15.6%	44.7%
31	Nevada	18.2%	8.9%	55.9%
34	Maryland	21.6%	9.3%	46.6%
35	Michigan	18.3%	12.5%	46.2%
36	Tennessee	18.2%	18.7%	41.2%
37	South Carolina	16.7%	16.4%	45.5%
38	North Carolina	19.9%	15.2%	43.4%
39	Delaware	17.5%	14.3%	48.3%
40	Kentucky	22.1%	10.9%	47.1%
41	Arizona	21.0%	13.6%	46.3%
42	Alabama	18.4%	20.4%	45.4%
42	Florida	18.8%	15.9%	47.0%
44	West Virginia	19.1%	16.7%	47.6%
45	New Mexico	21.3%	12.7%	55.6%
45	Texas	21.4%	14.7%	49.1%
47	Mississippi	20.8%	15.6%	55.2%
48	Oklahoma	21.7%	18.2%	54.4%
49	Arkansas	23.0%	20.4%	49.4%
50	Louisiana	24.8%	25.0%	50.0%
42*	District of Columbia	21.7%	14.1%	45.1%

Photo: Shawn Millsaps



6-year-old Aubrey from eastern Tennessee only attends school on Mondays and Tuesdays.

10 Best States  
10 Worst States

\* Result for D.C. had it been included in the ranking

- 1 Adults living in households with children aged 0-17 who reported their household sometimes or often did not have enough food to eat in the past week
- 2 Adults living in households with at least one child in K-12th grade who reported that internet and a computer aren't usually available to children for educational purposes
- 3 Adults living in households with children aged 0-17 who reported it has been somewhat or very difficult for their household to pay for usual household expenses in the past week

Source: Save the Children's analysis of data from The Annie E. Casey Foundation, KIDS COUNT Data Center, <https://datacenter.kidscount.org>

# COVID Child Protection Ranking 2020 – 4-Month View

Survey Weeks		13-14	14-15	15-16	16-17	17-18	18-19	19-20	20-21	Average Rank (Aug 19-Dec 21)	2020 COVID-19 Case Rate†	
		Aug 19- Sep 14	Sep 2- Sep 28	Sep 16- Oct 12	Sep 30- Oct 26	Oct 14- Nov 9	Oct 28- Nov 23	Nov 11- Dec 7	Nov 25- Dec 21			
1	Minnesota	4	3	1	1	3	5	1	5	2.9	7,325	
1	Utah	1	4	2	2	2	1	4	7	2.9	8,482	
3	Washington	3	1	4	6	4	3	2	1	3.0	3,182	
4	New Hampshire	2	2	6	10	1	1	3	3	3.5	3,180	
5	North Dakota	5	5	3	3	6	14	6	8	6.3	12,138	
6	Massachusetts	21	15	8	8	5	7	11	9	10.5	5,259	
7	Vermont	10	7	11	8	8	6	16	21	10.9	1,166	
8	Maine	8	13	7	13	26	25	5	4	12.6	1,799	
9	Colorado	12	7	5	5	17	24	23	18	13.9	5,745	
9	Oregon	17	12	11	7	13	17	22	12	13.9	2,662	
9	South Dakota	27	5	20	24	9	12	8	6	13.9	11,159	
12	Wisconsin	7	9	10	11	32	31	14	10	15.5	8,866	
13	Connecticut	15	10	23	34	20	18	7	2	16.1	5,151	
14	Virginia	27	19	17	15	16	20	12	11	17.1	4,096	
15	Idaho	14	18	16	16	24	25	12	14	17.4	7,826	
16	Rhode Island	25	23	27	32	7	4	21	12	18.9	8,302	
17	New Jersey	36	32	13	4	13	16	24	16	19.3	5,317	
18	Hawaii	11	11	21	26	15	10	32	30	19.5	1,473	
19	Pennsylvania	19	22	14	11	18	20	30	25	19.9	4,932	
20	California	25	24	19	20	20	12	17	27	20.5	5,614	
21	Wyoming	6	13	14	21	23	33	32	24	20.8	7,626	
22	Montana	8	15	23	28	25	28	27	23	22.1	7,607	
23	Iowa	24	26	25	14	11	19	28	31	22.3	8,842	
24	Nebraska	17	17	9	19	28	30	34	26	22.5	8,545	
25	Missouri	32	25	22	41	34	10	10	15	23.6	6,336	
26	Alaska	15	20	32	47	29	22	9	18	24.0	6,147	
27	Illinois	33	29	26	23	11	27	25	20	24.3	7,539	
28	Indiana	30	30	34	29	20	8	20	28	24.9	7,502	
29	Kansas	29	36	29	17	30	32	15	17	25.6	7,635	
30	Maryland	22	33	37	33	10	9	31	34	26.1	4,576	
31	Ohio	44	40	41	24	27	23	19	22	30.0	5,909	
32	Michigan	35	34	30	42	33	14	18	35	30.1	5,293	
33	South Carolina	13	27	18	18	47	49	44	37	31.6	5,894	
34	North Carolina	23	31	30	22	39	42	36	38	32.6	5,080	
35	Delaware	19	21	37	39	36	41	36	39	33.5	5,812	
36	Arizona	30	27	27	36	37	34	43	41	34.4	7,041	
37	Kentucky	46	43	41	27	30	28	28	40	35.4	5,937	
38	West Virginia	34	41	46	31	18	36	36	44	35.8	4,700	
39	Nevada	38	44	34	35	44	35	26	31	35.9	7,227	
40	Tennessee	44	37	33	30	37	37	35	36	36.1	8,505	
41	New York	38	34	37	48	42	39	48	29	39.4	4,861	
42	Florida	41	39	34	39	35	44	47	42	40.1	5,977	
43	Georgia	37	42	45	43	43	43	41	31	40.6	6,167	
44	Oklahoma	41	37	40	38	41	46	49	48	42.5	7,510	
45	Arkansas	40	45	41	44	46	40	46	49	43.9	7,371	
46	Alabama	48	45	44	37	48	47	41	42	44.0	7,277	
47	New Mexico	47	49	50	45	40	38	39	45	44.1	6,733	
48	Texas	43	47	47	45	45	44	39	45	44.4	5,992	
49	Mississippi	50	50	49	49	50	48	45	47	48.5	7,251	
50	Louisiana	49	48	48	50	49	50	50	50	49.3	6,695	
33*	District of Columbia	51*	50*	41*	26*	5*	3*	30*	42*	31*	4,075	

10 Best States ■ Low  
 10 Worst States ■ Medium  
■ High

Sources: Save the Children's analysis of U.S. Census Bureau's Household Pulse Survey data for Weeks 13-21 (August 19, 2020 to December 21, 2020) from The Annie E. Casey Foundation, KIDS COUNT Data Center, <https://datacenter.kidscount.org>, and CDC COVID DATA Tracker

† COVID-19 case rate reported to the CDC (per 100,000 population) from January 21, 2020 to December 21, 2020

\* Results for D.C. had it been included in the ranking



# Methodology and Research Notes

Every child has a right to childhood. The concept of childhood is defined in the Convention on the Rights of the Child.<sup>67</sup> It represents a shared vision of childhood: healthy children learning and playing, growing strong and confident with the love and encouragement of their family and an extended community of caring adults, gradually taking on the responsibilities of adulthood, free from fear and protected from harm. This ideal contrasts starkly with the childhood many children experience. Pandemic-related hardships have made the ideal even harder to achieve.

## Technical note for the COVID Child Protection Ranking 2020

The *COVID Child Protection Ranking* identifies where children have been most and least protected during the COVID-19 pandemic. It incorporates four months of data from the U.S. Census Bureau’s Household Pulse Survey, from the start of Phase 2 (August 19, 2020) to the last survey of 2020 (ending December 21, 2020), corresponding to collection periods (i.e., “weeks”) 13 to 21.

The ranking includes three indicators: not enough food to eat, inadequate tools for remote learning and difficulty paying bills. Definitions are provided in the table below. Data are sourced from The Annie E. Casey Foundation, KIDS COUNT Data Center, <https://datacenter.kidscount.org>. KIDS COUNT pools survey data into a two-period rolling average. They also provide the margin of error for these estimates.

The methodology for the *COVID Child Protection Ranking* mirrors that used to calculate last year’s *End of Childhood State Ranking 2020*. State ranks were calculated for each indicator, from 1 = best to 50 = worst. An average rank for each state based on all three indicators was calculated

for each period, i.e., (indicator 1 rank + indicator 2 rank + indicator 3 rank)/3 = average rank. States were then re-ranked based on this average rank to give a 1 to 50 state ranking for each survey period.

To get states’ overall rank for the entire 4-month timeframe, this process was repeated. Ranks for the eight survey periods were averaged, i.e., (period 1 rank + period 2 rank + period 3 rank + period 4 rank + period 5 rank + period 6 rank + period 7 rank + period 8 rank)/8 = average rank. States were then re-ranked from 1 to 50 based on this average rank.

States’ overall ranks were compared to their 2020 COVID case rate. These data were sourced from the CDC’s COVID DATA Tracker and give the number of cases for every 100,000 people from January 21, 2020 to December 31, 2020. Rates were categorized as shown below, according to groupings used by the CDC on their map ([covid.cdc.gov/covid-data-tracker/#cases\\_casesper100k](https://covid.cdc.gov/covid-data-tracker/#cases_casesper100k)), accessed December 31, 2020.

Standard errors for all estimates prepared for this report were evaluated. Unless otherwise noted, coefficients of variation are under 30%. All comparisons made are statistically significant at the 90% confidence level.

INDICATOR	DEFINITION (Link to data source)
Not enough food to eat	The percentage of adults living in households with children aged 0-17 who reported that their household sometimes or often did not have enough food to eat in the past seven days ( <a href="https://datacenter.kidscount.org/data/tables/10882">datacenter.kidscount.org/data/tables/10882</a> )
Inadequate tools for remote learning	The percentage of adults living in households with at least one child attending public, private or home school for kindergarten through 12th grade who reported that internet and a computer or digital device is sometimes, rarely or never available to children for educational purposes ( <a href="https://datacenter.kidscount.org/data/tables/10889">datacenter.kidscount.org/data/tables/10889</a> )
Difficulty paying bills	The percentage of adults living in households with children aged 0-17 who reported that it has been somewhat or very difficult for the household to pay for usual household expenses, including but not limited to food, rent or mortgage, car payments, medical expenses, students loans, and so on in the past week ( <a href="https://datacenter.kidscount.org/data/tables/10896">datacenter.kidscount.org/data/tables/10896</a> )

	COVID case rate (per 100,000)
Low	0 to 4,096
Medium	4,097 to 6,733
High	6,734 to 12,138

Note: Metrics reflect the percentage of adults in households with children aged 0-17 who are experiencing these pandemic-related hardships. They are used to approximate rates for families with children aged 0-17.

- <sup>1</sup> Johns Hopkins University, Coronavirus Resource Center. (Accessed December 31, 2020)
- <sup>2</sup> Social Policy Institute. *Socio-Economic Impacts of COVID-19 Survey, Wave 3*. (2020)
- <sup>3</sup> In the early months of the pandemic, the unemployment rate in the U.S. quadrupled, from 3.5% in February 2020 to 14.7% in April. The EU's unemployment rate, by comparison, rose by only one-tenth of 1% (from 6.5% to 6.6%), although it later peaked at 7.8% in July as job losses tied to the pandemic mounted. Source: Eurostat, *European Statistical Recovery Dashboard*.
- <sup>4</sup> As of December 31, 2020, 18 of 34 (53%) high-income OECD countries were providing broad relief, 12 countries, including the U.S., were providing narrow relief and 4 were providing no debt or contract relief. Source: Thomas Hale, Noam Angrist, Emily Cameron-Blake, Laura Hallas, Beatriz Kira, Saptarshi Majumdar, Anna Petherick, Toby Phillips, Helen Tatlow and Samuel Webster. *Oxford COVID-19 Government Response Tracker*. Blavatnik School of Government. (2020)
- <sup>5</sup> 15 of 21 high-income OECD countries surveyed said they offered or negotiated access to the internet at subsidized or no cost; at least 3 countries that did not provide internet returned to fully in-person classes. Source: UNESCO, UNICEF and the World Bank. *Survey on National Education Responses to COVID-19 School Closures, round 2*. (Paris, New York and Washington, D.C.: 2020)
- <sup>6</sup> In 2019, 4.7% of U.S. households with children under 18 did not have access to the internet at home, paid or otherwise (6.5% of households did not have a paid internet subscription at home). Across the EU, only 2% of households with dependent children did not have access to the internet at home in 2019. Rates were 6% in Romania and 9% in Bulgaria. Three other non-EU European countries also have lower rates of internet access than the U.S.: Albania (9%), Bosnia and Herzegovina (13%) and Montenegro (6%). Sources: U.S. Census Bureau. *ACS 1 – Year Estimates-Public Use Microdata Sample (2019)* and Eurostat. (Accessed January 27, 2021)
- <sup>7</sup> Approximately 9 million of these students live in households with neither an adequate connection nor an adequate device for distance learning. An additional 1 million have an adequate connection but no device. Source: S. Chandra, A. Chang, L. Day, A. Fazlullah, J. Liu, L. McBride, T. Mudalige and D. Weiss. *Closing the K-12 Digital Divide in the Age of Distance Learning*. (San Francisco, CA: Common Sense Media and Boston, Massachusetts: Boston Consulting Group: 2020)
- <sup>8</sup> Survey responses are available for 21 of 34 high-income OECD countries. Source: UNESCO, UNICEF and the World Bank. *Survey on National Education Responses to COVID-19 School Closures, round 2*.
- <sup>9</sup> Using poverty estimates from Bruce D. Meyer and James X. Sullivan. *Near Real Time COVID-19 Income and Poverty Dashboard (2020)* and demographic data from U.S. Census Bureau, *2020 Demographic Analysis*, we estimate the number of children living in poverty has risen from 9.8 million (or 13.1%) in June 2020 to 12.4 million (or 16.6%) in December 2020 – a 27% increase. The overall poverty rate rose by 2.4 percentage points between June and December 2020 (from 9.3% to 11.8%), pushing more than 8 million people into poverty. This rise is nearly double the largest annual increase in poverty since the 1960s.
- <sup>10</sup> In 2019, when asked “which best describes your ability to pay all of your bills in full this month,” 22% of respondents with children under age 18 said they “can’t pay some bills.” This corresponds to about 8.2 million families. In late December 2020, 45% of adults living with children aged 0-17 – some 17 million families – reported it had been somewhat or very difficult for the household to pay for usual household expenses in the past week, including but not limited to food, rent or mortgage, car payments, medical expenses and student loans. Sources: Federal Reserve, SHED 2019, U.S. Census Bureau, Household Pulse Survey, Week 21 and U.S. Census Bureau, *America’s Families and Living Arrangements: 2020*, Table H2.
- <sup>11</sup> The percentage of adults living in households with children aged 0-17 who reported that their household sometimes or often did not have enough food to eat in the past week was used to approximate the share of households with children struggling with hunger. In late April 2020, 11.1% of households with children – some 4.2 million families – said they did not have enough food before the pandemic. In December 2020, 18.3% of households with children – some 6.9 million families – said they did not have enough food in the last week. Sources: U.S. Census Bureau, Household Pulse Survey, Weeks 1 and 21 and U.S. Census Bureau, *America’s Families and Living Arrangements: 2020*, Table H2.
- <sup>12</sup> In South Carolina, 73% of adults in households with children aged 0-17 reported it had been a little, somewhat or very difficult for the household to pay for usual household expenses in the past week. 46% said it was somewhat or very difficult. Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Household Pulse Survey, Week 21.
- <sup>13</sup> Gundersen, C., M. Hake, A. Dewey, E. Engelhard. *The Impact of the Coronavirus on Food Insecurity in 2020, Update October 2020*.
- <sup>14</sup> The Annie E. Casey Foundation. KIDS COUNT Data Center. (Accessed January 31, 2021)
- <sup>15</sup> 90% confidence intervals are (34% to 47%) and (0% to 5%), respectively. The coefficient of variation for the wealthiest families’ estimate is large and may indicate serious data quality issues related to sampling error. Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Household Pulse Survey, Week 21.
- <sup>16</sup> The Annie E. Casey Foundation. KIDS COUNT Data Center. (Accessed January 31, 2021)
- <sup>17</sup> See, for example: Cheryl Vince-Whitman, Carmen Aldinger, Beryl Levinger and Isolde Birdthistle. *School Health and Nutrition*. (UNESCO: 2001) and Feeding America. *What Happens When a Child Faces Hunger?*
- <sup>18</sup> Bipartisan Research Center. *Nationwide Survey: Child Care in the Time of Coronavirus*. (2020)
- <sup>19</sup> Child Care Aware. *Picking Up the Pieces: Building a Better Child Care System Post COVID-19*. (Arlington, VA: 2020) and Child Care Data Center.
- <sup>20</sup> 18% of adults in households with children who did not work in the last week said the main reason they were not working was that they were caring for children not in school or daycare. Source: Save the Children’s analysis of U.S. Census Bureau, Household Pulse Survey, Week 21.
- <sup>21</sup> The Annie E. Casey Foundation. KIDS COUNT Data Center. (Accessed January 31, 2021)
- <sup>22</sup> In December 2020, 25% of adults living in households with at least one child attending public, private or home school for K-12th grade said internet was not always available to children for educational purposes. 21% said a computer or digital device was not always available for educational purposes. Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Household Pulse Survey, Week 21. This is consistent with a pre-pandemic study that found about 30% of all K-12 public school students lacked an adequate internet connection, a distance learning device, or both. Rural communities were the most disconnected, with 2 in 5 rural students (37%) lacking adequate home internet access, compared to 1 in 5 urban students (21%). Source: S. Chandra, et al. *Closing the K-12 Digital Divide in the Age of Distance Learning*.
- <sup>23</sup> The 8 other states are (in order of highest to lowest rates): Vermont, California, New Hampshire, Maine, Idaho, Alaska, Kentucky and Washington. Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Household Pulse Survey, Week 21.
- <sup>24</sup> McKinsey & Company. *COVID-19 and Student Learning in the United States: The Hurt Could Last a Lifetime*. (2020)
- <sup>25</sup> Many parents continue to work full-time outside their homes, so their children may not have an adult at home to supervise learning. Source: Brooke Auxier and Monica Anderson. *As Schools Close Due to the Coronavirus, Some U.S. Students Face a Digital “Homework Gap.”* (Pew Research Center: 2020). Many white-collar workers, however, are able to work remotely and thus provide at least some supervision. Source: Dana Goldstein, Adam Popescu and Nikole Hannah-Jones. “As School Moves Online, Many Students Stay Logged Out,” *New York Times*, April 6, 2020. Also, 1 in 10 public school students in New York City, for example, lives in shelter housing, which can mean several children sharing a single room. Source: Anna North. “The Shift to Online Learning Could Worsen Educational Inequality,” *Vox*, April 9, 2020.
- <sup>26</sup> McKinsey & Company. *COVID-19 and Learning Loss – Disparities Grow and Students Need Help*. (October 2020)
- <sup>27</sup> Researchers estimate that an additional 2% to 9% of high school students could drop out as a result of COVID and associated school closures – some 232,000 to 1.1 million students. Source: McKinsey & Company. *COVID-19 and Student Learning in the United States: The Hurt Could Last a Lifetime*.
- <sup>28</sup> Utah Education Policy Center, University of Utah. *Research Brief: Chronic Absenteeism*. (2012)
- <sup>29</sup> “Declining Enrollment, Shuttered Schools,” *Education Week*, September 19, 2018 and *Legacy of Katrina: The Impact of a Flawed Recovery on Vulnerable Children of the Gulf Coast*. (Children’s Health Fund, National Center for Disaster Preparedness: 2010) cited in: McKinsey & Company. *COVID-19 and Student Learning in the United States: The Hurt Could Last a Lifetime*.
- <sup>30</sup> School Innovations & Achievement. *Preliminary Chronic Absence Patterns & Trends Analysis*. (2020)

- <sup>31</sup> Sources: Ellen Barry. "U.S. Public School Enrollment Drops as Parents, Frustrated By Lockdown, Pull Their Children Out," *New York Times*, November 28, 2020; Eliza Shapiro. "Fewer Kindergarten Students Means Money Problems for Schools and Learning Concerns For Children," *New York Times*, November 29, 2020; and Eliza Shapiro. "Enrollment in NYC Schools Drops Sharply, Especially Among Preschool-Age Children," *New York Times*, January 29, 2021.
- <sup>32</sup> Bellwether Education Partners. *Missing in the Margins: Estimating the Scale of the COVID-19 Attendance Crisis*. (October 2020)
- <sup>33</sup> U.S. Census Bureau, Household Pulse Survey, Week 21.
- <sup>34</sup> The Annie E. Casey Foundation. KIDS COUNT Data Center. (Accessed January 31, 2021)
- <sup>35</sup> U.S. Census Bureau, Household Pulse Survey, Week 21.
- <sup>36</sup> The Annie E. Casey Foundation. KIDS COUNT Data Center. (Accessed January 31, 2021)
- <sup>37</sup> 26% of adults living in renter households with children aged 0-17 report the household is not currently up-to-date on rent payments, compared to 15% of adults in renter households without children. Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Household Pulse Survey, Week 21.
- <sup>38</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>39</sup> See, for example, National Council of State Housing Agencies. *Estimation of Households Experiencing Rental Shortfall and Potentially Facing Eviction (8/19/20 – 11/23/20)*.
- <sup>40</sup> Percentage of adults living in households with children aged 0-17 who reported that they felt nervous, anxious or on edge for at least several days (i.e., several days, more than half the days and nearly every day) in the past week. Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Household Pulse Survey, Week 21.
- <sup>41</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>42</sup> Shen, Hanyang, Cecilia Magnusson, Dheeraj Rai, Michael Lundberg, Félice Lê-Scherban, Christina Dalman and Brian K. Lee. "Associations of Parental Depression With Child School Performance at Age 16 Years in Sweden." *JAMA Psychiatry*, Vol. 73. No. 3. (2016)
- <sup>43</sup> See, for example, Cutler and Lleras-Muney. 2008. "Education and Health: Evaluating Theories and Evidence." In *Making Americans Healthier: Social and Economic Policy as Health Policy*. (New York: Russell Sage Foundation; 2008) and Kaestner, Schiman and Ward. 2020. "Education and Health Over the Life Cycle." *Economics of Education Review*. Vol. 76. (2020)
- <sup>44</sup> As of December 16, 2020, the cumulative COVID case rate in high-poverty counties was 27% higher than in low-poverty counties; the cumulative death rate was 54% higher. High-poverty is defined by the CDC as rates above 17.3%, low-poverty as rates below 12.3%. Source: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. CDC COVID Data Tracker (Accessed January 27, 2021)
- <sup>45</sup> 28% of Black adults and 25% of Hispanic or Latino adults in households with children aged 0-17 reported their household sometimes or often did not have enough food to eat in the past seven days, compared to 13% of white families. 60% of Black adults and 56% of Hispanic or Latino adults in households with children aged 0-17 reported it has been somewhat or very difficult for the household to pay for usual household expenses, compared to 37% of white families. 17% of Black adults and 14% of Hispanic or Latino adults living in households with at least one child attending public, private or home school for kindergarten through 12th grade reported that internet and a computer or digital device are not usually or always available to children for educational purposes, compared to 10% of white families.
- <sup>46</sup> The Annie E. Casey Foundation. KIDS COUNT Data Center. (Accessed January 21, 2021)
- <sup>47</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>48</sup> 28% of Black renter households and 24% of Hispanic renter households are behind on their rent, compared to 12% of white renter households.
- <sup>49</sup> As of December 31, 2020, the cumulative case rate in rural (i.e., non-metro) areas was 6,625 (per 100,000 population), compared to 6,032 in urban (i.e., non-metro) areas. The cumulative death rate in rural areas was 115 per 100,000 and 104 per 100,000 in urban areas. Source: CDC's COVID Data Tracker. (Accessed January 25, 2021)
- <sup>50</sup> Save the Children's analysis of COVID county data for December 31, 2020 from USAFacts.org and Rural-Urban Continuum Codes from USDA Economic Research Service.
- <sup>51</sup> USDA. *Rural America at a Glance: 2020 Edition*. (2020)
- <sup>52</sup> NPR, The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation and Harvard's T.H. Chan School of Public Health. *The Impact of Coronavirus on Households in Rural America*. (2020)
- <sup>53</sup> See endnote 10.
- <sup>54</sup> In 2019, when asked "which best describes your ability to pay all of your bills in full this month," 22% of respondents with children under age 18 said they "can't pay some bills." This corresponds to about 8.2 million families. In late December 2020, 45% of adults living with children – some 17 million families – reported it had been somewhat or very difficult for the household to pay for usual expenses in the past week, including but not limited to food, rent or mortgage, car payments, medical expenses and student loans – roughly double the rate in 2019. This was also 40% higher than the share of adults in households without children who reported it had been somewhat or very difficult to pay for expenses in December 2020 (32%). Sources: Federal Reserve, SHED 2019, U.S. Census Bureau, Household Pulse Survey, Week 21 and U.S. Census Bureau, *America's Families and Living Arrangements: 2020*, Table H2.
- <sup>55</sup> In late April 2020, 11.1% of adults in households with children said they did not have enough food before the pandemic. In December 2020, 18.3% of adults in households with children said they did not have enough food in the last week – a 65% increase. The food scarcity rate for adults in households without children in December 2020 was 10.8%. Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Household Pulse Survey, Weeks 1 and 21.
- <sup>56</sup> 47% of adults living in households with at least one child in K-12th grade who sometimes or often did not have enough food to eat before March 13, 2020, say internet is not always available to their children for educational purposes, compared to 22% of adults in households with school-aged children who had enough food before the pandemic. Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Household Pulse Survey, Week 21.
- <sup>57</sup> 57% of adults in renter households where someone has experienced a loss of employment income since March report they are somewhat or very likely to be evicted in the next two months, compared to 31% of respondents in renter households that have not lost income. Note: These estimates are for respondents who are not current on rental payments and are for all households, not only households with children. Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Household Pulse Survey, Week 21.
- <sup>58</sup> American Academy of Pediatrics and the Children's Hospital Association. *Children and COVID-19: State Data Report*. Version: 12/31/20 (2020)
- <sup>59</sup> CDC COVID DATA Tracker. (Accessed December 31, 2020)
- <sup>60</sup> S. Chandra, et al. *Closing the K-12 Digital Divide in the Age of Distance Learning*.
- <sup>61</sup> Jessen-Howard, Steven and Simon Workman. *Coronavirus Pandemic Could Lead to Permanent Loss of Nearly 4.5 Million Child Care Slots*. (Center for American Progress: 2020)
- <sup>62</sup> Bishop-Josef, Sandra, Chris Beakey, Sara Watson and Tom Garrett. *Want to Grow the Economy? Fix the Child Care Crisis. Workers and Employers Feel Pain in Pockets and Productivity*. (Council for a Strong America: 2018)
- <sup>63</sup> Puma, Michael, Stephen Bell, Ronna Cook and Camilla Heid. *Head Start Impact Study: Final Report*. (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services: 2010)
- <sup>64</sup> U.S. Department of Agriculture. *Food Security in the U.S.: Key Statistics & Graphics*.
- <sup>65</sup> Bauer, Lauren. *The COVID-19 Crisis Has Already Left Too Many Children Hungry in America*. (Brookings: 2020)
- <sup>66</sup> 9 of the top 10 and 93 of the top 100 counties with the highest projected 2020 child food insecurity rates are rural. Overall, child food insecurity rates in rural areas are projected to exceed those in urban areas (27% vs. 24%). Source: Save the Children's analysis of C. Gundersen, et al. *The Impact of the Coronavirus on Food Insecurity in 2020, Update October 2020*.
- <sup>67</sup> Childhood means more than just the time between birth and adulthood. It refers to the state and condition of a child's life – to the quality of those years. As the most widely endorsed human rights treaty in history, the Convention on the Rights of the Child, adopted by the UN General Assembly in 1989 and ratified by all but one country, represents a global consensus on the terms of childhood. Although there is not absolute agreement on the interpretation of each and every provision of the Convention, there is substantial common ground on what the standards of childhood should be. Source: UNICEF. *The State of the World's Children 2005*.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Photo: Shawn Millsaps



*Children in South Carolina wait in the car at a Save the Children distribution of food and essential household items.*

This report was directed and written by Tracy Geoghegan from Save the Children. The researchers were Beryl Levinger and Nikki Gillette. Special thanks to Roy Chrobocinski, Sara Luciano and Jeremy Soulliere for substantive inputs. Thanks also to Joe Ansah, Shannon Hubler, Lois Jensen, Maribel Paredes and Victoria Zegler for production and editorial support. Design by Alison Wilkes.



Save the Children believes every child deserves a future. Since our founding over 100 years ago, we've changed the lives of over 1 billion children. In the United States and around the world, we give children a healthy start in life, the opportunity to learn and protection from harm. We do whatever it takes for children – every day and in times of crisis – transforming their lives and the future we share.

Save the Children  
501 Kings Highway East,  
Suite 400  
Fairfield, Connecticut 06825

899 North Capital Street, NE  
Suite 900  
Washington, D.C. 20002

1 (800) 728-3843  
[savethechildren.org](https://www.savethechildren.org)



#### ON THE COVER

*5-year-old Aleeah outside of her school in eastern Tennessee. Aleeah is on a modified schedule due to COVID-19 and only attends school on Mondays and Tuesdays.*

Photo: Shawn Millsaps