



# THE KEENE SENTINEL



Inside

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## Kids Count 2022

### NH ranks second for children's well-being

But depression and anxiety on the rise

By **ETHAN DeWITT**  
N.H. Bulletin

New Hampshire is the second best state for overall child well-being in the country, a four-year national survey released this week has found.

The survey, known as the 2022 Kids Count Data-book and conducted by the Annie E. Casey Foundation, offers other positive indicators for the state: Kids in New Hampshire are ranked fourth highest in terms of economic well-being, fourth highest for education, and second highest for health.

But the comparatively high rankings don't mean that the mental health of Granite State children is in great shape. In fact, between 2016 and 2020, the last year in which children were surveyed, the percentage of children ages 3 to 17 who reported having anxiety or depression rose in New Hampshire from 14.4 percent to 18.4 percent, a 27.8 percent increase, the report says.

And because the survey captured children and families between 2016 and 2020, the data doesn't account for all increases in mental health challenges for children since the outbreak of COVID-19.

Since the start of the pandemic, there has been a sharp increase in the number of children waiting for one of the state's 16 inpatient psychiatric treatment beds for youth. In May 2021, the number reached 30. There were 10 waiting Wednesday, according to the Department of Health and Human Services' tracker.

Advocates in the state say the picture for kids

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### Police may help to ease Winchester St. traffic during roundabout work

By **HUNTER OBERST**  
Sentinel Staff

Following several complaints of drivers experiencing significant delays exiting Riverside Plaza as the city builds a roundabout at Winchester Street and Key Road, Keene officials are looking to employ new methods to ease vehicle congestion at the intersection.

Brett Rusnock, project manager, said the city's contractor, BUR Construction LLC, had been completing drainage work along the northern curb line of Winchester Street near the plaza's exit this past Friday.

This work, which began that morning and wrapped up around 3 p.m., limited what is normally three lanes available to drivers leaving the plaza to just one. Rusnock said the city's public works department received about a half dozen phone calls that day, from people complaining about the traffic.

"One of the reports I received seemed to indicate a 40-minute delay," Rusnock said.

Drivers traveling along Winchester Street were largely unaffected by Friday's construction, he added.

But Elaine Cargill of Spofford, who was traveling north on Winchester Street that day, said she was held up in traffic for 15 minutes. She added that she used to pass through Winchester Street about three or four times a week



Photos by **HANNAH SCHROEDER** / Sentinel Staff

Traffic stretches south and north of the intersection of Winchester Street and Key Road on Wednesday, where the city is building a new roundabout. At top, Ryan St. Pierre of Claremont maps out some of the future water lines.

before construction started last month, but has been avoiding the intersection.

"Since this has started, I try to come once or less; I try to use West Street if I can," she said Wednesday, while standing by her parked car at Riverside Plaza.

She said she's worried traffic will only get worse with school starting soon.

So is Frank Beaupre of Troy. "I think there's going to be

problems," he said. "This is a very congested area for everything."

With construction expected to continue until late November or early December, Keene resident Christy Bergeron said she thinks traffic delays could also be exacerbated by travelers and shoppers during the holidays.

Rusnock, the project manager, said the city is considering using

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### State eyes water assistance for areas of drought

By **TIM NAIL**  
Sentinel Staff

Temperatures may be on the decline in New Hampshire after a prolonged heat wave, but nearly all of the state remains in a drought, which could prove detrimental to residential wells.

To help alleviate the financial impact of the drought to people of low income, the N.H. Department of Environmental Services has introduced an assistance program to provide short-term relief and help cover costs of repairing or replacing these wells. The department announced the program, Water Assistance for Natural Disaster Impacts to Low-Income Residential Well Owners, or WAND, on Monday.

"Through our Drinking Water and Groundwater Trust Fund, N.H. has invested nearly \$2 million to provide assistance to scores of low-income homeowners whose wells have been affected by drought," Gov. Chris Sununu said in a news release.

The WAND program is primarily funded by a \$500,000 grant from the trust fund, the news release said. John Pasquale, project manager of DES' MTBE Remediation Bureau, said the money in the fund ultimately traces back to the state's lawsuit against ExxonMobil that was decided in 2013. The N.H. Supreme Court case centered around the contamination of groundwater with the gasoline additive MTBE, with the state government winning \$236 million through the decision.

"In February, the DWGTF approved the WAND initiative with \$500,000," Pasquale said in an email



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### Former nurse charged with pilfering opioids from Alice Peck Day hospital



# Keene may use police to help ease Winchester St. roundabout project traffic

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police officers to override traffic signals at the intersection and help reduce delays. Normally, those stop lights work on fixed time intervals, but officers at the scene could control the lights to adjust to traffic patterns.

"They could make [a green light] go longer for those leaving Riverside Plaza," Rusnock said.

Officers would be employed only as needed, he added, during peak times

when traffic might be slowed significantly.

Cargill said she thinks using officers to override the stop lights would help.

Bergeron said she'd appreciate any relief to traffic.

The roundabout to replace the signalized intersection is one of two being planned for Winchester Street. The other will be at the intersection of Island and Pearl streets, City Engineer Donald Lussier told The Sentinel in June. He said construction on that roundabout is expected to

begin next spring. Estimated as of June 9 at about \$10.7 million, and also including the reconstruction of the Island Street Bridge, the N.H. Department of Transportation will fund about 80 percent of the project, with the city covering the remaining costs.

The city expects the roundabout currently being built will reduce traffic delays at the intersection from an average of about 54.8 seconds on weekday evenings and 81 seconds on Saturdays at midday to

about 16.7 seconds and 23.8 seconds, respectively.

According to the Insurance Institute for Highway Safety, roundabouts improve traffic flow and are safer than intersections, since roundabouts make head-on collisions unlikely.

A 2004 study by the New York State Department of Transportation found that roundabouts can decrease injury-related accidents by 70-80 percent, and decrease all accidents by about 47 percent.

But drivers The Sentinel interviewed at Riverside

Plaza Wednesday aren't convinced another roundabout was the best option for Keene.

Cargill thinks adding one at Winchester Street and Key Road, so close to the existing one to the south, will confuse drivers and could lead to more vehicle accidents.

Bergeron agreed.

"I think it might be too many roundabouts," she said. "I definitely think there will be some more accidents because people don't really know who has the right-of-way in a rotary."

"Not another one, no," said Ed Sikoski of Winchester. "I don't like it, nope, I'm against it. I think these roundabouts are horrible; I think we already have enough of them here."

Rusnock said that in the near future, the city's contractor is expected to install

a drainage pipe running across the Riverside Plaza exit. He added that this work will be done in phases to allow vehicles to pass through. The work has not been scheduled yet, but the installation will likely start on the southern side of the entrance, toward Rite Aid.

Traffic along Winchester Street was diverted to the west side of the street (the Key Road side) starting July 11, when work began on the east side of the street. This traffic pattern is expected to continue for a couple months before work begins on the opposite side.

Rusnock wanted to thank the public for their patience through construction.

"We know it's an inconvenience, and I hope ultimately the work will lead to a better product," he said.

## New Hampshire ranked second for child well-being

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remains troubling.

"We know that it was a trend going up into 2020," said Emma Sevigny, the children's behavioral health policy coordinator for New Futures, a New Hampshire health advocacy group that partnered with the Casey Foundation to help administer the surveys. "And we know that the pandemic has only compounded that. So even though the data

necessarily doesn't show that, it still is understood that there's a mental health epidemic going on."

The Kids Count survey shows some areas of improvement for New Hampshire kids and some areas of stagnation or decline. Nine percent of children in New Hampshire were in poverty in 2020, compared to 11 percent in 2016. The number of high school students not graduating on time fell from 14 percent to 12 percent between

2011 and 2019. Teen births per 1,000 females fell from 16 in 2010 to seven in 2020. The number of children without health insurance fell from 5 percent to 3 percent.

But the number of 4th-graders not proficient in reading rose from 59 percent in 2009 to 62 percent in 2019. The number of children between 10 and 17 who were overweight or obese rose from 24 percent in 2017 to 27 percent in 2020. The percentage of young children ages 3 to 4 who did not attend preschool in 2020 was still 46 percent, only a percentage point lower than in 2012. And the number of children whose parents lack secure employment fell only one percentage point between 2012 and 2020, from 23 percent to 22 percent.

For many of those metrics, despite only modest changes in the past decade, New Hampshire exceeded the national average.

In a statement, Gov. Chris Sununu hailed the top-line rankings, arguing that the state's "investments in mental health and public education have delivered results for children and families across the 603."

"With top rankings in economic well-being, best education, and best health too, these rankings all make one thing clear: New Hampshire is the best state in the country for families."

Sevigny also gave credit to programs the state has set up to improve conditions for two of New Hampshire's most persistent problems:

a 603 area code should call 1-833-710-6477). But Sevigny said New Futures is continuing to press lawmakers and state officials to support further expansions of children's mental health systems by extending the state's Medicaid expansion law, which is set to expire in 2023, and providing further funding to the 988 program and child care scholarship programs.

"We don't want the overall rank of No. 2 to mask the real story that there are still a lot of challenges facing all families in New Hampshire," she said.

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