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**Rhode Island KIDS COUNT Makes Data Local at  
'Pawtucket Data in Your Backyard' Event**

*Largest increase in high school graduation rate in the state*

*Decrease in teen birth rate*

*School breakfast participation low; offering breakfast in the classroom recommended*

**Pawtucket, RI, (June 10, 2015)** - Rhode Island KIDS COUNT Policy Analyst Stephanie Geller presented data from the *2015 Rhode Island Kids Count Factbook* to an audience of community leaders and policy makers. The *Pawtucket Data in Your Backyard* presentation included highlights of improvements and declines in the well-being of children and youth in Pawtucket. After the presentation, audience members discussed opportunities to improve outcomes for children in Pawtucket. The presentation was brought to the community in partnership with the Pawtucket School Department Child Opportunity Zone and was held on **Wednesday, June 10, 2015 from 9:30 a.m. to 11:00 a.m. at St. Paul's Episcopal Church**, 50 Park Place, Pawtucket, RI.

Geller welcomed participants, saying, "These Data in Your Backyard presentations provide an opportunity for community members to identify issues that need attention and community-based strategies for improving outcomes for children and families."

**Pawtucket has high rates of poverty and extreme poverty among children**

Although childhood poverty exists in every Rhode Island community, it is particularly concentrated in the core cities of Pawtucket, Central Falls, Providence, and Woonsocket. In 2014, the federal poverty threshold was \$19,073 for a family of three with two children and \$24,008 for a family of four with two children. More than one-quarter (28.9% or 4,550) of children in Pawtucket live in poverty. Of these, 2,228 children live in extreme poverty (14.2% of all children in Pawtucket). A family is considered to be in extreme poverty if its income is less than half the poverty threshold (\$9,537 for a family of three).

**Improvements in high school graduation rates and disciplinary practices**

Since 2007, Pawtucket's four-year high school graduation rate has experienced the largest increase in the state, increasing from 48% of students graduating in four years in 2007 to 80% in 2014. Pawtucket's four-year high school graduation rate is now comparable to the rate for the state as a whole, which is 81%.

Elizabeth Burke Bryant, Executive Director of Rhode Island KIDS COUNT, congratulated Pawtucket saying, "We are excited to see the great progress Pawtucket has made in increasing the number of students graduating from high school. The district and individual high schools have worked hard to increase the city's graduation rate, focusing on improving the school climate, increasing

attendance, and providing support for students who are identified as at risk for dropping out. Pawtucket's success demonstrates how much progress can be achieved."

Pawtucket is also reducing the number of students who are suspended. During the 2011-2012 school year, Pawtucket had 55 suspensions per 100 students, and the most recent data from the 2013-2014 school year shows that the suspension rate has gone down to only 10 suspensions per 100 students. However, there is still work to be done. The Pawtucket Schools are still using out-of-school suspensions much more than in-school suspensions. Of the 917 suspensions given during the 2013-2014, 99% (905) were out-of-school suspensions and only 1% (12) were in-school suspensions. Improving school discipline and reducing the use of suspensions is a key strategy in improving the high school graduation rate because suspended students are more likely than their peers to experience disengagement from school, academic failure, and dropping out of school.

"Pawtucket has worked hard to improve school disciplinary practices and reduce chronic absence," said Geller. "As a result of these changes and other district practices, Pawtucket has seen more children in their seats ready to learn, and more students graduating from high school on time. Pawtucket's improvements in these areas highlight the connection between improving school climate and increasing high school graduation rates."

### **School Breakfast participation low; offering in the classroom could boost participation**

Students who eat breakfast perform better in school – they have higher math and reading scores, fewer absences, improved attentiveness, and lower incidences of social and emotional problems. Pawtucket is one of five school districts in Rhode Island with a Universal School Breakfast Program, which offers free breakfast to all children regardless of income. Despite universal access, only 29% of low-income children in Pawtucket take part in school breakfast.

"In Rhode Island, 22% of low-income students participated in School Breakfast Programs in schools not offering universal school breakfast or breakfast in the classroom, compared with 32% of low-income students in schools offering universal programs and 82% of low-income students in schools offering both universal programs and breakfast in the classroom. Communities like Providence and Central Falls have been able to increase school breakfast participation rates by offering breakfast in the classroom at the start of the school day, and Pawtucket may be able to increase its participation rate and ensure that more students start their school days with a healthy breakfast by implementing this practice," said Geller.

### **Improvements in several infant outcomes**

The teen birth rate is on the decline across the nation, in Rhode Island, and in Pawtucket. The teen birth rate is measured as the number of births per 1,000 girls ages 15 to 19. While the teen birth rate is higher in Pawtucket than the state as a whole, the teen birth rate in Pawtucket is moving in the right direction. The five-year average teen birth rate in Pawtucket declined 35% between 2005-2009 and 2009-2013, from 57.7 births per 1,000 teen girls to 37.5.

### **Increased rates of child abuse and neglect**

Pawtucket is experiencing an increase in the child abuse and neglect rate. In 2014, there were 387 victims of child abuse and neglect in Pawtucket (a rate of 23.3 victims per 1,000 children), up from a rate of 17.2 victims per 1,000 children in 2010. Pawtucket had the fifth highest rate of child abuse and neglect victims in Rhode Island in 2014. This includes physical, sexual, and emotional abuse, as well as emotional, educational, physical, and medical neglect. Providing access to child care, early childhood learning programs, and evidence-based home visiting programs to families with multiple risk factors can prevent the occurrence and recurrence of child abuse and neglect.

*Rhode Island KIDS COUNT is a statewide children's policy organization that works to improve the Economic well-being, health, safety, education and development of Rhode Island children.*