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## Rhode Island KIDS COUNT to release new *Issue Brief: Preventing Bullying in Rhode Island Schools*

Providence, RI (December 6, 2016): Rhode Island KIDS COUNT will release their newest publication, *Preventing Bullying in Rhode Island Schools* at a policy roundtable on Tuesday, December 6, 2016, from 11:30 a.m. – 1:00 p.m. at Rhode Island KIDS COUNT, One Union Station, Providence, RI.

Featured speakers will include Elizabeth Burke Bryant, Executive Director of Rhode Island KIDS COUNT; Karen Davis, Senior Vice President Global Philanthropy & Social Impact at Hasbro, Inc.; Ken Wagner, Commissioner, Rhode Island Department of Education; Patti DiCenso, Superintendent, Pawtucket School Department; Thomas DiPaola, Director, Educational Leadership Program at Johnson & Wales and Washington County Coalition for Children; Patrick Cozzolino, School Social Worker, Westerly Middle School and Washington County Coalition for Children; and Janet Pichardo, Director of Family & Community Engagement, Providence Public Schools. Rhode Island KIDS COUNT Policy Analysts James Beasley and Kara Foley will share the *Issue Brief* findings.

Educators, policy makers, state agencies, and community members will gather at the policy roundtable to discuss bullying in Rhode Island, as well as bullying prevention strategies for Rhode Island schools.

### How Bullying Adversely Impacts Children

Bullying behavior is a social, educational, and health problem that affects many children and adolescents in Rhode Island and the U.S. Bullying behavior has a negative impact on all involved, including the victim, the perpetrator, and bystanders:

- **Students who bully** are likely to engage in other risky behaviors, such as substance use, or exhibit anti-social conduct and poor school adjustment.
- **Victims of bullying** may experience physical injury, heightened stress, sleep disturbances, depression, anxiety, and low self-esteem, and are at risk of poor academic achievement, absenteeism, and forms of aggression. The long-term consequences of being bullied can be more severe than other forms of child maltreatment.
- **Both victims and perpetrators** of bullying are more likely to contemplate or attempt suicide.
- **Bystanders** may experience anxiety, fear, and insecurity, which may inhibit their ability to seek help.

***For the spectrum of bullying and specific types of bullying, please see the charts on page 2 of the Issue Brief.***

“Because bullying negatively impacts children now, and into their future, it’s critical that we have both short-term and long-term strategies to prevent, identify, and address bullying behavior,” said Elizabeth Burke Bryant, Executive Director of Rhode Island KIDS COUNT. “This will require the consistent and sustained efforts of educators, school administrators, parents, health care providers, families, and policymakers to ensure that Rhode Island children are safe from bullying.”

### **Who Experiences Bullying?**

- While national and state estimates of bullying prevalence vary, there is consensus that bullying behavior is a serious issue that is experienced by children and youth of all ages. In Rhode Island between 2009-2010 and 2013-2014 students at every grade level reported experiencing at least one form of bullying in the past 12 months.
- In 2015, 16% of Rhode Island high school students reported currently being bullied on school property and 12% reported currently being cyberbullied. More than one-third (38%) of Rhode Island middle school students reported ever being bullied on school property and 21% reported ever being electronically bullied.
- Rhode Island elementary school students have reported significant declines in being bullied from 63% in 2009-2010 to 47% in 2013-2014.
- Middle school students in Rhode Island report having the highest rates of being bullied than any other grade level, but rates decreased from 61% in 2011-2012 to 57% in 2013-2014.
- In Rhode Island in 2013, 45% of high school students report being bullied, a decline from 51% in 2011-2012.
- Forty-two percent (42%) of high school students in the four core cities report bullying in the past 12 months, lower than their peers in the remainder of the state (49%) in 2013-2014.
- Specific student subgroup populations are at increased risk of being bullied, including youth who are lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT); youth with physical, emotional and/or learning disabilities; and youth who are overweight.

### **Race & Ethnicity**

- While there is no consistent evidence that any one ethnic group is more or less likely to be the target of bullying, bullying behavior and related forms of peer victimization can be due to bias and discrimination.
- National research shows that children of any racial or ethnic background are at increased risk for bullying if a majority of their peers are of another racial or ethnic background. Racially and ethnically diverse schools may reduce rates of bullying behavior because no one racial or ethnic group is dominant.
- Nationally and in Rhode Island in 2015, White, non-Hispanic high school students report higher rates of being bullied on school property than their Hispanic or Black, non-Hispanic peers.

### **School Climate**

- Bullying often occurs at school—the physical setting in which most of childhood is centered and the primary source for peer group formation.
- School climate refers to student perceptions of factors such as student-teacher engagement, quality of peer interactions, and family support. School climate defines the character and quality of school life as well as shared beliefs about acceptable and unacceptable behaviors.

- School climate is also associated with bullying. Schools with strong disciplinary structure and consistent student support report a lower prevalence of bullying behaviors. Students in schools with high levels of perceived support from both teachers and school administrators are more likely to report bullying. Schools with a negative school climate are more likely to report higher rates of school avoidance, behavior problems including bullying, school suspensions and lower student achievement.

“First and foremost, our responsibility as educators is to ensure that our schools are safe and secure places for teaching and learning,” said Ken Wagner, Commissioner of the Rhode Island Department of Education. “To achieve that goal, we need to ensure that all of our schools are committed to creating a culture in which all children matter. There is no single program or strategy that in itself will end bullying. Our schools and school districts need to bring a diverse group of people to the table to find the best solutions and resources to eradicate bullying in their communities.”

### **Bullying Prevention Programming in Rhode Island**

Many school-based prevention programs have been developed but more evaluation needs to be performed to maximize outcomes. Multi-component programs appear to be most effective at minimizing incidents of bullying and should be implemented throughout the U.S.

**Pawtucket School District:** In 2015, the Pawtucket School Department and the City of Pawtucket began their partnership with *No Bully*, an anti-bullying non-profit. Pawtucket was the first school district in New England to adopt a district-wide *No Bully* program, with funding from the Hasbro Children's Fund.

Employees from all 17 district schools, including 800 teachers and 200 staff members, were jointly trained in the *No Bully* program principles and took an oath to champion and cultivate this effort daily. In Pawtucket, each school creates and enacts its own unique culture of *No Bully*. Schools designate student ambassadors, create solution teams to address problems, and incorporate bullying prevention activities, communications, and events into their daily schedule. Workshops for parents are also offered in which student-led anti-bully content is featured as a means to advance kindness in the community.

In Pawtucket, the number of acts of bullying district-wide has decreased from 59 in the 2015 school year to 20 in the 2016 school year, which is the first year *No Bully* was in effect. In addition to the reductions, the manner in which bullying was addressed changed during that time as well to reflect the *No Bully* principles.

“In Pawtucket, we had an unprecedented opportunity to have a district-wide, school by school *No Bully* effort that has engaged all of our teachers, principals, staff and students to create and maintain peaceful, positive school communities. The success of the program comes from the targeted training of social emotional learning and bullying prevention. Each school takes ownership of their *No Bully* model through school wide consensus and daily practice to create a positive, safe school experience for all students and staff,” said Patti DiCenso, Superintendent of Pawtucket Schools.

**South Kingstown and Westerly School-Wide Bullying Prevention Efforts:** In 2011, Curtis Corner Middle School began implementation of the Olweus Bullying Prevention Program (OBPP). The program has since expanded to both middle schools and all four elementary schools in South Kingstown. Westerly Middle School began implementing OBPP in 2012. In both South Kingstown

and Westerly, OBPP is integrated into the district Positive Behavioral Intervention and Supports (PBIS) systems, which are designed to foster positive social culture, provide individualized behavioral supports, and enable academic success for all students.

Westerly Middle School saw a 14.5% overall reduction in reported bullying between 2012 and 2014. In 2014, 64% of students reported staff and teachers do a “good deal” to reduce bullying in school and 73% reported it is “very important” for adults and students to continue working on bullying prevention.

The Washington County Coalition for Children, the region’s child advocacy organization, works with local schools to support OBPP implementation and to raise community awareness and foster civic engagement around bullying prevention beyond the school walls. The Coalition has developed lesson plan toolkits to support classroom meetings, developed recommended middle and high school book lists to reinforce bullying prevention best practices for use in schools and local libraries, conducted bullying prevention trainings using OBPP curriculum for parents, community groups, and afterschool/camp staff, and organized Chalk It Up Against Bullying community arts events in local downtowns.

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

*The Issue Brief was developed with support from the Hasbro Children’s Fund, the philanthropic arm of Rhode Island-based global play and entertainment company Hasbro, Inc. (NASDAQ: HAS), as part of its recently announced [BE FEARLESS BE KIND](#) initiative designed to inspire and empower kids to have the compassion, empathy and the courage to stand up for others and be inclusive throughout their lives. Learn more at [www.BeFearlessBeKind.org](http://www.BeFearlessBeKind.org).*