



RHODE ISLAND KIDS COUNT
ONE UNION STATION
PROVIDENCE, RHODE ISLAND 02903
401/351-9400 • 401/351-1758 (RAJ)

Information is embargoed until 12:01 a.m. on Monday, October 23, 2017.

Contact: Katherine Linwood Chu, Communications Manager

401.351.9400, Ext. 22 / kchu@rikidscount.org

Rhode Island KIDS COUNT, in Partnership with Young Voices Releases Results of Student Focus Groups on Student-Centered Learning

The report provides youth perspectives on what teaching and learning looks like in schools, what experiences students have had with more student-centered approaches to learning, and how schools could better engage students and prepare them for success in college and careers.

Providence, RI (October 20, 2017): Rhode Island KIDS COUNT, in partnership with Young Voices, will release a new publication *Engaging Students in Their Own Learning: Rhode Island Youth Perspectives*, at a policy roundtable on Monday, October 23, 2017, from 3:30 p.m. – 5:00 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 and Ken Wagner, Commissioner of Elementary and Secondary Education. Stephanie Geller, Senior Policy Analyst at Rhode Island KIDS COUNT will present findings from the report with Amelia Lopez and Jorge Soto, Youth Members of Young Voices.

All information provided in this report is based on the results of six focus groups and represents the views of 56 students at seven public high schools in Central Falls, Pawtucket, and Providence, Rhode Island. The report provides youth perspectives on what teaching and learning looks like in schools currently, what experiences students have had with more student centered approaches to learning, and how schools could better engage students in their own learning and prepare them for success in college and careers.

Student-Centered Learning: Why it Matters for Students' Success

Student-centered learning incorporates students' skills and interests into the learning process and engages students in their own success. Adopting student-centered learning practices at the high school level can help students develop meaningful relationships with adults inside and outside of school, increase engagement and achievement for students from a variety of backgrounds, and ensure that students graduate from high school with important social and emotional skills that are essential for success in college and careers.

Rhode Island's policies and statewide strategic plan for education were developed to support student-centered learning, but must be followed with strong implementation.

"Students perform at their best when they are engaged in their coursework, excited about school, and can see how what they're learning relates to their futures," said Ken Wagner, Commissioner of Elementary and Secondary Education. "We're committed to putting students at the center of education, and building a personalized approach that empowers

every young person in every community to access challenging, work-based, hands-on learning opportunities that will prepare them for the future.”

Collecting Student Voices: Engaging Youth in All Aspects of this Project

For this report, Rhode Island KIDS COUNT partnered with Young Voices, a youth empowerment organization that teaches youth to understand policy issues, think strategically, speak out and lead, and ultimately achieve success in high school, college, and life. Together, Rhode Island KIDS COUNT and Young Voices planned and conducted a series of six focus groups with students at seven urban public high schools in Rhode Island to get their perspectives about what teaching and learning looks like in their schools currently and what experiences they have had with more “student-centered” approaches to learning.

Students were involved in every aspect of this project, from beginning to end. Authentic youth involvement in research ensures that student responses are truly understood and that conclusions and recommendations reflect students’ lived experiences and priorities.

Research that focuses on student voice provides school, district, and state decision makers with knowledge and perspectives about what happens in school could not be obtain any other way.

“Rhode Island has strong policies and a statewide strategic plan that supports student-centered learning, but, as we know, policies are only as strong as their implementation,” said Rhode Island KIDS COUNT Senior Policy Analyst Stephanie Geller. “We conducted this study, in partnership with Young Voices, to get a snapshot of what students were actually experiencing in schools and how these policies are currently being implemented.”

“We students are the only ones who know what it’s like to actually be in the classrooms every day,” said Jorge Soto, an 11th grade student and Board Member of Young Voices. “How can policymakers know if the policies they create are being implemented the way they intended, if they don’t hear from the people who are impacted by those policies on a daily basis? Our perspective needs to be included if policies are to be effective at improving our lives.”

Moving Forward with Student-Centered Learning in Rhode Island

The report includes recommendations for promoting the use of student-centered learning policies and practices.

“Ensuring that all Rhode Island students have the opportunities for student-centered learning needed to be successful in college and careers will require the complementary and sustained efforts of a variety of stakeholders, including policymakers, state education officials, district and school administrators, teachers and school personnel, parents, and students,” said Rhode Island KIDS COUNT Executive Director Elizabeth Burke Bryant.

###

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.