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

*Virtual event will highlight improvements and declines in the economic well-being, education, health, child welfare, and safety of Newport's children*

**Newport, RI (October 6, 2020)** – Newport community members will have the opportunity to learn about the well-being of local children and families through the annual *Data in Your Backyard* presentation. At the virtual event, Rhode Island KIDS COUNT Deputy Director Stephanie Geller will lead a data-driven discussion on the well-being of Newport children and families. The presentation's data comes from the [2020 Rhode Island Kids Count Factbook](#), and includes improvements and declines in economic well-being, education, health, child welfare, and safety.

The *Newport Data in Your Backyard* event is brought to the community in collaboration with Newport Partnership for Families and BankNewport and will be held via Zoom on Tuesday, October 6, 2020, from 9:00 am to 10:30 am. [Please click here to access the event.](#)

Event speakers will include:

- Kathleen Charbonneau, Vice President and Director of Community Relations at BankNewport
- Kathleen Burke, Executive Director of Newport Partnership for Families
- Thomas Brendler, Senior Program Officer at van Beuren Charitable Foundation
- Elizabeth Burke Bryant, Executive Director at Rhode Island KIDS COUNT
- Stephanie Geller, Deputy Director at Rhode Island KIDS COUNT

Improvements and declines discussed at the *Data in Your Backyard* presentation include:

### **Newport has a high percentage of low-income children**

Nearly one in four (23.3%) Newport children are living in families in poverty. In 2019, the federal poverty threshold was \$20,598 for a family of three with two children and \$25,926 for a family of four with two children. According to the *2018 Rhode Island Standard of Need*, it costs a single-parent family with two young children \$55,115 a year to pay basic living expenses, including housing, food, clothing, child care, and health care.

Data from schools also indicate that a large proportion of Newport Public Schools students – 68% -- are from low-income families (i.e., eligible for free and reduced-price meals at school). Only Central Falls (91%), Providence (84%), Woonsocket (79%), and Pawtucket (76%) have higher percentages of children who are classified as low-income by the schools and eligible for free and reduced-price meals. (Note: This year, due to COVID-19 and the economic hardships many families are facing, all Rhode Island public schools are able to provide meals – both breakfast and lunch – free to all children and youth ages 18 and younger.)

### **Effects of COVID-19 on Family's Economic Security**

Before the pandemic, 1,175 Newport children received nutrition benefits through the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), 230 children were in families that received RI Works cash assistance benefits, and 82 children were identified as homeless by Newport Public Schools personnel. The *2020 Rhode Island Kids Count Factbook* includes data on child and family well-being before the pandemic. Many more families are struggling

now due to loss of employment or income and will need access to food, housing, and other assistance.

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

Children need love, affection, and nurturing from their parents or caregivers for healthy physical and emotional development. Experiencing child neglect and abuse can have lifelong consequences for a child's health, well-being, and relationships with others.

- In 2019, there were 108 Newport children who were victims of child neglect and abuse, an increase from 93 Newport victims of child abuse and neglect in 2018.
- Newport's reported child neglect and abuse victim rate was 26.5 victims per 1,000 children in 2019, the third highest in the state.

### **Higher Rates of Lead Exposure and Asthma**

- Lead exposure, even at very low levels, can cause irreversible damage, including slowed growth and development, learning disabilities, behavioral problems, and neurological damage. Exposure to lead has been shown to negatively impact academic performance in early childhood. Rhode Island children with a history of lead exposure, even at low levels, have been shown to have decreased reading readiness at kindergarten entry and diminished reading and math proficiency in the third grade. Among Newport children due to enter kindergarten in the fall of 2021, 7.5% have a history of elevated blood levels, higher than the state rate of 4.5%.
- Asthma is one of the most common chronic conditions among children and a leading cause of school absenteeism. Newport's rate of asthma-related emergency department visits was 9.5 per 1,000 children, among the highest in the state with only the rates for Central Falls, Providence, and Woonsocket higher.

### **Head Start and State Pre-K**

- Start and RI Pre-K are two important programs designed to ensure that children have access to the kinds of high-quality preschool programs that help children gain the skills and knowledge they need to be successful in school.
- 34% of all children and 39% of low-income children in Newport were enrolled in either Head Start or State Pre-K during the year before kindergarten.

### **Third-Grade Reading**

- Reading proficiently by the end of third grade is an important indicator -- children who don't meet this benchmark are four times more likely to drop out of high school than their proficient peers. Youth who read below grade level and drop out of high school are more likely to be involved in the juvenile and adult justice systems and to receive public assistance.
- In 2019, 27% of third graders in Newport met expectations in English Language Arts, compared to 48% of all Rhode Island students.

### **Improvements in College Enrollment**

- 62% of Newport students who graduated from high school in the Class of 2018 immediately enrolled in college, up from 50% for the Class of 2017.
- There were also increases statewide with 67% of Rhode Island students who graduated from high school in the Class of 2018 immediately enrolling in college, up from 61% for the Class of 2017.

**For trend data and comparisons to Rhode Island statewide rates, please see [Newport's Community Snapshot](#). All data and information presented at *Newport Data in Your Backyard* is available on Rhode Island KIDS COUNT's website: [www.rikidscount.org](http://www.rikidscount.org).**

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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.*