



RHODE ISLAND KIDS COUNT
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For Immediate Release

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**Rhode Island KIDS COUNT Presents:
*Newport Data in Your Backyard***

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**Newport, RI, October 5, 2010** - Rhode Island KIDS COUNT Policy Analyst, Stephanie Geller, presented data from the *2010 Rhode Island Kids Count Factbook* to an audience of community leaders, parents and policy makers. The presentation included highlights of improvements and declines in the well-being of children and youth in Newport and included comparisons of Newport to other communities with high child poverty rates and the nearby communities of Middletown and Portsmouth. After the presentation, community members discussed opportunities to improve outcomes for children and youth in Newport. The presentation was hosted by the Newport Partnership for Families and was held on **Tuesday, October 5, 2010 from 9:00 a.m. to 10:30 a.m. at the Newport Public Library**, 300 Spring Street, Newport, RI.

“Newport has one of the highest child poverty rates in the state with almost one in four children (24%) living in poverty”, stated Elizabeth Burke Bryant, Executive Director of Rhode Island KIDS COUNT. She noted, “We know that children living in poverty are at less likely to have the opportunities and resources they need to thrive. They are at greater risk for poor health and developmental outcomes. One of the most effective ways to ameliorate the negative, long-term effects of poverty is to provide a high-quality education for children and do what it takes to ensure that all children achieve at high levels.”

## Education

Over the past few years, Newport has made considerable progress in improving academic achievement. From 2005 to 2009, Newport showed improvements in 4<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> grade reading proficiency and 4<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> grade math proficiency. The largest gains were in 8<sup>th</sup> grade reading. From 2005 to 2009, the percentage of eighth graders scoring at or above the proficiency level in reading increased from 50% to 76%. The percentage of Newport eighth graders who are proficient in reading is now higher in Newport (76%) than in the state as a whole (70%). Newport's four-year high school graduation rate has also improved substantially from 60% in 2007 to 75% in 2009 and is now the same as the graduation rate for the state as a whole.

Other highlights of the 2009-2010 school year in Newport include:

- All children in Newport had access to a full-day kindergarten program in the 2009-2010 school year, compared to 60% of children statewide. Full-day kindergarten has been shown to improve academic success, especially for low-income children.
- The rate of fourth graders reading at or above proficiency increased from 46% in 2005 to 53% in 2009, but continued to be lower than the rate for the state as a whole (67%).
- The rate of fourth graders scoring at or above proficiency in math increased from 34% in 2005 to 52% in 2009, compared to the state rate of 62%.
- The rate of eighth graders scoring at or above proficiency in math increased from 39% in 2005 to 44% in 2009, but continued to be lower than the state rate (54%).

"Despite a high child poverty rate, Newport is showing some real improvements in educational outcomes. We know that these gains can grow by continuing to build a school culture that reinforces student success, provides individualized supports for students at the first sign that they are struggling, and reaches out to children and families even before they enter school. We congratulate Newport on the great strides they've made over the past few years and look forward to continued progress," said Stephanie Geller, Policy Analyst at Rhode Island KIDS COUNT.

Two new education indicators in the *2010 Rhode Island KIDS COUNT Factbook* indicate some additional areas for attention. A new indicator reports on *Chronic Early Absence* for each of Rhode Island's school districts and the state as a whole. Chronic early absence is defined as "children in grades K-3 who miss more than 18 days of school in a year." Research shows that chronic absenteeism in the early grades leads to poor reading and math achievement and increases the likelihood of dropping out of high school. In Newport, 16% of children in grades K-

3 were chronically absent in the 2009-2010 school year, compared to 11% of students statewide and nationally.

A new indicator on *College Preparation and Access* shows that Rhode Island youth are less likely to go on to college than youth in the U.S. as a whole. Completion of secondary education is critical to moving families out of poverty, yet many students either do not graduate from high school or graduate from high school unprepared for college entry. In 2006, just over half (55%) of Rhode Island seniors who graduated from high school went directly on to a two-year or four-year college, compared to 62% of seniors nationally. Rhode Island ranks 43<sup>rd</sup> on this measure (1<sup>st</sup> is best). Low-income and first-generation college students are much more likely to go to college when they attend schools with strong “college-going cultures,” where teachers encourage students to go to college, work to make sure students are prepared, and help students with the college application process. In 2008, about two-thirds (62%) of Newport high school seniors reported planning to attend college, compared to 74% in the state as a whole.

### **Teen Pregnancy and Parenting**

Between 2004 and 2008, the teen birth rate for Newport teens ages 15-17 was 24.1 births per 1,000 teen girls in this age group, compared to a rate of 30.2 births per 1,000 younger teens between 2000 and 2004. Despite this progress, Newport’s teen birth rate for younger teen girls ages 15-17 continues to be higher than the Rhode Island state rate of 18.9 births in this age group. “While the teen birth rate in Newport has been declining over the past decade, the number of young teens who are parents continues to cause for concern. Teen pregnancy and parenting threatens the healthy development of the teens as well as their children,” stated Ms. Geller. “Children of teen parents are more likely to live in poverty, enter the foster care system, and drop out of high school than children of mothers who had their first birth after adolescence.”

Teen pregnancy and parenting can be an important risk factor for future involvement with the child welfare system. National research shows that 80% of families in the child welfare system had their first child as a teenager. Ms. Geller continued, “Teen pregnancy prevention is best addressed by using multiple approaches that meet the developmental needs of teens, make sure youth are engaged in school, provide opportunities to build career and leadership skills, and offer accurate information about and increased access to reproductive health care services.”

## **Safety**

Preventing child abuse and neglect is critical to helping children grow into strong, healthy productive adults and good parents. In 2009 in Rhode Island, almost half (47%) of the victims of child abuse and neglect were young children under age six and more than one-third (34%) were age three and younger. In Newport, there were 90 victims of child abuse and neglect in 2009, a rate of 17.3 per 1,000 children, substantially higher than the state rate of 11.7 per 1,000 children.

A new indicator, *Youth Violence*, showed that during the 2007-2008 school year, 12% of Rhode Island public high school students reported ever experiencing violence in schools and 13% reported ever bringing a weapon to school. In comparison, in Newport, 12% of students reported ever experiencing violence and 15% of students reported ever bringing a weapon to school. Violence in schools affects individual victims and also disrupts the functioning of entire schools. Lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender youth, youth with disabilities and youth with low grades (Ds and Fs) in Rhode Island are more likely than their peers to report being threatened or injured at school and to miss school because they felt unsafe.

## **Economic Well-Being**

Newport continues to have a high child poverty rate. According to the U.S. Census Bureau, in 2000, almost one-quarter (24% or 1,267 children) of the children in Newport lived in families with incomes below the poverty threshold. More than one-half of these children (773) were living in extreme poverty, which is defined as having a household income less than half the poverty line. In 2009, the federal poverty threshold was \$17,285 for a family of three with two children and \$21,756 for a family of four with two children. The extreme poverty level was \$8,643 for a family of three with two children and \$10,878 for a family of four with two children.

The Rhode Island Works Program serves as a critical safety net for children living in poverty, helping families transition to work by providing cash assistance and work supports, including subsidized child care, to families in need. In December 2009, more than two-thirds (67%) of the people who benefitted from Rhode Island Works were children under the age of 18, and more than half (54%) of those children were under age six. Since 1996, Rhode Island cash assistance caseloads have declined by 61%. In December 2009, 6% (336) of Newport children were receiving cash assistance, down from 10% in 2005.

Research shows that hunger and lack of regular access to sufficient food are linked to serious health, psychological, emotional and academic problems in children and can impede their healthy growth and development. In 2009, 1,202 Newport children were enrolled in the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), up 36% from 2005. Although smaller numbers of children in nearby Middletown and Portsmouth were enrolled in SNAP, these communities saw even larger increases – 163% in Middletown and 160% in Portsmouth.

In October 2009, an average of 393 (31%) low-income children in Newport participated in the School Breakfast Program each day out of 1,253 who were eligible for free or reduced-price meals. Six school districts in Rhode Island offer Universal School Breakfast in all schools. Schools that offer free breakfast to all children regardless of income increase breakfast participation and can reduce administrative costs. Offering a Universal School Breakfast Program and providing breakfast in the classroom at the start of the school day are two strategies that could help increase participation in Newport.

## **Health**

Data from the *2010 Rhode Island Kids Count Factbook* reveal that Newport has made progress in several areas of child health and development over the past decade; however, there is still more work to be done to ensure that Newport's children grow up healthy.

- In recent years, the percentage of Newport mothers receiving delayed prenatal care has decreased from 13.4% in 2000-2004 to 11.5% in 2004-2008. During this same period, the percentage of Rhode Island mothers as a whole receiving delayed prenatal care actually increased from 9.1% to 14.0%. Early prenatal care is important to identify and treat health problems and influence health behaviors that can compromise fetal development, infant health and maternal health.
- The percentage of Newport children who enter kindergarten with a history of elevated blood levels has also been decreasing. Between 2005 and 2009, the percentage decreased from 13.6% to 3.5%. In the most recent year of testing, 340 Newport children were screened for elevated blood lead levels. Of these children, 12 screened positive initially, and only 4 were confirmed positive.

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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.