



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Contact:

Amy Lanctot, Communications Coordinator
401-351-9400, Ext. 22 / alanctot@rikidscount.org



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

Newport's high school graduation rate increased 21% from 2007 to 2011 and is now higher than the statewide graduation rate

Chronic absenteeism among Newport students remains among the highest in the state

Newport has the highest rate of child abuse and neglect in Rhode Island

~~~

**Newport, RI (October 2, 2012)** – Community leaders, policy makers and parents learned about the well-being of children and families in Newport today. Stephanie Geller, Policy Analyst for Rhode Island KIDS COUNT, presented data from the *2012 Rhode Island Kids Count Factbook*. The *Data in Your Backyard* presentation, which took place at the Newport Public Library, 300 Spring Street in Newport, included highlights of improvements and declines in the well-being of children and youth in Newport. After the presentation, community members discussed opportunities to improve outcomes for Newport children. The presentation was brought to the community in collaboration with the Newport Partnership for Families.

**Children living in poverty in Newport**

The U.S. Census Bureau's 2010 Decennial Census did not collect data on income as it has in previous years, so the most recent and reliable childhood poverty data available for cities and towns in Rhode Island is from the U.S. Census Bureau's American Community Survey (ACS). The ACS is an annual survey of a sample of the population (not a true count as in the decennial Census), providing an estimate of the percentage of children in poverty. According to the ACS, between 2006 and 2010, an estimated 14.4% of children in Newport lived in poverty. Newport's child poverty rate is higher than neighboring

Middletown (12.2%) and Portsmouth (5.6%), but lower than the state rate (16.7%) and the core city rate (33.7%). The four core cities (Central Falls, Pawtucket, Providence and Woonsocket) have the highest child poverty rates.

### **Expanding the school breakfast program could increase participation**

In October 2011, an average of 335 low-income children in Newport participated in the School Breakfast Program each day out of 1,190 children who were eligible for free or reduced-price meals, which is 28% of all low-income children in Newport public schools. Universal school breakfast programs provide free breakfast to all children regardless of income and are beneficial because they increase participation and decrease administrative costs.

“Free- and reduced-price breakfast is available at all Newport schools, but only some of the city’s schools offer it to all students, regardless of income,” stated Stephanie Geller, Policy Analyst for Rhode Island KIDS COUNT. “The district could increase participation by expanding the universal program to all schools and by offering breakfast in the classroom, as they do in Central Falls and Providence.”

Students who eat breakfast have higher test scores, fewer absences, improved attentiveness, and fewer behavioral problems than students who do not eat breakfast.

### **Gains made in infant health outcomes**

Newport has been making improvements in multiple indicators of infant health. While the state’s delayed prenatal care rate has been increasing, Newport’s has been decreasing (with higher percentages of Newport women receiving early prenatal care). Nine percent of women in Newport who gave birth between 2006 and 2010 received delayed prenatal care, compared to the state rate of 15.6% during the same time period. From 2001-2005, the previous five-year period, 14.2% of women in Newport received delayed prenatal care.

The city’s infant mortality rate also has improved. From 2006 to 2010, Newport’s infant mortality rate was 4.8 deaths per 1,000 live births, while the state rate was 6.5 deaths per 1,000 live births.

“Newport has been making great strides in improving outcomes for babies,” added Elizabeth Burke Bryant, Executive Director of Rhode Island KIDS COUNT. “Increasing access to evidence-based programs that offer expectant mothers support early in their pregnancies could help even more new moms receive critical care, additional support, and continued education that will improve their lives and the lives of the their children.”

### **The number of teen births in Newport has declined, but remains high**

From 2006 to 2010, Newport had the fifth highest young teen birth rate in the state with 23.9 births per 1,000 girls ages 15-17, compared to the state's young teen birth rate of 17.3 births per 1,000 girls ages 15-17. Newport's teen birth rate for older teens (26.3 births per 1,000 girls ages 18-19) is lower than both the state rate (37.5 births per 1,000 girls ages 18-19) and neighboring Middletown (50.8 births per 1,000 girls ages 18-19).

"Newport can continue to reduce the number of births to teens, especially among young teens, by using a combination of approaches, including ensuring that youth are involved in school, offering career and leadership opportunities and offering information about and access to reproductive health care services," added Geller.

### **City's child abuse and neglect rate is highest in the state**

In 2011, Newport had the highest rate of child abuse and neglect in the state with a rate of 32.1 victims per 1,000 children. In comparison, Rhode Island as a whole had a rate of 14.0 child victims of abuse and neglect per 1,000 children. Other cities with high child abuse and neglect rates in 2011 were West Warwick (29.8), Woonsocket (27.4), Central Falls (23.4), and Pawtucket (21.7).

"Child abuse and neglect can cause children to feel isolated, fearful, and unable to trust, and this is connected to impaired cognition and low academic performance during the teen years," stated Bryant. "Parents at risk of abusing and/or neglecting their children often lack basic parenting skills and are struggling with a combination of social and economic factors. Providing access to child care, early childhood learning programs and offering evidence-based home visiting programs to families with multiple risk factors can prevent child abuse and neglect altogether or stop it from happening again."

### **Absenteeism is a persistent problem among Newport students at all grade levels**

Chronic early absence is the percentage of children in kindergarten through third grade (K-3) who have missed at least 10% of the school year (i.e., 18 days or more), including excused and unexcused absences. During the 2010-2011 school year, 16% (122 children) of Newport children in grades K-3 were chronically absent, higher than the state rate of 12%.

Children who are chronically absent in kindergarten show lower levels of achievement in math, reading, and general knowledge in first grade. Among poor children, chronic absence in kindergarten can predict low educational achievement at the end of fifth grade. Noted Geller, "Chronic absenteeism can be reduced by monitoring attendance, through school, family and community partnerships, and by contacting parents as soon as troubling attendance patterns occur."

Absenteeism is an even greater problem among Newport students in middle and high school. During the 2010-2011 school year, 19% of Newport middle school students and 43% of Newport high school students were chronically absent (i.e., 18 days or more). While this was an improvement at the middle school level from the 2009-2010 school year (when 25% of middle school students were chronically absent), both the middle and high school chronic absenteeism rates remain among the highest in Rhode Island.

“Newport is making progress reducing absenteeism among its students, but more work needs to be done,” stated Bryant. “Through the Truancy Summit and efforts at the elementary school level, Newport has been focusing on efforts to strengthen community and school partnerships to get Newport students to class, providing challenging and creative coursework, developing discipline policies that keep students in school, and offering art, music, physical education and other high-interest classes all can help further improve attendance.”

### **Progress made in reading and math proficiency among Newport students**

Between 2005 and 2010, the percentage of fourth-grade students in Newport public schools who were proficient in reading increased steadily from 46% to 66%; however, in 2011, reading proficiency among fourth-grade students declined to 58%. Between 2005 and 2011, Newport’s eighth-grade reading proficiency rate increased from 50% to 78% and is now comparable to the state rate of 77%.

“It is crucial that all children are able to read at grade level by the end of third grade,” stated Bryant. “When children have difficulty reading beyond third grade, they often need intensive interventions to learn to read proficiently. We can help ensure that more children read proficiently by third grade by continuing to invest in high-quality early learning programs and by identifying struggling readers early and providing help before they fall further behind their peers.”

The city’s fourth- and eighth-grade students have made progress in math proficiency since 2005. The fourth-grade math proficiency rate was 53% in 2011, up from 34% in 2005, while the eighth-grade math proficiency rate was 50% in 2011, up from 39% in 2005.

### **Newport’s graduation rate continues to improve**

Newport’s graduation rate has improved significantly over the past four years. From 2007 to 2011, the four-year graduation rate in Newport increased from 60% to 81%, surpassing the state’s four-year graduation rate of 77%. Only Central Falls had a larger increase in its graduation rate (24%). Newport’s four-year graduation rate in 2011 was lower than Portsmouth (89%), but higher than Middletown (72%).

“Newport has made great strides when it comes to increasing the number of students who graduate from high school,” stated Bryant. “School leaders can continue work to identify at-risk students and provide timely academic and social supports to keep them on-track to graduate with their peers. Identifying chronically absent children while they are still in elementary school and middle school, improving school climate, creating eighth- to ninth-grade transition programs and using expanded learning time also can help further increase the number of students who graduate.”

###

*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.*