



**For Immediate Release**

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

*Between 2008 and 2009, the Pawtucket four-year graduation rate was 55%. More than one in five students (21%) dropped out between freshman and senior year, and 15% completed their GED.*

*Rhode Island ranks 43<sup>rd</sup> nationally in college attendance (where 1<sup>st</sup> is best). Just over half of Rhode Island seniors who graduated from high school in 2006 went directly on to a two- or four-year college.*

*100% of Pawtucket children were enrolled in a full-day kindergarten program during the 2009-2010 school year. Ten years ago, Pawtucket did not offer a full-day kindergarten program. Research shows that children enrolled in full-day kindergarten programs make greater academic gains in both reading and math than children in half-day programs.*

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**Pawtucket, RI, June 18, 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 Pawtucket. After the presentation, community members discussed opportunities to improve outcomes for children and youth in Pawtucket. The presentation was hosted by the Pawtucket School Department Child Opportunity Zone and was held on **Friday, June 18, 2010 from 9:00 a.m. to 10:30 a.m. at St. Paul's Episcopal Church, 50 Park Place, Pawtucket, RI.**

**Education**

Pawtucket has the second lowest high school graduation rate in the state. From 2008 to 2009, the four-year high school graduation rate in Pawtucket decreased from 57% to 55%. In 2009, only Central Falls had a lower high school graduation rate. Risks for dropping out include repeating one or more grades, ongoing

attendance problems, suspensions and behavior problems, disengagement from school, and failing math or English. “Student achievement and graduation rates can be improved with the use of early warning systems that use data to identify at-risk students as early as elementary school. If we identify children having problems early on, we can provide them with the kinds of academic and social support they need to stay on track and succeed in school and in life,” said Elizabeth Burke Bryant, Executive Director of Rhode Island KIDS COUNT.

College preparation and access are 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. 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. 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, almost one in four (73%) Pawtucket high school seniors reported planning to attend college, but only 41% took the SATs. While some colleges do not require the SATs for admission, students significantly limit their choice of colleges when they do not take the SAT exams.

Data from the *2010 Rhode Island Kids Count Factbook* show positive trends in access to full-day kindergarten, 4<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> grade math proficiency, and 8<sup>th</sup> grade reading proficiency. Low levels of reading and math proficiency and high rates of student mobility in Pawtucket continue to be areas of concern that have a large impact on children’s ability to graduate from high school.

- Between 2005 and 2009, the percentage of 4<sup>th</sup> grade students in Pawtucket public schools who were proficient in math increased from 42% to 51% and the percentage of 8<sup>th</sup> graders who were proficient in math increased from 37% to 41%. Both rates remain far below the math proficiency rates for the state as a whole, 62% for 4<sup>th</sup> graders and 54% for 8<sup>th</sup> graders.
- Between 2005 and 2009, the percentage of 4<sup>th</sup> grade students in Pawtucket public schools who were proficient in reading increased from 48% to 56% and the percentage of 8<sup>th</sup> graders who were proficient in reading increased from 44% to 55%. Both rates remain far below the proficiency rates for the state as a whole, 67% for 4<sup>th</sup> graders and 70% for 8<sup>th</sup> graders.

- During the 2008-2009 school year, the Pawtucket student mobility rate (24%) was substantially higher than the rate for the state as a whole (16%). Students who change schools in the middle of the year are more likely to be absent and are less likely to be academically successful than their peers.

### **Economic Well-Being**

Pawtucket continues to have a high child poverty rate. According to the U.S. Census Bureau's American Community Survey, between 2006 and 2008 more than one-quarter (28%) of children in Pawtucket lived in families with incomes below the poverty threshold. More than one-third of these children 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. In the past 15 years, Rhode Island cash assistance caseloads have declined by 61%. In December 2009, 6% (1,081) of Pawtucket children were receiving cash assistance, down from 14% (2,496) 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, 5,790 Pawtucket children were enrolled in the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), up 53% from 2005. Pawtucket is one of six school districts in Rhode Island that offers Universal School Breakfast in all of its schools. Schools that offer free breakfast to all children regardless of income increase breakfast participation and can reduce administrative costs. Despite offering Universal School Breakfast, only about one-quarter of low-income students and one-fifth of all students participate in Pawtucket's breakfast program. In October 2009, an average of 1,657 (25%) low-income children in Pawtucket participated in the Universal School Breakfast Program each day out of

6,723 who were eligible for free or reduced-price meals. Offering breakfast in the classroom at the start of the school day, as they do in Central Falls, could help increase participation.

According to Geller, “Children in poverty, especially those who experience poverty in early childhood and for extended periods of time, are more likely to have health and behavioral problems, experience difficulty in school, become teen parents, and earn less or be unemployed as adults. Community efforts to help families access safety net programs like Rhode Island Works, SNAP, and the School Breakfast Program can help protect children from the worst effects of poverty, including hunger and homelessness, which can interfere with young children’s emotional and intellectual development.”

## **Health**

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

- In recent years, the percentage of Rhode Island mothers receiving delayed prenatal care has increased from 9.1% in 2000-2004 to 14.0% in 2004-2008. During that same time period, the percentage of Pawtucket mothers receiving delayed prenatal care rate increased from 12.5% to 16.4%. 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 overall teen birth rate for girls ages 15-19 is higher in Pawtucket (58.7 births per 1,000 teen girls) than in the state as a whole (30.7 births per 1,000 teen girls ages 15 to 19). The Pawtucket rate of births to younger teens (33.3 births per 1,000 teens ages 15 to 17) is greater than the state rate of 18.9 births per 1,000 teens ages 15 to 17. The teen birth rate for girls ages 18-19 in Pawtucket (96.9 per 1,000 girls) is more than double the state rate (44.0 per 1,000 girls). Reducing teen pregnancies would improve outcomes for teen mothers and their children who are more likely to live in poverty, enter the foster care system, and drop out of high school than children of older mothers.
- Other health issues in Pawtucket include lead poisoning and asthma hospitalization rates that exceed the state average. Both of these issues are connected to housing quality as well as access to health care.

## **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 Pawtucket, there were 320 victims of child abuse and neglect in

2009, a rate of 17.6 per 1,000 children, substantially higher than the state rate of 11.7 per 1,000 children.

A new indicator on *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 Pawtucket, 9% of students reported ever experiencing violence and 12% 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.

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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.