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Rhode Island KIDS COUNT Releases New Report *Reading by the End of Third Grade Matters*

***Reading proficiently by the end of third grade an important predictor
of high school graduation and career success***

Providence, RI (May 8, 2014) – Rhode Island KIDS COUNT released its newest Issue Brief – ***Reading by the End of Third Grade Matters*** – at a policy roundtable attended by policy makers, education leaders, state agencies, and community members. The event was held on Thursday, May 8, 2014, from 12:00 p.m. – 2:00 p.m. at Rhode Island KIDS COUNT, One Union Station, in Providence. Elizabeth Burke Bryant, Executive Director of Rhode Island KIDS COUNT and Deborah Gist, Rhode Island Commissioner of Education, provided remarks. Rhode Island KIDS COUNT Policy Analyst Stephanie Geller and Senior Policy Analyst Leanne Barrett presented the findings.

Reading proficiently by the end of third grade is as an essential step for children to succeed academically and do well in life. Children who are not proficient in reading by the end of third grade are four times more likely to drop out of high school than their proficient peers, which can have profound negative consequences well into the future. Youth who read below grade level and drop out of school are more likely to be involved in the juvenile and adult justice systems and to receive public assistance than their peers.

Rhode Island among states with greatest improvements in reading proficiency

National data from the *National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP)* shows that from 2003 to 2013, the biggest gains in reading proficiency were in Rhode Island, Maryland, and the District of Columbia. In 2003, 29% of Rhode Island fourth graders were reading proficiently as measured by the *NAEP*. By 2013, this percentage had improved by 9 percentage points and 38% were reading proficiently. Rhode Island ranks 13th best in the nation and 5th among the six New England states for the percentage of fourth-grade students that are proficient in reading. Rhode Island's *New England Common Assessment Program (NECAP)* shows large gains in reading proficiency as well. In October 2013, 71% of Rhode Island fourth graders scored at or above proficiency on the *NECAP*, up from 60% on 2005.

“This is good news for Rhode Island –national and state measures show that our students have made important gains in reading proficiency over the past ten years. Reading proficiently by fourth grade is a key indicator of a student’s future educational and economic success,” said Elizabeth Burke Bryant, Executive Director of Rhode Island KIDS COUNT.

Large achievement gaps persist

Despite overall improvements in reading proficiency over the last decade, gaps exist among children of low- and higher-income families and between children of different racial and ethnic groups:

- In Rhode Island in 2013, 19% of low-income fourth graders scored at or above the proficient level as measured by the *NAEP*, compared with 55% of higher-income fourth graders. Rhode Island has one of the largest achievement gaps in fourth-grade reading proficiency rates between low- and higher-income students in the nation.
- Seventy-nine percent of White and 78% of Asian fourth graders in Rhode Island were proficient on the October 2013 *NECAP*, compared with 56% of Black students, 55% of Hispanic students, 49% of Native American students, and 64% of students of Two or more races.

Elizabeth Burke Bryant said, “The positive gains in Rhode Island’s overall reading proficiency provide important momentum for the continued urgent work needed to close Rhode Island’s achievement gap in reading proficiency between low- and higher-income income students, and among racial and ethnic groups. We need to ensure that all children are proficient in reading by the end of third grade.”

Recommendations

The *Issue Brief* offers specific priority areas and recommendations to develop strong readers across the state, including:

Close the skill and knowledge gap that grows from infancy through early childhood

- *Evidence-based home visiting and parenting programs.* Expand access to evidence-based home visiting and parenting programs for children facing multiple risks for poor educational outcomes and promote language-rich home environments.
- *Access to primary health care.* Ensure that all children have access to comprehensive primary health care.
- *Developmental screening and referral.* Strengthen systems to ensure that all young children are screened for developmental delays and disabilities, including appropriate and timely services through Early Intervention and preschool special education.
- *Early Head Start and Head Start.* Maintain and expand access to Early Head Start and Head Start.
- *High-quality State Pre-K.* As part of the education funding formula, continue the planned expansion of the State Pre-K program, with priority for communities with high concentrations of low-income children.
- *Access to high-quality child care.* Expand and strengthen the state child care subsidy program to ensure that young children of low-income working parents have access to high-quality child care programs from infancy through early elementary school.
- *High-quality early learning programs.* Use BrightStars, the state’s Quality Rating and Improvement System, and the Center for Early Learning Professionals to support quality improvement in all early learning programs.

Strengthen early elementary education

- *Kindergarten entry assessment.* Support the continued development and implementation of a statewide kindergarten entry assessment.
- *Full-day kindergarten.* Expand access to full-day kindergarten, so that all Rhode Island kindergarten students have access to full-day kindergarten.
- *Early warning systems to identify students who are falling behind.* Ensure that children in public schools receive early and ongoing language and literacy screening. Children who struggle should have access to high-quality, evidence-based interventions to build language and literacy skills.
- *High expectations for special populations.* Support effective instruction and the attainment of high standards by English Language Learners, dual language learners, and children with special educational needs.
- *Chronic early absence and summer learning loss.* Find, develop, and deploy practical and scalable solutions for chronic early absence and summer learning loss, two significant contributors to the large achievement gaps between children from low-income and higher-income families.

Support educators working with children from infancy through grade 3

- *Effective educator preparation programs.* Ensure that evidence-based literacy instruction is integrated into early childhood and elementary educator preparation programs.
- *Effective professional development.* Provide regular professional development opportunities and ongoing classroom supports for infant-toddler caregivers, family child care providers, and preschool and early elementary educators, with specific attention to developing the instructional skills, classroom environment, and teacher-child interactions that support oral language, literacy, and social-emotional development.
- *Dedicated time for program, classroom, school, and district-level interventions.* Use aggregate data on children's reading and literacy skills to align resources and implement evidence-based instructional strategies at the program, classroom, school, and district levels.
- *English Language Learners.* Expand the cadre of early childhood and early elementary teachers who have the specialized skills and experience needed to promote English language acquisition while supporting home language development.

“Rhode Island is focusing attention on the key strategies we know improve early reading proficiency. We are improving access to high-quality early learning programs, reducing chronic absence in the early grades, and enhancing literacy strategies targeted to struggling readers,” said Bryant. “We must continue to focus our attention and resources on these issues because we all know how important early reading proficiency is to a child’s future success and to the economic success of our state.”

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***The NAEP and the NECAP** - The National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) measures proficiency nationally and across states every other year. The New England Common Assessment Program (NECAP) is Rhode Island's statewide assessment system and measures proficiency in Rhode Island and across districts and is administered every year.*

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.