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

***Warwick's child population decreased 15.7% from 2000 to 2010
and became more ethnically diverse.***

***The number of children enrolled in Early Head Start and Head
Start down from 2008.***

***City's high school graduation rate is improving, but remains low
for low-income students.***

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**Warwick, RI (November 15, 2011)** – Community leaders, policy makers and parents learned about the well-being of children and families in Warwick today. Stephanie Geller, Policy Analyst for Rhode Island KIDS COUNT, presented data from the *2011 Rhode Island Kids Count Factbook*. The *Data in Your Backyard* presentation, which took place at the Buttonwoods Community Center in Warwick, included highlights of improvements and declines in the well-being of children and youth in the city. After the presentation, community members discussed opportunities to improve outcomes for the city's children. The presentation was brought to the community in partnership with the Warwick Coalition to Prevent Child Abuse.

**Fewer Children Living in Warwick, Population More Diverse**

According to the 2010 decennial Census, there are fewer children living in Warwick now than there were a decade ago. Between 2000 and 2010, the number of children living in the city decreased by 15.7% from 18,780 to 15,825. Warwick's children have also become more ethnically diverse with increasing percentages of Hispanic, Asian and Black children. In 2000, 92% of Warwick's children were White, non-Hispanic and by 2010, this percentage had declined to 84%.

## **Assistance for Children and their Families**

Between 2005 and 2008, an estimated 1,289 Warwick children (7.8%) were living in poverty. While the child poverty rate in Warwick is much lower than in the state as a whole (17%), there are still a substantial number of children and families in Warwick who are in need.

Access to cash assistance has decreased dramatically for children in Warwick and the state as a whole, mainly because of policy changes made in 2008. From 1996 to 2009, there was a 68% decline in Rhode Island's cash assistance caseload. In Warwick, the number of cases has declined as well, and in December 2010, only 283 (2%) Warwick children were in families receiving assistance from the RI Works program.

On the other hand, the number of families participating in the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) has been rising. In October 2010, 2,367 Warwick children were receiving SNAP benefits, more than double the number in 2005.

The School Breakfast Program offers nutritious meals to children and is another important resource for low-income families. Students who eat breakfast have higher reading and math scores, fewer absences, improved attentiveness and lower instances of social or behavioral problems. In October 2010, an average of 437 (14%) low-income children in Warwick Public Schools participated in the program each day, out of 3,235 who were eligible for free or reduced-price lunch.

"Hunger and lack of regular access to sufficient food can lead to health, psychological, emotional and educational problems in children," stated Elizabeth Burke Bryant, Executive Director of Rhode Island KIDS COUNT. "It is important that families and children continue to be connected to resources, like SNAP and free and reduced-price meals, that promote the healthy growth and development of our children."

Added Stephanie Geller, Policy Analyst for Rhode Island KIDS COUNT, "Providing universal access to the School Breakfast Program can increase school breakfast participation, reduce administrative costs and help students achieve improved outcomes."

## **Positive and Negative Trends Seen in Health Indicators**

Overall, Warwick is doing well in areas involving prenatal care and infant health in comparison to the state as a whole. For example, more women are receiving timely prenatal care in Warwick than the state as a whole; however, the percentage of women receiving delayed prenatal care increased from 6.5% between 2001 and 2005 to 11.7% between 2005 and 2009, following a similar increase statewide.

An area of concern for the city is teen pregnancy. Teen pregnancy can threaten the development of teen parents as well as their children. The teen birth rate for Warwick girls ages 15 to 17 rose from 9.0 in 2003-2007 to 10.0 in 2004-2008, while the state rate fell during this same time period. Between 2005-2009, the birth rate for teen girls in Warwick was 22.3 births per 1,000 teen girls ages 15-19, which was lower than the state rate of 30.1 births per 1,000 teen girls ages 15-19. The teen birth rate for teen girls ages 18-19 was slightly higher in Warwick (47.4) than the state rate (42.8) during 2005-2009.

### **Child Abuse Rate Increasing in Warwick and in State as a Whole**

Another trend to watch in Warwick is the increasing rate of child abuse and neglect. In 2010, the rate of child abuse and neglect was 8.7 victims per 1,000 children, an increase from the 2008 rate of 6.2 victims per 1,000 children. Despite this increase, Warwick's rate of child abuse and neglect continues to be lower than the rate for the state as a whole as well as many of its neighboring communities.

"It is critical that communities like Warwick continue to focus on ways to prevent child abuse and neglect," noted Bryant. "Increasing access to income supports, health care for parents and children, and enrollment in high-quality early learning programs and out-of-school time programs can help stabilize at-risk families and keep children safe, particularly during stressful economic periods."

Research also shows that child abuse and neglect can be prevented when vulnerable families with infants and toddlers participate in evidence-based home visiting programs. Added Bryant, "Effective home visiting programs help parents develop the skills to nurture and support their children's development and improve the health of both the parent and the child."

### **Early Head Start, Head Start Numbers Dip**

Early Head Start is a comprehensive early childhood program serving low-income children birth to age three, pregnant women and their families, while Head Start serves low-income preschool children ages 3 to 4 and their families. According to the 2000 Census, an estimated 260 children under age 3 in Warwick were income-eligible for enrollment in the Early Head Start program. In 2010, 35 (13%) of these children were enrolled in Early Head Start, down from 64 (25%) in 2008. An estimated 189 children ages three to four in Warwick were eligible for enrollment in the Head Start preschool program. In 2010, 126 (67%) of these children were enrolled in Head Start, down from 164 (87%) in 2008.

“Research shows that children who attend high-quality early learning and preschool programs, like Early Head Start and Head Start, and who learn to read on grade level in elementary school are more likely to graduate high school,” stated Bryant. “These programs can help at-risk children make significant cognitive, language and social-emotional gains and help close the Kindergarten preparation gap that often exists.”

### **Graduation Rates Improving Significantly Among Warwick Students**

In 2010, Warwick’s graduation rate was 75%, close to the state rate of 76%, and an improvement from 2007 when the graduation rate was 66%. Warwick’s dropout rate in 2010 was 16%, slightly higher than the state rate of 14%.

“Identifying at-risk students during elementary and middle school can help improve student achievement and graduation rates,” added Bryant. “Implementing early warning systems that lead to personalized and timely academic supports, improving school climate and creating 8<sup>th</sup> to 9<sup>th</sup> grade transition programs can help students get back on track for graduation with their peers.”

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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.*