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

***West Warwick's graduation rate decreased, contrary to improved graduation rates across much of the state.***

***Rate of child abuse and neglect in West Warwick increased in 2010.***

***Between 2000 and 2010, the number of children living in the city decreased by 13%.***

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**West Warwick, RI (November 22, 2011)** – Community leaders, policy makers and parents learned about the well-being of children and families in West 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 Thundermist Health Center's West Warwick location, 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 Thundermist Health Center.

**Child abuse and neglect on the rise**

An area of concern facing the city of West Warwick is the increasing rate of child abuse and neglect. In 2010, the rate of child abuse and neglect was 25.9 victims per 1,000 children, a substantial increase from the 2008 rate of 15.4 victims per 1,000 children. West Warwick's rate of child abuse and neglect is the third highest in the state. The immediate effects of child abuse and neglect can include isolation, fear, inability to trust, injury and even death. Long-term effects include juvenile delinquency, substance abuse, mental health problems, teen pregnancy and low academic achievement.

“It is critical that we continue to focus on ways to prevent child abuse and neglect in all of our state’s cities and towns,” noted Elizabeth Burke Bryant, Executive Director of Rhode Island KIDS COUNT. “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.”

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.”

### **Fewer children living in West Warwick, population more diverse**

According to the 2010 decennial Census, there are fewer children living in West Warwick now than there were a decade ago. Between 2000 and 2010, the number of children living in the city decreased by 13% from 6,632 to 5,746. West Warwick’s children have also become more ethnically diverse with increasing percentages of Hispanic and Black children. In 2000, 87% of Warwick’s children were White, non-Hispanic and by 2010, this percentage had declined to 79%.

### **Mixed news on health indicators**

Early prenatal care can identify and treat health problems and influence health behaviors that can compromise fetal development, infant health and maternal health. The state’s delayed prenatal care rate has been slowly increasing, and West Warwick’s rate has followed this same trend. Between 2005 and 2009, 15.6% of West Warwick women received delayed prenatal care or no prenatal care, compared to 8.3% of West Warwick women between 2001 and 2005. West Warwick’s delayed prenatal care is also higher than the state rate of 14.9%. The city’s infant mortality rate has been decreasing in recent years and is also lower than the state rate. In 2005 to 2009, West Warwick’s infant mortality rate was 3.5 deaths per 1,000 live births, a decline from 6.5 deaths per 1,000 live births between 2001 and 2005.

“Increasing access to evidence-based programs that offer expectant mothers support early in their pregnancies through programs like the Nurse Family Partnership, Early Head Start and Healthy Families, will help ensure that more new moms receive critical care, additional support, and continued education that will improve their family’s future over the long-term,” stated Bryant.

West Warwick’s teen birth rate for young girls (ages 15-17) is the lowest rate among the core cities. Between 2005 and 2009, West Warwick’s birth rate among girls ages 15 to

17 was 19.6 births per 1,000 girls, while the state rate among girls ages 15 to 17 was 18.9 births per 1,000 girls. The number of teen births among older teens (ages 18 to 19) is higher in West Warwick (66.7 births per 1,000) than both the state rate (42.8 births per 1,000) and the core cities as a whole (58.0 births per 1,000).

According to Bryant, “Teen pregnancy can threaten the development of teen parents as well as their children and outcomes for children of older teens are not much better than for children of younger teens.”

### **Numbers of children enrolled in Early Head Start, Head Start increase**

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 three to four and their families. According to the 2000 Census, an estimated 385 children under age 3 in West Warwick were income-eligible for enrollment in the Early Head Start program. In 2010, 61 (16%) of these children were enrolled in Early Head Start, up from 48 (12%) in 2008. An estimated 266 children ages three to four in Warwick were eligible for enrollment in the Head Start preschool program. In 2010, 149 (56%) of these children were enrolled in Head Start, up from 103 (39%) 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.”

### **Slow but steady improvements in reading and math proficiency**

West Warwick is making gains in reading and math proficiency among its students. Between 2005 and 2010, the percentage of West Warwick’s fourth-graders who were proficient in reading increased from 55% to 67%, approaching the state rate of 69%. Even larger improvements were made among the city’s eighth-graders with reading proficiency rates increasing from 56% in 2005 to 79% in 2010. West Warwick has seen improvements in both fourth-grade and eighth-grade math proficiency since 2005 as well, although the proficiency rates continued to be lower than the rate for the state as a whole.

### **Graduation Rate Not Showing Improvement Despite Gains Elsewhere in State**

In 2010, West Warwick’s graduation rate was 65%, among the lowest in the state.

Stephanie Geller, Policy Analyst for Rhode Island KIDS COUNT, said, “West Warwick has failed to make the kind of gains we are seeing in so many other districts. The district’s graduation rate has actually declined by 2 percentage points since 2007 when it was 67%. During that same period, the statewide graduation rate improved from 70% to 76% and some districts showed increases of more than 10 percentage points.” Neighboring Warwick’s graduation rate increased from 66% in 2007 to 75% in 2010.

“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.*