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**Rhode Island KIDS COUNT Presents:  
*Central Falls Data in Your Backyard***

***Between 2005-2009, the birth rate for teen girls ages 15-19 was 91.7 per 1,000 teen girls, more than triple the state rate.***

***Reading and math proficiency among 4<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> graders in Central Falls has improved.***

***In 2010, 51% of Central Falls students graduated from high school in four years; Central Falls had the lowest graduation rate in the state.***

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**Central Falls, RI (November 29, 2011)** – Community leaders, policy makers, parents and youth learned about the well-being of children and families in Central Falls 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 in the library at Central Falls High School, 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 Central Falls School Department.

**More children living in Central Falls and population more diverse**

According to the 2010 decennial Census, the number of children living in Central Falls has risen slightly over the past decade, while many other Rhode Island communities' child populations have declined. In 2010, there were 5,644 children under age 18 living in the city, up from 5,531 in 2000. The child population in Central Falls has also become more ethnically diverse. In 2010, 70% of the children in Central Falls were Hispanic or Latino, compared to 56% in 2000. At

the same time, the White, non-Hispanic child population has declined from 28% in 2000 to 13% in 2010.

### **Teen birth rate in Central Falls is the highest in state**

The teen birth rate per 1,000 teen girls ages 15-19 is higher in Central Falls than any other Rhode Island community. Between 2005-2009, the birth rate for teen girls ages 15-19 was 91.7 per 1,000 teen girls, more than triple the state rate of 30.1 per 1,000 teen girls. During the same time period, 64 births were repeat teen births, making up one in five of the 316 teen births in the city during those years. Although Central Falls continues to have the highest teen birth rate the city has seen declines in recent years, from 98.1 per 1,000 teen girls in 2003-2007 to 91.7 per 1,000 teen girls in 2005-2009.

“Teen pregnancy and parenting threaten the development of teen parents, as well as their children,” noted Elizabeth Burke Bryant, Executive Director of Rhode Island KIDS COUNT. “Teen mothers, particularly younger teen mothers, often have trouble finishing high school and continuing on to college. Their children are more likely to experience child abuse and neglect, enter the foster care system, and live in poverty and are less likely to complete high school.”

The daughters of teen mothers are three times more likely to become teen mothers themselves and the sons of teen mothers are twice as likely to spend time in prison than children of older mothers.

### **Work needs to be done to improve infant health outcomes**

Delayed prenatal care is an area of concern in Central Falls. 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. In Central Falls, the delayed prenatal care rate was 19.8% in 2005-2009, the second highest in the state. “Women who receive delayed prenatal care are at increased risk of poor birth outcomes, such as having babies who are stillborn, low birthweight or who die within the first year of life,” explained Stephanie Geller, Policy Analyst for Rhode Island KIDS COUNT.

The city’s infant mortality rate also increased. In 2005-2009, Central Falls’ infant mortality rate was the highest in the state (10.7 per 1,000 live births), up from 8.4 per 1,000 live births in 2004-2008.

### **Central Falls sees an increase in child abuse and neglect**

Over the past several years, Central Falls’ rate of child abuse and neglect has increased. In 2010, 129 children in Central Falls were victims of child abuse and neglect, a rate of 23.3 victims per 1,000 children, which is an increase from 19.3 per

1,000 children in 2009 and 18.6 per 1,000 children in 2008. The 2010 rate is higher than the core city combined rate of 21.0 victims per 1,000 children, and is significantly higher than the state rate of 13.3 victims per 1,000 children.

“It is critical that community partners work together to implement the strategies that we know are effective to prevent child abuse and neglect,” added Bryant. Research shows that child abuse and neglect can be prevented when vulnerable families with infants and toddlers participate in evidence-based home visiting programs. According to 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.”

Research also shows that many families who experience child abuse and neglect are struggling economically and have a variety of health and mental health challenges that add considerable levels of stress to their lives. “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.”

### **More children participate in the School Breakfast Program**

Central Falls has a Universal School Breakfast Program which offers free breakfast to all children regardless of income. Such programs increase school breakfast participation and reduce administrative costs. Central Falls has taken a step further by offering breakfast in the classroom at the start of the school day. These strategies have paid dividends. In October 2010, an average of 1,058 (43%) of the 2,448 of low-income children who were eligible for free or reduced-price breakfast in Central Falls participated in the program each day, up from 654 (25%) in October 2009.

“Students who eat breakfast do better in math and reading, miss less school, and have fewer behavioral problems,” stated Bryant. “Central Falls has long been a leader in implementing this important program which leads to increased achievement among all students and can help close the achievement gap that often exists among low-income children.”

### **In Central Falls, almost one in four public school students is an English Language Learner**

During the 2009-2010 school year, 595 (23%) of Central Falls’ 2,634 students were English Language Learners (ELL), the highest percentage in the state. Nationally, and in Rhode Island, the achievement gap between students who are English Language Learners and all students widens between elementary school and middle school. In October 2010 in Rhode Island, 19% of eighth-grade ELL students scored at or above proficiency in reading, compared to 74% of all Rhode Island eighth-graders.

“Proven approaches to increasing academic success among English Language Learners include tailoring instructional practices to students’ needs, using assessment data, recruiting highly skilled teachers and implementing programs that focus on both English proficiency and course content,” added Geller.

### **Gains made in reading and math proficiency**

Students in Central Falls are making steady progress in reading and math. Between 2005 and 2010, the percentage of fourth-grade students in Central Falls who were proficient in reading increased from 40% to 58%. Despite these significant improvements, Central Falls has the second lowest fourth grade reading proficiency level in the state, just behind Providence. Even more substantial improvements have been seen among eighth-grade students. Between 2005 and 2010, the percentage of eighth-grade students who were proficient in reading increased from 27% to 53%.

Central Falls has also seen improvements in fourth-grade and eighth-grade math proficiency since 2005. From 2005 to 2010, fourth-grade math proficiency jumped from 28% to 55%, while eighth-grade math proficiency showed less dramatic improvements, increasing from 16% in 2005 to 28% in 2010.

“Schools in Central Falls have been making progress, but more work needs to be done,” said Bryant. “School leaders can continue to improve student performance by continuing to support a strong focus on student achievement, using data to improve instruction for every student, and nurturing positive relationships within the schools.”

### **Graduation rate lowest in Rhode Island**

In 2010, 51% of Central Falls’ students graduated from high school in four years, up from 46% in 2007. Central Falls’ 4-year graduation is the lowest in the state and significantly lower than the state rate of 76%. The city’s dropout rate was 34% in 2010, higher than the other core city districts and the state rate of 14%.

“Identifying at-risk students during elementary and middle school can help improve student achievement and ultimately 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*