



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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**Rhode Island KIDS COUNT releases new *Issue Brief:*
*Improving College Access and Completion in Rhode Island***

***College completion brings substantial lifelong benefits, including higher incomes,
lower unemployment rates, and better health***

***Large gaps in college access and completion exist between low-income and
high-income Rhode Island students***

Providence, RI (June 20, 2013) – Rhode Island KIDS COUNT released its newest Issue Brief – ***Improving College Access and Completion in Rhode Island*** – at a policy roundtable attended by policy makers, education leaders, state agencies, and community members. The event was held on Thursday, June 20, 2013, from 3:00 p.m. – 5:00 p.m. at Rhode Island KIDS COUNT (One Union Station, Providence) and was co-hosted by Opportunity Nation and the Community College of Rhode Island. Speakers included Deborah Gist, Commissioner of the Rhode Island Department of Education; Eva-Marie Mancuso, Chair, Rhode Island Board of Education; Ray DiPasquale, President of the Community College of Rhode Island; and Elizabeth Burke Bryant, Executive Director of Rhode Island KIDS COUNT. Rhode Island KIDS COUNT Policy Analyst Stephanie Geller presented the findings.

The policy forum highlighted current data on college readiness, enrollment, and completion in Rhode Island and key strategies to increase college success. Speakers at the event emphasized the importance of increasing college access and completion to individuals and to our state's economy.

Between 2009 and 2011 in Rhode Island, the median income of adults with bachelor's degrees was \$51,157, compared to \$29,828 for adults with high school degrees, and the unemployment rate for Rhode Islanders with bachelor's degrees (4.1%) was one-third as high as for Rhode Islanders with only a high school diploma (12.1%). Elizabeth Burke Bryant, Executive Director of Rhode Island KIDS COUNT, stated, "All of our children and youth need high-quality educational opportunities that will prepare them to succeed in college and careers. By 2018, two-thirds of Rhode Island's jobs will require education beyond a high school diploma, and we must make sure that our students are ready."

College readiness is the level of preparation a student needs to enroll in and succeed in college, without requiring remedial education. Key components of college readiness include academic preparedness, academic tenacity, and college knowledge.

Key findings related to college readiness include:

- Among current high school seniors who took the NECAP in 2011 when they were juniors, 77% scored at or above proficiency in reading and 30% scored at or above proficiency in math.
- 54% of Rhode Island seniors expected to graduate in 2013 had completed a Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) by May 2013. Students are 50% more likely to enroll in college if they have completed their FAFSA by May of their senior year.
- 70% of Rhode Island students entering CCRI in Fall 2006 required remediation.

According to Geller, “students from low-income families, minority students, and first-generation college students are much more likely to go to college when they go to high schools where students are encouraged to attend college, get help with the application process, and are academically prepared.”

One area of concern is the large gap in college enrollment rates between low-and higher-income students. Among Rhode Island’s 2010 high school graduates, 64% of higher-income students and 37% of low-income students enrolled in college the following fall.

Another area of concern was the large percentage of students who enroll in college but never complete their degree. Thirty-four percent of students who attend a four-year college in Rhode Island graduate in four years and 58% graduate in six years. “We want to be sure that once youth enroll in college, they receive the academic, social, and financial support they need to graduate,” remarked Bryant. “Rhode Island must continue to invest in higher education and provide our students with the supports they need to succeed.”

Recommendations

Participants at the forum highlighted the need to implement the Issue Brief’s recommendations in order to best position Rhode Island youth for success, including:

Increase College Readiness and Enrollment

- Intervene in the earliest years to close the achievement gap
- Increase the percentage of students reading proficiently by the end of third grade
- Focus on increasing the high school graduation rate
- Reduce chronic absence
- Foster a college-going culture in schools
- Prepare students for the academic rigor of college
- Implement the Common Core Standards
- Build academic tenacity and 21st Century skills

Support College Application and Enrollment

- Start the college conversation early
- Focus school and community resources on college planning
- Increase the FAFSA completion rate
- Maintain access to in-state tuition for undocumented students
- Help students make the right “match”

Support College Success and Completion, including

- Reduce the number of students needing remediation
- Explore strategies for remediation
- Provide social and academic support
- Review transfer policies
- Make higher education a budget priority
- Set statewide goals for college completion
- Continue developing a statewide college access and success data system

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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.