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**Rhode Island KIDS COUNT releases new Issue Brief:  
*Improving High School Graduation Rates in Rhode Island***

***Issue Brief released during Grad Nation Summit, part of the America's Promise Alliance national initiative to raise awareness about and inspire action to increase the graduation rate***

***Report includes new data on graduation and dropout rates in Rhode Island and individual school districts, provides recommendations for improvement***

Providence, RI (November 25, 2013) – Rhode Island KIDS COUNT released its newest Issue Brief – ***Improving High School Graduation Rates in Rhode Island*** – at the Providence Grad Nation Summit attended by policy makers, education leaders, state agencies, business leaders, youth, and other community members. The Grad Nation Summit focused on increasing the high school graduation rate and is part of the America's Promise Alliance national initiative to hold 100 summits across the country in the next four years. The Summit was co-hosted by the Providence Children and Youth Cabinet, RI Department of Education, and Rhode Island KIDS COUNT; and was held on Monday, November 25, 2013 from 10:00 am – 5:30 pm at the Providence Marriott, One Orms Street. The Issue Brief Release portion of the event was held from 11:00 am – 11:30 am; Rhode Island KIDS COUNT Policy Analyst Stephanie Geller, EdM, presented the findings.

The Issue Brief presents detailed graduation and dropout rates for every school and district in Rhode Island, research on warning signs and risk factors of dropping out, and key strategies for dropout intervention and recovery, increased graduation rates, and college readiness. Rhode Island's four-year graduation rate has been steadily increasing in recent years, from 70% in 2007 to 77% in 2012. Disparities continue to exist within this overall increase. In Rhode Island, students in several sub-populations have lower graduation rates than their peers, including: English Language Learners, students with disabilities, and low-income students. Minority students also are more likely than White students to drop out.

The lowest graduation rates are in the four core cities, Central Falls (68%), Pawtucket (67%), Providence (65%), and Woonsocket (65%). While students in Rhode Island's core cities are more likely to drop out than students in the remainder of the state, progress has been made in increasing the graduation rate. The four-year graduation rate for the four core cities increased from 56% in 2007 to 66% in 2012, a steeper increase than in remainder of the state districts, where the graduation rate increased from 79% in 2007 to 83% in 2012. Also, the two districts with the largest increases in graduation rates from 2007 to 2012 were both core city districts – Central Falls and Pawtucket.

“Keeping our students in school and on-track to graduate is critical for their success,” noted Bryant. “Education is the key to economic opportunity, and this Issue Brief focuses on specific ways to support and engage Rhode Island students to stay in school and graduate.”

### **Warning signs for students at risk**

Dropping out of school is almost always a long process rather than a sudden event. A number of factors or “early warning signs” can predict students at risk for dropping out, including reading below grade level at the end of third grade; poor course performance; ongoing patterns of absenteeism or tardiness; and multiple suspensions or other behavior problems. Research shows that reading at grade level by the end of third grade, attendance, behavior, and course performance can be tracked and monitored to successfully identify and intervene with students who are most at risk of dropping out.

“It is crucial that school leaders set up early warning systems to identify students who are struggling in school and implement strategies to ensure that students get the support they need to succeed in school,” stated Geller. “There are a few key indicators that can be observed, measured, and monitored as students go through school, and they should be part of any effective early warning system.”

### **Recommendations to Improve Graduation Rates**

- **Raise awareness** among students, parents, and the general public about the connection between educational attainment and positive economic, social, and health outcomes.
- **Increase access to high-quality early childhood programs**, pre-kindergarten, and full-day kindergarten to prevent the achievement gap early on.
- **Ensure that all children read proficiently by the end of third grade**, focusing on improving school readiness, reducing chronic early absence, and increasing access to high-quality summer learning.
- **Establish early warning systems** that use data on attendance, behavior, and course performance to identify students at risk of dropping out.
- **Help students transition from middle school to high school** by preparing students to participate in the high school campus and culture before enrollment, ensuring that all students feel connected to school, and identifying students who are struggling before high school and providing timely and individualized supports.
- **Provide multiple pathways to graduation** for all students who need them, including acceleration programs for students lacking credits, online instruction, flexible hours, partnerships with adult education and other community providers, and alternative completion models.
- **Ensure that school leaders have high expectations** for all students and staff.
- **Focus on closing achievement gaps** between low-income and higher-income students and White and minority students. Collect and report data on graduation rates for special populations.
- **Ensure that all students have effective teachers** and that all teachers receive professional development opportunities focused on effective instructional practice and differentiated teaching methods for a range of learning styles.
- **Offer students a rigorous and engaging curriculum** aligned with standards and tied to college access, career pathways, and vocational exploration opportunities, including opportunities to participate in arts, music, and sports programs and expanded learning opportunities that allow students to receive credit for rigorous, hands-on, individualized learning opportunities outside the classroom.
- **Reduce chronic absence at all school levels** by developing systems that provide frequent reports on student absenteeism and reasons for absenteeism.
- **Improve the school climate** by focusing on teaching, modeling, and rewarding students’ positive behavior and revising disciplinary policies to ensure the equitable, appropriate, and limited use of suspensions and expulsions.

- **Improve communication with parents**, especially when students are falling behind academically, frequently absent, or exhibiting troubling behaviors in school.
- **Develop and nurture partnerships** between schools and higher education institutions, community organizations, and businesses to offer wrap-around supports to students and promote educational success.
- **Share best practices** of schools and districts that are having success in raising their graduation rates with other schools and districts.

“The Issue Brief and Summit highlighted key examples of what’s happening in Providence and other communities to help more students succeed in school and earn a high school diploma. Communities across Rhode Island are recognizing the importance of reading by the end of third grade, reducing chronic absence, improving school climate, and developing early warning systems connected to individualized interventions,” stated Bryant. “This Summit provided an opportunity to share data, highlight promising practices, and work together to propel the good work already happening to the next level.”

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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.*