



**EMBARGOED FOR RELEASE:  
Until 12:01 a.m., June 21, 2011**



**Contact:**

Amy Lanctot, Communications Coordinator  
401-351-9400, Ext. 22 / [alanctot@rikidscount.org](mailto:alanctot@rikidscount.org)

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

***In 2010, only 58% of Pawtucket students graduated from high school on-time. Only Central Falls had a lower high school graduation rate (51%).***

***While reading and math proficiency rates among Pawtucket's fourth and eighth grades students are lower than in many other communities, the district is making steady progress in both areas.***

~~~

**Pawtucket, RI (June 21, 2011)** – Congressman David Cicilline joined an audience of community leaders, parents and policy makers today to discuss opportunities for improving the well-being of children and youth in Pawtucket. Stephanie Geller, Policy Analyst for Rhode Island KIDS COUNT, presented data from the *2011 Rhode Island Kids Count Factbook*, focusing on improvements and declines in the well-being of children and youth in Pawtucket. After the presentation, community members discussed opportunities to improve outcomes for Pawtucket children and youth. The presentation was brought to the community in partnership with the Pawtucket School Department Child Opportunity Zone and took place **Tuesday, June 21, 2011, from 9:30 a.m. to 11:00 a.m. at St. Paul's Episcopal Church, 50 Park Place, Pawtucket, RI.**

**Education**

In 2010, only 58% of Pawtucket's students graduated within four years of entering high school. The city's graduation rate was lower than every other Rhode Island community except Central Falls, which had a four-year graduation rate of 51%. While 65% of Pawtucket's female students graduated on-time, only 51% of the city's male students did. High school graduation is the minimum requisite for college acceptance and employment. In Rhode Island, adults without high

school diplomas are almost four times as likely to be unemployed as those who have a bachelor's degree.

Risks for dropping out include repeating one or more grades, ongoing attendance problems, suspensions and behavior problems, disengagement from school, and failing math or English. "More work needs to be done to identify at-risk students during the elementary and middle school years," said Elizabeth Burke Bryant, Executive Director of Rhode Island KIDS COUNT. "Doing so will allow schools to provide targeted academic and social service support to troubled students, which can help them get back on track so they can graduate on time."

While reading and math proficiency rates in Pawtucket remain among the lowest in the state, the district has been making steady progress. Between 2005 and 2010, the percentage of fourth grade students in Pawtucket public schools who were proficient in reading increased from 48% to 61%. Eighth-grade reading proficiency also showed improvements, with proficiency rates rising from 44% in 2005 to 62% in 2010. Pawtucket's math proficiency rates have also shown improvement, though improvements have not been as large. In 2005, the math proficiency rate among the city's fourth-grade students was 42%, and in 2010 the rate rose to 53%. The eighth-grade math proficiency rate improved slightly from 37% in 2005 to 40% in 2010.

### **Opportunities to Improve Outcomes for Infants**

Early prenatal care is important to identify and treat health problems and influence health behaviors that can compromise fetal development and infant and maternal health. Despite its importance, the percentage of Pawtucket women who have received delayed prenatal care has increased from 12.5% between 2001 and 2005 to 17.5% between 2005 and 2009. Pawtucket has the third highest percentage of mothers receiving delayed prenatal care 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. Geller also noted that Pawtucket also has higher low birthweight and infant mortality rates than the state as a whole.

Teen pregnancy is also an issue of concern in Pawtucket. Teen pregnancy and parenting threaten the development of teen parents as well as their children. Teen mothers are less likely to have the financial resources, social supports and parenting skills needed for healthy child development. Teen parenting is also closely associated with poverty and other family disadvantages. In Pawtucket, the teen birth rate per 1,000 teen girls ages 15-17 is substantially higher in Pawtucket (34.3) than the state as a whole (18.9), but lower than the core city rate (40.1). From 2005-2009, the teen birth rate for older teens (girls ages 18-19) was among the highest in the state at 92.7 per 1,000. Reducing teen pregnancies would improve outcomes for teen mothers and their children.

Pawtucket has two programs specifically designed to help support vulnerable infants and their families. These programs – the Nurse-Family Partnership Program and Early Head Start – promote healthy development through home visits and other supports. In

Pawtucket in 2010, 52 (5%) of the city's income-eligible children under age 3 were enrolled in the Early Head Start program, still a small number but up from 0 in 2009. Elizabeth Burke Bryant emphasized that, "Programs like the Nurse Family Partnership Program and Early Head Start can help infants at risk and deserve continued federal and state investment."

### **Providing Nutritional Support to Children in Need**

As many Rhode Island families struggle with job loss and underemployment, some have turned to assistance programs to help make ends meet. In Pawtucket, the number of families participating in the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) rose from 3,795 in 2005 to 6,396 in 2010, a 69% increase. Despite the need demonstrated by the rising number of children participating in SNAP, the percentage of children participating in Pawtucket's Universal School Breakfast Program remains low. In 2010, only 25% of low-income children took part in the program. That percentage is lower than each of the remaining urban core communities (Central Falls, Newport, Providence, West Warwick and Woonsocket) and lower than the statewide percentage, which is 28%.

Stephanie Geller recommends, "The district could consider offering in-classroom breakfast, which has been proven to increase participation rates." Central Falls and Providence are already offering in-classroom breakfasts and have found that this change is increasing participation rates.

### **Safety**

In 2010 in Pawtucket, there were 313 victims of child abuse and neglect, a rate of 17.2 per 1,000 children, down slightly from 320 children and a rate of 17.6 per 1,000 children in 2009. Pawtucket has the lowest child abuse and neglect rate among the core cities; however, this rate is still far above the rate for the state as a whole (13.3 per 1,000 children).

Another indicator that shows improvement is the number of youth at the state Training School. Of the 821 youth who passed through the Training School in 2010, 76 youth were from Pawtucket, down from 96 youth in 2009. Stephanie Geller noted that the overall number of youth at the Training School has also been decreasing and also remarked that 34 of the 76 Pawtucket youth who passed through the Training School in 2010 were detained only and never received a sentence or community-based placement. She noted, "We remain concerned about the large percentage of youth held at the Training School that were detained only and are working with a wide variety of partners to encourage other alternatives, so that youth can remain in their homes and communities when at all possible."

###

*Rhode Island KIDS COUNT is a statewide children's policy organization that works to improve the economic well-being, health, safety, education and development of Rhode Island children.*