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For Immediate Release

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

Between 2008 and 2009 in Providence, the percentage of fourth graders who were proficient in reading dropped from 47% to 44%, lagging behind the state 4th grade reading proficiency rate of 67%.

New indicator shows that chronic early absence (i.e. children in grades K-3 who miss more than 18 days of school in a year) leads to poor reading and math achievement and increases the likelihood of dropping out of high school.

21% of children in grades K-3 in Providence were chronically absent, compared to 10% of students statewide and nationally.

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**Providence, RI, June 11, 2010** - Rhode Island KIDS COUNT Policy Analyst, Stephanie Geller, presented data from the *2010 Rhode Island Kids Count Factbook* to an audience of community leaders, parents and policy makers. The presentation included highlights of improvements and declines in the well-being of children and youth in Providence. After the presentation, community members discussed opportunities to improve outcomes for children in Providence. The presentation was brought to the community in partnership with Casey Family Services and was held on **Friday, June 11, 2010 from 9:00 a.m. to 10:30 a.m. at Casey Family Services**, 1268 Eddy Street, Providence, RI.

A new indicator on *Chronic Early Absence* shows that 21% of Providence students in Kindergarten through 3<sup>rd</sup> grade miss at least 10% of the school year (i.e., 18 days or more). This is more than twice the state rate of school absence in the early grades. "When students are absent from school they miss important opportunities to learn. During the early elementary school years, children develop important skills and approaches to learning that are critical for ongoing school success. There is a need for an immediate intervention for students who are chronically absent and students who are struggling with reading in K-3," stated Elizabeth Burke Bryant, Executive Director of Rhode Island KIDS COUNT. Children who are chronically absent in kindergarten demonstrate lower levels of achievement in math, reading and general knowledge in first grade. Among poor children, chronic absence in kindergarten can predict low educational achievement at the end of fifth grade.

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The ability to read, understand and use math are basic requirements to achieve success academically and in life. In Providence, there were positive trends in math proficiency levels but the low rates continue to remain an area of concern. Between 2005 and 2009, the percentage of fourth grade students in Providence public schools who were proficient in math increased from 25% to 35% and the percentage of eight grade students proficient increased from 20% to 28%.

Between 2005 and 2009, the percentage of fourth grade students in Providence public schools who were proficient in reading increased from 31% to 44%, compared to the statewide increase from 60% proficient to 67% proficient over the same time period. Between 2008 and 2009, there was a decrease in the percentage of Providence fourth grade students who were proficient in reading, from 47% to 44%. Students with poor reading skills often experience difficulty completing academic coursework, struggle in middle school, fail to graduate from high school and have difficulty finding and maintaining employment later in life. Participation in high quality preschools also can boost language and literacy skills by providing early literacy experiences including storybook reading, discussions about books, dramatic play, listening comprehension and writing activities. "Closing the gaps in reading proficiency will require effective strategies that begin at birth and continue through the early school years," noted Bryant.

Data from the *2010 Rhode Island Kids Count Factbook* show a positive trend in access to full-day kindergarten and improvements in the high school graduation rate. Student mobility in Providence continues to be an area of concern and has an impact on children's learning and school achievement.

- One hundred percent of kindergarten children in Providence were enrolled in a full-day program in the 2009-2010 school year, an increase from 68% in the 1999-2000 school year and higher than the state rate of 60%. Nationally, children in full-day kindergarten classes make greater academic gains in both reading and mathematics compared to those in half-day classes.
- Sixty-six percent of Providence's class of 2009 graduated on time in four years, which is an increase from 63% in 2008 but lower than the state rate of 75%. Student achievement and graduation rates can be improved with the use of early warning systems that use data to identify at-risk students as early as 4<sup>th</sup> grade.
- During the 2008-2009 school year, the Providence student mobility rate (28%) was the highest in the state, and substantially higher than the rate for the state as a whole (16%). Students who change schools in the middle of the year are more likely to be absent and are less likely to be academically successful than their peers.

A new indicator on *College Preparation and Access* shows that just over half of Rhode Island seniors go on directly to a two-year or four-year program after graduating from high school, compared to 62% in the U.S. Rhode Island ranks 43<sup>rd</sup> on this indicator (where 1st is best). College preparation and access is critical to moving families out of poverty, yet many students graduate from high school unprepared for college entry. In Providence, 77% of high school seniors reported planning to attend college, yet only 58% had taken the SATs. While some colleges do not require the SATs for admission, students significantly limit their choice of colleges when they do not take the SAT exams.

Nationally, three out of four young adults in the top income quartile earn a bachelor's degree, compared with one in ten young adults in the bottom income quartile. Black and Hispanic youth are less likely than White youth to enroll in and complete college. These differences by race and ethnicity often are the result of differences in family education and income levels and access to rigorous K-12 educational opportunities.

### **Economic Well-Being**

Providence continues to have a high child poverty rate, with more than one-third (36%) of children living in families with incomes below the poverty line. Almost half of these children (45%) live in extreme poverty – with income less than half the poverty line. According to the *American Community Survey* conducted by the U.S. Census Bureau, between 2006 and 2008, 36.3% of children in Providence live in poverty, more than twice the state rate of 16.1%. In 2009, the federal poverty threshold was \$17,285 for a family of three with two children and \$21,756 for a family of four with two children.

The Rhode Island Works Program serves as a critical safety net for children living in poverty, helping families transition to work by providing cash assistance and work supports, including subsidized child care, to families in need. More than two-thirds of the people who benefit from Rhode Island Works are children under the age of 18, and more than half (54%) of those children are under age six. In December 2009, 10% (4,725) of children in Providence were receiving cash assistance, while 36% (14,861) of children in Providence lived in poverty from 2006-2008. The percentage of children receiving cash assistance in Providence has declined precipitously in recent years, from almost one-quarter (23%) in 2005 to 10% in 2009.

Research shows that hunger and lack of regular access to sufficient food are linked to serious health, psychological, emotional and academic problems in children and can impede their

healthy growth and development. In October 2009, 20,771 Providence children were receiving SNAP benefits (the new name for the Food Stamp Program), a 24% increase in participation from 2005.

According to Geller, "Children in poverty, especially those who experience poverty in early childhood and for extended periods of time, are more likely to have health and behavioral problems, experience difficulty in school, become teen parents, and earn less or be unemployed as adults. Safety net programs like Rhode Island Works and SNAP protect children from the worst effects of poverty, including risk factors associated with poverty, such as inadequate nutrition and environmental toxins, which can interfere with young children's emotional and intellectual development."

### **Health**

Data from the *2010 Rhode Island Kids Count Factbook* reveal that while Providence has made progress in several areas of child health and development over the past decade, there is still more work to be done to ensure that Providence's children grow up healthy.

- From 2004 to 2008, Providence had the highest rates of women receiving delayed prenatal care and infant mortality the state. In Providence, 20.5% of women received delayed prenatal care and the infant mortality rate was 9.3 per 1,000 births. 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.
- The overall teen birth rate to girls ages 15-19 is higher in Providence (48.0 births per 1,000 teen girls) than in the state as a whole (30.7 births per 1,000 teen girls ages 15 to 19). While the teen birth rate for girls ages 18-19 is slightly higher in Providence (48.7) compared to the state rate (44.0), the Providence rate of births to younger teens (46.7 births per 1,000 teens ages 15 to 17) is more than twice the state rate of 18.9 births per 1,000 teens ages 15 to 17).
- Other health issues in Providence include the highest rate of lead poisoning (5.1% confirmed positive with high lead levels) and the highest rate of childhood asthma hospitalizations (3.0 per 1,000 children). Both of these issues are connected to housing quality as well as access to health care.

### **Safety**

In 2009, 463 adults incarcerated in Rhode Island whose last known residence was Providence reported having 1,081 children. In Providence, 23.9 per 1,000 children have a parent who is incarcerated, the highest rate in the state. When a parent is in prison, their children are more likely to need assistance coping with parental absence and other social, emotional and educational supports necessary for child well-being.

Preventing child abuse and neglect is critical to helping children grow into strong, healthy productive adults and good parents. In 2009 in Providence, there were 640 victims of child abuse and neglect, a rate of 14.1 per 1,000 children. This is lower than the core city rate of 17.4 victims per 1,000 children but substantially higher than the state rate of 11.7 per 1,000 children.

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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.