



RHODE ISLAND KIDS COUNT

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**Rhode Island KIDS COUNT Releases New *Issue Brief*
*Reading by the End of Third Grade Matters***

Reforms needed from birth to third grade education to ensure that all Rhode Island children read proficiently by the end of third grade.

Issue Brief highlights strategies to increase access to high-quality early learning programs and implement immediate interventions for struggling readers in K-3.

Providence, RI, December 6, 2010 – Rhode Island KIDS COUNT released its latest *Issue Brief* entitled *Reading by the End of Third Grade Matters*, at a policy roundtable with educators, state agencies, advocates, policymakers and community leaders. The event was held on **Monday, December 6, 2010** from **8:30 a.m. to 10:00 a.m.** at **Rhode Island KIDS COUNT, One Union Station, Providence, RI**. Speakers at the event included Executive Vice President of the Annie E Casey Foundation Ralph Smith and Rhode Island Commissioner of Education Deborah A. Gist. Catherine B. Walsh, Deputy Director of Rhode Island KIDS COUNT, presented findings from the *Issue Brief*.

Elizabeth Burke Bryant, Executive Director of Rhode Island KIDS COUNT, said, “Many Rhode Island students are at risk of school failure because they are not reading proficiently by the end of third grade. Research shows that when reading difficulties are not identified early, children often need expensive and intensive interventions in order to read proficiently. Once they fall behind, most children never catch up to their grade level peers.”

The *Issue Brief* provides a set of recommendations to improve the rates of students reading proficiently in Rhode Island and close the achievement gap. Recommendations are grouped in two categories to achieve the following: close the preparation gap that children experience when they enter school and ensure that early learning programs and K-3 classrooms are high-quality teaching and learning environments.

“We must intervene deliberately to change the trajectory for the many children who are falling behind in reading,” stated Bryant. “Language development differences between children from lower-and higher-income families appear in infancy, widen during the preschool years and persist throughout a child’s school career. Yet, we know what works to turn the curve – high-quality early learning opportunities, prompt identification of students who are falling behind in reading skills and evidence-based instructional practices that focus on making sure every child is reading proficiently by third grade.”

Recommendations from the *Issue Brief* include:

Close the preparation gap that children experience when they enter school by investing in evidence-based strategies that work, including action on the following issues:

- Evidence-based home visiting and parenting programs.
- Health and developmental screening and services.
- Timely and appropriate referral to Early Intervention and Special Education.
- Access to high-quality Pre-K programs.
- Access to high-quality child care, Head Start and Early Head Start.
- Access to high-quality full-day Kindergarten programs.

Ensure that early learning programs and K-3 classrooms are high-quality teaching and learning environments, including action on the following issues:

- Effective teacher preparation programs.
- Effective professional development.
- High expectations for special populations, including English Language Learners, dual language learners and children with special educational needs.
- Data to identify children who are falling behind.
- Dedicated time for program, classroom, school and district level planning.
- Chronic absence and summer learning loss.

Ralph Smith, Executive Vice President of the Annie E. Casey Foundation, called the group to action, noting, “The concern about reading is reaching a critical point. Our ability to compete in a global economy is severely compromised if we don’t improve these literacy rates. The economic future of our country and our states requires us to prioritize results-driven strategies that will significantly increase the percentage of children reading at grade level by the end of third grade.”

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