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**For Immediate Release**

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

*Warwick's high school graduation rate has improved from 66% in 2007 to 75% in 2009; yet, just over half (57%) of low-income students in Warwick complete high school in four years.*

*Warwick youth are at risk due to high birth rates among older teens, alcohol and drug use rates that are higher than many communities and the prevalence of violence at school.*

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**Warwick, RI, Thursday, October 21, 2010** - Rhode Island KIDS COUNT Policy Analyst, Stephanie Geller, presented data from the *2010 Rhode Island KIDS COUNT Factbook* to an audience of community and policy leaders. As part of the *Data in Your Backyard Series*, the presentation highlighted indicators of child well-being in Warwick and included a community discussion about the implications of the data. The presentation was held on **Thursday, October 21, 2010, from 9:30 a.m. to 11:30 a.m. at the Warwick Public Library, 600 Sandy Lane, Warwick, RI.** The event was hosted locally by the Warwick Coalition to Prevent Child Abuse.

“Warwick has a track record for leadership on issues affecting the well-being of children and youth. On the positive side, Warwick is showing improvement on its high school graduation rates and on its fourth- and eighth-grade reading proficiency rates. In order to ensure that Warwick’s youth have the opportunity to succeed in school and in life a renewed focus should be placed on preventing teen pregnancy, youth violence and alcohol and drug use,” stated Elizabeth Burke Bryant, Executive Director of Rhode Island KIDS COUNT.

“Warwick youth need access to the opportunities from preschool through high school that can prepare them for higher education and success in the workforce.”

## **Risk Factors Affecting Warwick Youth**

Warwick's teen birth rate for younger teens of 10.0 births per 1,000 teens ages 15 to 17 continues to be about half the state rate of 18.9 births per 1,000 teens ages 15 to 17. However, Warwick's teen birth rate for older teens ages 18-19 is higher than the rate for the state as whole. In Warwick there are 48.4 births for every 1,000 girls ages 18-19 compared to the Rhode Island rate of 44.0 births for every 1,000 girls ages 18-19. "Teen pregnancy and parenting threatens the healthy development of the teens as well as their children," stated Ms. Geller. "We must not be complacent about high rate of childbearing among older teens in Warwick. Having a baby at ages 18 and 19 places young people at risk for not completing their education and low-paying jobs that are inadequate to meet basic needs. Teen pregnancy and parenting are also important risk factors for future involvement with the child welfare system."

A new indicator on *Youth Violence* showed that during the 2007-2008 school year, 12% of Rhode Island public high school students reported ever experiencing violence in schools and 13% reported ever bringing a weapon to school. In Warwick, 17% of students reported ever experiencing violence and 17% of students reported ever bringing a weapon to school. Violence in schools affects individual victims and also disrupts the functioning of entire schools. Lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender youth, youth with disabilities and youth with low grades (Ds and Fs) in Rhode Island are more likely than their peers to report being threatened or injured at school and to miss school because they felt unsafe.

During the 2007-2008 school year, the most recent year for which data are available, 45% of Warwick high school students reported using alcohol and 33% reported using drugs. Warwick's alcohol and drug use rates are higher than the state rates and are among the highest in the state. Use and abuse of alcohol and drugs poses health and safety risks to the youth themselves as well as to their families, schools, and communities. Families and schools need to work together to prevent substance use and abuse among young people.

Ms. Geller stated, "The best way to prevent many of the problems faced by teens – including teen pregnancy, substance use, and violence – is by using multiple approaches that meet the developmental needs of teens, make sure youth are engaged in school, provide opportunities to build career and leadership skills, and offer accurate information about and increased access to reproductive and behavioral health care services."

## **Preventing Child Abuse and Neglect**

Preventing child abuse and neglect is critical to helping children grow into strong, healthy productive adults and good parents. In 2009 in Rhode Island, almost half (47%) of the victims of child abuse and neglect were young children under age six and more than one-third (34%) were age three and younger. In 2009, 162 Warwick children were victims of child abuse and neglect, a rate of 8.6 victims per 1,000 children ages birth to 18.

Warwick's child abuse and neglect rate continues to be lower than the rate for the state as a whole, but the Warwick child abuse and neglect rate is up from last year when it was 6.2 victims per 1,000 children. "We are seeing increases in the number of children experiencing abuse and neglect across Rhode Island as well as in Warwick, most likely due to families experiencing the stresses of a poor economy," said Geller.

Teen pregnancy and parenting can also be an important risk factor for future involvement with the child welfare system. National research shows that 80% of families in the child welfare system had their first child as a teenager. "Research shows that high-quality, intensive family support programs during the first few years of life can improve child outcomes and reduce the risk of neglect and abuse," stated Geller. "Local and state efforts are being implemented to help caregivers who may be overwhelmed by multiple stressors, including inadequate income to meet even basic needs and lack of strong social support networks. Providing a strong network of family support services, access to health care and affordable child care can help keep families from ending up in the child welfare system."

## **Education**

In 2009, 75% of Warwick students graduated on time (within four years). Another 15% dropped out of school, while 5% completed their GED within four years or were still in school. Warwick's four-year graduation rate has been climbing steadily from 66% in 2007 to 72% in 2008, and is now equal to the four-year graduation rate for the state as a whole (75%). Children in low-income families are less likely to graduate on time than their more advantaged peers. In 2009 in Warwick, only 57% of low-income students graduated on time, compared to 82% of higher-income students.

Other education highlights include:

- Fewer than one in ten (9%) Warwick kindergarten children attend a full-day kindergarten program, compared with 60% of kindergarten children statewide. Full-day kindergarten has been shown to improve academic success, especially for low-income children.
- In Warwick, the rate of fourth graders reading at or above proficiency level in 2009 was 76%, higher than it was in 2005 (71%) and above the state rate of 67%.
- In 2009, Warwick's rate of eighth graders scoring at or above proficiency in reading (76%) was substantially higher than it was in 2005 (59%), and higher than the state rate of 70%.
- In Warwick, the rate of fourth graders achieving proficiency in math has increased from 63% in 2005 to 70% in 2009. During that same period, eighth grade math achievement has also improved, from 52% to 55%.

Another new indicator, *College Preparation and Access*, shows that Rhode Island youth are less likely to go on to college than youth in the U.S. as a whole. In 2006, just over half (55%) of Rhode Island seniors who graduated from high school went directly on to a two-year or four-year college, compared to 62% of seniors nationally. Rhode Island ranks 43<sup>rd</sup> on this measure (1<sup>st</sup> is best). College preparation and access are critical to moving families out of poverty, yet many students either do not graduate from high school or graduate from high school unprepared for college entry. Low-income and first-generation college students are much more likely to go to college when they attend schools with strong “college-going cultures,” where teachers encourage students to go to college, work to make sure students are prepared, and help students with the college application process. In 2008, 70% of Warwick high school seniors reported planning to attend college, but only 45% took 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.

### **Economic Well-Being**

The most recent data on the child population in Warwick is from Census 2000 when there were 18,780 children under age 18 and Warwick had a child poverty rate of 6.7%. This means that more than 1,200 Warwick children lived in families with incomes below the federal poverty threshold. In 2009, the federal poverty threshold was \$17,285 for a family of three. Many poor families live in extreme poverty – with income below half the poverty line.

Since the recession began, more and more families have lost employment and been forced to seek help to meet their families' basic needs. The Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program

(SNAP) is helping families provide food for their children so they can be healthy and prepared for school. Between 2005 and 2009, the number of Warwick children receiving Supplemental Nutrition Assistance (SNAP) benefits more than doubled from 1,136 to 2,295. “It is good news that Warwick families are able to access SNAP benefits; however, only 12% of low-income children in Warwick participate in the School Breakfast Program, compared to 27% in the state as a whole. We remain concerned that many Warwick children still go to school hungry and could benefit from participation in the School Breakfast Program,” noted Geller. Strategies to increase program participation in the School Breakfast Program include providing information to parents and community leaders on the importance of nutrition on school performance, providing universal breakfast and offering breakfast in the classroom at the beginning of the school day.

## Health

Data from the *2010 Rhode Island Kids Count Factbook* reveal that Warwick does better than the state as a whole on many of the health outcomes for children.

- The percentage of women with delayed prenatal care in Warwick at 10.7% is lower than the state rate of 14.0%. However, the rate of Warwick women with delayed prenatal care has increased from 5.0% between 2000 and 2004 to 10.7% between 2004 and 2008, similar to the statewide increase from 8.9% to 14.0% in that same period. Women receiving late or no 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.
- Between 2004 and 2008, 7.8% of infants from Warwick were born low birthweight, compared to 8.0% statewide. Low birthweight is a major determinant of infant mortality and illness and is related to increased risk of cognitive difficulties and lower academic achievement
- The infant mortality rate in Warwick of 6.0 infant deaths per 1,000 live births was also better than the state rate of 6.2 infant deaths per 1,000 live births between 2004 and 2008.

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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.