

## Preventing Poverty in Future Generations

*“These statistics are all the more troubling since the evidence is undisputed that children in high-poverty households and in tough communities have bleak outcomes that compromise their prospects for productive adulthood.”<sup>1</sup>*

There is a strong consensus among policy researchers in the United States that investing in antipoverty measures targeted directly at children are vital to breaking the cycle of poverty in the long-term.<sup>2</sup> Social policy often seeks to “play catch-up” and address past inequities long after the effects of poverty have made their mark on children that often last a lifetime.<sup>3</sup>

Preventing poverty in future generations requires interventions from the outset of a child’s life that continue throughout the school age years. Moreover, the other types of poverty alleviation strategies designed to reduce poverty in the short-term (including addressing workforce needs, making work pay, and reducing the high cost of being poor) all contribute to better educational and economic outcomes for children which allow the next generation to avoid a lifetime of poverty. Additionally, long-term two-generation strategies will often complement short-term initiatives by making the problems these initiatives address less severe. In sum, short-term and long-term poverty alleviation strategies rely and build upon one another.<sup>4</sup>

### **Access to Quality Early Childhood Education Programs**

Current research in cognitive science strongly suggests that because of the way a child’s brain develops early education initiatives can have a profound impact on a child’s long-term success in life. Success in adulthood, of course, requires that we ensure that a child will possess the necessary skills to avoid a life of poverty. Supports for infants and toddlers as well as universal access to quality pre-kindergarten programs can be viewed as key strategies to meet a child’s needs during this critical early phase of life. High-quality early childhood education programs create positive lifelong effects on future educational attainment and criminal activity. Low-income children who attend pre-kindergarten programs have improved vocabulary, spoken language, social skills, behavior and early math skills.<sup>5</sup> Investment in high-quality, outcome-based school readiness programs is prudent fiscal policy.<sup>6</sup> Many intensive programs yield economic benefits to communities that are greater than the upfront costs.<sup>7</sup> Studies show that for every dollar invested in high quality early childhood education now, Rhode Island taxpayers could save as much as \$7 later.<sup>8</sup>

**Problem: *Low-income children enter kindergarten less well-prepared for school than their more affluent peers.*** One study found that three-year-olds in low-income families possess only half the vocabulary of more affluent children.<sup>9</sup> Adult literacy and language stimulation play a key role in promoting healthy brain growth in children. The average child from a professional family hears 215,000 words per week; a child from a working-class family hears 125,000 words per week; and a child from a very low-income family hears 62,000 words per week, according to a Chicago Ounce of Prevention Fund report.<sup>10</sup>

To succeed in kindergarten, children must also already have the social, behavioral and cognitive skills that enable them to listen, follow directions, start and finish small projects, express their needs, respect others, and know when they need help. Children learn these skills from their families and quality early childhood providers. Between birth and age five, children develop essential social and emotional skills: confidence, curiosity, verbal abilities, and self-control.

However, many children arrive at school without these skills. Kindergarten teachers report that disruptive behavior is now the single greatest challenge they face in the classroom. Studies show that untreated early emotional and behavioral problems have lifelong consequences on the likelihood of school failure, criminal activity, and lower earnings potential.<sup>11</sup>

- ❖ **Promising Strategy—Improve access to quality parent education and empowerment programs for infants, toddlers and preschoolers that increase school readiness.**

#### ***National Best-Practice Models:***

A national best-practice model is the Parents as Teachers program, which was designed as a universal support for all families of children birth to age 5 to improve school readiness. The program includes regular home visits by a parent educator trained to implement the Born to Learn curriculum (focusing on child development, age-appropriate activities, etc.). The Atlanta, GA Parents as Teachers program has been particularly successful, and has added an innovative component that connects parents with the school department to address parental ability to negotiate school bureaucracy.<sup>12</sup> In 2004, there were 25 Parents as Teachers programs operating in Rhode Island, serving 3,920 children.

Home Instruction Program for Preschool Youngsters (HIPPY) is another national best practice model designed to improve school readiness using curricula delivered primarily through home visits. This program focuses on parents who have limited education with children ages 3-5.<sup>13</sup> In 2004, there were 5 HIPPY programs operating in Rhode Island, serving 425 children.

The Nurse-Family Partnership Model is an intensive, long-term program for low-income pregnant and parenting first-time mothers. These programs help to improve pregnancy outcomes, child health and development, and family economic self-sufficiency. They have been shown to improve prenatal health, reduce the incidence of child abuse and neglect, reduce subsequent pregnancies, increase intervals between births, increase maternal employment, and improve school readiness. The program also produces long-term benefits to children including fewer behavior problems and less delinquency in adolescence. For more information see their website at [www.nursefamilypartnership.org](http://www.nursefamilypartnership.org).<sup>14</sup>

#### ***Providence Practices:***

Ready to Learn Providence (R2LP), a program of the Providence Plan, is a broad-based community coalition with the vision that all children in Providence will enter school healthy and ready to learn. R2LP offers a wide array of early education services including early literacy programs and extensive provider training.<sup>15</sup> The program focuses on supporting parents and child care providers (center-based and family child care) in their roles as teachers and nurturers of young children. The program has extensive capability in working with Spanish-speaking families and early care providers. Ready to Learn Providence recently reported that since 2003 the number of incoming kindergartners meeting the fall benchmark for early literacy has increased by 13 percentage points.<sup>16</sup>

Children Healthy and Prepared to Succeed in School (CHAPS) is a coalition of individuals working under Making Connections Providence to promote children being healthy and prepared to succeed in school, with a focus on parent readiness and early childhood development.<sup>17</sup>

- ❖ **Promising Strategy—Institute high quality universal pre-kindergarten education programs for 3- and 4-year olds that feature:**
  - Well-educated and trained teachers.

- Strong curriculum guidelines, small class sizes, and high adult-to-child classroom ratios.
- A language-rich and physically safe environment.
- Responsive and compassionate staff interactions with children.<sup>18</sup>

### ***National Examples of Universal Pre-Kindergarten Programs:***

Universal pre-kindergarten initiatives make publicly funded preschool services available to all 3- and 4-year olds on a voluntary basis. Georgia and Oklahoma have programs that are available to all 4-year-olds in participating school districts, irrespective of income. The majority of school districts in these states have chosen to participate; and a majority of parents of 4-year-olds have chosen to enroll their children. The District of Columbia also has a program that in principle is available to all children on a first-come, first-served basis. New Jersey offers preschool services free to all 3- and 4-year-olds who live in the 30 highest poverty school districts (Abbott districts) as a result of a court decision. Several other States, including West Virginia and Florida, are moving toward a variation of universal pre-kindergarten. At the local level, Los Angeles has made a commitment to provide access to pre-kindergarten for 100,000 children within 10 years.<sup>19</sup>

### ***Models for Funding Universal Pre-Kindergarten:***

- ❖ Iowa: The Iowa General Assembly recently approved on a bi-partisan vote an initiative aimed at making at least 10 hours per week of state-funded preschool education available to all 4-year-olds on a voluntary basis. The measure calls for spending an additional \$15 million in each of the next four years to provide pre-kindergarten to an estimated 28,000 additional children. It calls for teachers with degrees in each classroom and for the K-12 system to help manage issues of budgeting, personnel and facilities.<sup>20</sup> Governor Chet Culver signed the bill into law on May 10, 2007.<sup>21</sup> While there has been criticism of the bill because the number of hours of preschool provided is very limited, it is a good example of a state-funded preschool initiative that could be built on top of a high-quality child care infrastructure, such as the one that exists in Rhode Island.
- ❖ Georgia: In Georgia, a universal pre-kindergarten program has been in place since 1993 using proceeds from the state lottery for funding. A unified agency called the Department of Early Care and Learning established in 2004 administers the program.<sup>22</sup>

### ***Examples of National Best Practice Pre-School Models:***

- ❖ The Michigan Perry Preschool Program that serves low-income, African-American children ages 3 and 4 has shown key positive short-term IQ effects and positive long-term effects on employment, earnings, and arrests. By age 40, when examined against a comparison group, one-quarter fewer Perry adult graduates were poor.<sup>23</sup>
- ❖ The Abecedarian Program in Chapel Hill, North Carolina costs \$18,000 annually per child and still passed a cost-benefit test. It serves low-income children and has shown that its graduates are substantially more likely to attend college and have solid career opportunities. It also saw a reduction in female graduates who experience a teen pregnancy.<sup>24</sup>

***Problem: There are not enough Early Head Start slots in Rhode Island to enroll most eligible infants and toddlers.*** Rhode Island has 381 federally-funded Early Head Start slots.

Of these slots, 45% were center-based and 55% were home-based. In October 2006 in Rhode Island, 17 pregnant women and 391 infants and toddlers received Early Head Start services. 43 children under age 3 in Providence are enrolled in Early Head Start.<sup>25</sup>

- ❖ ***Proven Strategy—Expanding access to Early Head Start programs for infants and toddlers and their families.*** Interventions for children and families identified as at-risk of poor outcomes are most effective if they begin early and work with the family over time. Early Head Start is a federal program that promotes healthy prenatal care for low-income women, supports early learning and child development for children under age 3, and fosters healthy family relationships. Early Head Start programs can be home-based, center-based, or a combination of the two. They serve vulnerable families with income below the federal poverty level. Home-based programs use weekly home visits to support child development and offer group activities two times per month. Center-based programs provide enrollment for children in an early care and education program and twice yearly home visits.<sup>26</sup> The national evaluation of Early Head Start showed that the program produced significant cognitive and language development gains in participating children and more positive interactions with their parents. Early Head Start parents provided more emotional support and greater opportunities for language and learning to their children. Early Head Start mothers also had fewer subsequent births within 2 years of enrollment and are more likely to participate in education and job-training activities.<sup>27</sup> Increased federal or state funding would allow more children to access these services.

**Problem: Many children eligible for Head Start in Providence are not receiving services.**

In 2006, Head Start served 50% of the estimated 4,848 eligible children ages 3 and 4 in Rhode Island. In the core cities (including Providence), 36% of eligible children were enrolled in Head Start whereas 93% of the eligible children in the remainder of the state were served by Head Start. The participation rate is estimated based on the 2000 Census (most recent available data for all cities and towns). In Providence there were 1,919 children ages 3 and 4 eligible for Head Start but only 684 were enrolled. In 2006 in Rhode Island, there were 118 fewer 3 and 4 year-old children enrolled in Head Start than in 2005 and 372 fewer than in 2004. The 2006 participation rate of 50% marks two consecutive years in which the participation rate of children ages 3 and 4 eligible for Head Start decreased.<sup>28</sup>

Under Starting Right, Rhode Island's 1998 child care law, **Comprehensive Child Care Services** Programs were created to provide developmentally appropriate education and support services to children and families eligible for, but not receiving, Head Start services.<sup>29</sup> As of October 2006, there were 24 licensed child care centers, 3 certified family child care homes, and 2 certified group family childcare home in the Comprehensive Child Care Services network. There were 234 Head Start-eligible children being served in Rhode Island with 164 of these being Providence children. An additional 798 children were enrolled in the participating programs and benefited from some enhanced services.<sup>30</sup>

- ❖ ***Promising Strategy—Increase enrollment in quality Head Start and Comprehensive Child Care Programs.*** Research has shown that children who participate in quality Head Start receive both short-term and long-term benefits including improved literacy skills, reduced behavior problems, reduced rates of grade retention (which is linked to likelihood of dropping out), less need for special education services, and increased high school graduation rates. Research has also shown that Head Start programs with more financial resources produce better child outcomes, so the funding level of programs is important as well.<sup>31</sup> In Rhode Island, Comprehensive Child Care Programs help to meet

the needs of very low-income children in families that are not working (and therefore not eligible for child care subsidies).

### **Intensive Reading Interventions for Struggling Students in Elementary School**

Researchers and advocates agree that children must succeed in learning to read so that the best future opportunities will remain available to them. In fact, the extent to which children progress in reading skills as they move through the early part of their lives and into the compulsory school system is an excellent predictor of their future prospects as productive and contributing citizens.<sup>32</sup> Intensive reading interventions for struggling elementary school students is one important lever available for policy change over the long-term. While the academic literature around this issue has not established a single approach that is clearly superior to others, substantial guidance on best practices and policies are available for review.<sup>33</sup>

***Problem: Many young students read below grade level, and the problem is particularly concentrated in urban and low-income areas.*** There are also racial and ethnic disparities in reading proficiency. National data show that despite the widespread awareness of the importance of early reading success, disparities continue to exist between elementary school Hispanic students (both English Language Learners and monolingual English speakers) and their White, non-Hispanic counterparts.<sup>34</sup> Moreover, research suggests that Black elementary school students fall behind significantly in the first four years in school in all subject areas including reading achievement.<sup>35</sup>

- ❖ ***Promising Strategy***—**Intensive reading interventions for struggling students** that focus on skill and knowledge development in the following areas can be successful in improving literacy levels: reading fluency, phonological awareness, comprehension and vocabulary development, and word study.<sup>36</sup>
- ❖ ***Promising Strategy***—Because struggling readers often do not qualify for individual special education teaching arrangements, **the use of proven reading instruction models in elementary school classrooms can improve the literacy of all students, including those who struggle.** Developing and implementing sound teaching strategies for reading that teachers can apply in their classroom environment and that will benefit both more proficient students and struggling readers is an important goal. Such strategies include: daily reading to students from a variety of genres, providing multiple contexts for student learning (e.g., task structures where students engage in reading activities and structured talks precipitating dialogue between teachers and students), giving teachers the curriculum flexibility to tailor approaches to the needs of a specific classroom, and balancing different theoretical and practical methods.<sup>37</sup>

#### ***Rhode Island Practice:***

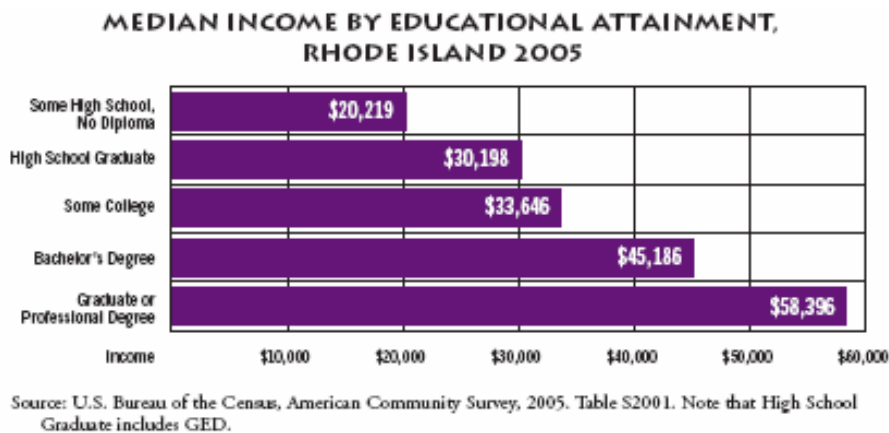
***The Rhode Island Reading First Program*** supports proven methods of early reading instructions in the classroom. Its goal is to ensure that all children will read well by the end of third grade. Schools in Providence, Pawtucket, Central Falls, and West Warwick participate in the program. Student achievement and poverty level determine a school's eligibility for the program. The program provides the necessary assistance to districts and schools to establish research-based reading instruction for students in kindergarten through third grade. It also focuses on providing high-quality and sustained professional development to ensure that all teachers, including special education and ESL teachers, have the knowledge and skills that they need to teach

reading effectively. Finally, it provides assistance for the selection, administration, and interpretation of screening, diagnostic, classroom-based progress monitoring, and outcome assessments with proven validity and reliability. This enables teachers to measure where students are, monitor their progress, and provide any required intervention and/or support.<sup>38</sup>

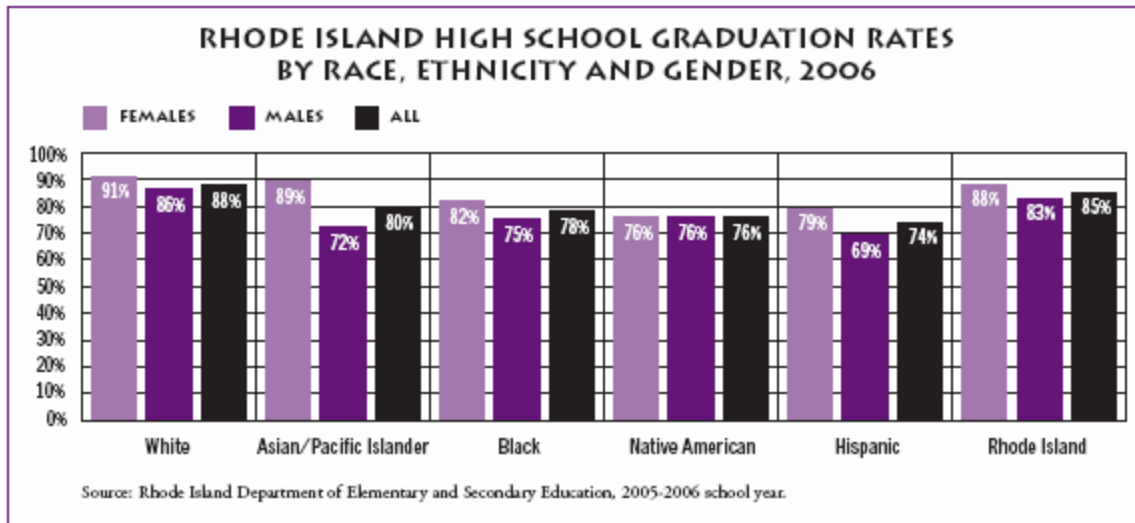
**Improving High School Graduation Rates and College Access and Retention**

High school graduation is the minimum prerequisite for college and most employment. Higher education is fast becoming a necessity for the majority of workers in the growing high-tech economy as well. In fact, according to U.S. Department of Labor projections, approximately 90% of the fastest growing jobs in the United States will require some post-secondary education or training.<sup>39</sup> High school dropouts are most likely to have a range of negative social outcomes when compared to people who graduate from high school including: living in poverty, receiving public assistance, being a teen parent, incarceration, having poor health, being divorced, and being single parents of children who also drop out of school.<sup>40</sup>

Education also has an impact on the likelihood of finding and maintaining employment as well as on earning levels. People who drop out of high school in the United States are almost twice as likely to be unemployed as those who attain a high school degree or equivalent and are almost four times as likely to be unemployed as those who receive a Bachelor's degree.<sup>41</sup> In Rhode Island in 2005, adults without a high school diploma or General Education Development certificate earned a median income of \$20,219 compared to \$30,198 for people with a high school degree or equivalent.<sup>42</sup> Moreover, college graduates earn on average 70% more than high school graduates while high school dropouts are four times more likely to be unemployed than college graduates.<sup>43</sup>



In 2006, Rhode Island had a high school graduation rate of 85%, compared with 71% in Providence. Significant differences in high school graduation rates in Rhode Island can also be seen across racial and ethnic groups as well as between males and females. Socio-economic status is a key indicator of dropping out, not race or ethnicity; yet the problem is worse in minority communities because of higher poverty rates and lower rates of educational attainment among adults.<sup>44,45</sup>



The 2006 Rhode Island graduation rate was 83% for males and 88% for females, with significant differences across racial and ethnic groups. Males have lower high school graduation rates than their female peers in every racial and ethnic group.<sup>46</sup> Nationally, female students drop out less but are significantly more likely to live in poverty than male dropouts from the same racial and ethnic group.<sup>47</sup>

**Problem: Many youth drop out of school.** In 2006, Providence had the lowest graduation rate of any district in Rhode Island, at 71%. The graduation rates of Providence high schools ranged from a low of 50% at the Alternative Learning Project to a high of 100% at the Times<sup>2</sup> Academy.<sup>48</sup>

- ❖ ***Promising Strategy*—Immediate and intensive interventions for students who are falling behind.**<sup>49</sup> Several studies have shown that interventions consisting of close monitoring of school performance, mentoring, and case management yield positive effects on staying in school (not dropping out) and suggest positive effects on advancing academically (earning credits) in school as well. The research, however, does not suggest a positive nor negative effect on finishing high school within four years.<sup>50</sup>
- ❖ ***Promising Strategy*—Improving teaching and curricula to make school more relevant and engaging and enhance the connection between school and work.**<sup>51</sup> One way to do this is to develop career academies within existing high schools that offer specific career-focused courses and partner with local employers to offer mentoring and internship opportunities. Career academies have been found to have potentially positive effects on both staying in school and academic advancement but no proven effects on finishing high school within four years.<sup>52</sup>
- ❖ ***Promising Strategy*—Creating alternative school opportunities for students who have difficulty in traditional educational environments.** Alternative high schools often focus on individualized educational programs, small class sizes, availability of child care, academic remediation, theme-based education and accelerated credit accumulation. The research suggests that high quality alternative educational models can yield positive effects on staying in school improved academic advancement.<sup>53,54</sup>

***Rhode Island Best Practice:***

The Urban Collaborative Accelerated Program (UCAP) is a small (141 students in 2006-2007), independent public school whose student body consists of youth in grades 7 through 9 at high risk for dropping out of school. The school has students from Providence, Central Falls, and Cranston referred to it by those respective school districts. Prior grade retention is the single biggest risk factor of students at UCAP. Academic acceleration is available through a rigorous curriculum that allows students to make-up grade levels rapidly (as quickly as two full grades in a year at the most accelerated pace). The school also operates under a theory of dropout intervention that emphasizes best practice instruction, viewing the school as a community, personalized student support, and family engagement and guidance. A study conducted to compare UCAP students with Providence students of similar risk profiles showed that 44% of UCAP students versus 36% of Providence students graduated from high school and only 28% of UCAP students dropped out of high school while 38% of Providence students left school. The UCAP study group had statistically significantly higher average cumulative attendance rates and a higher average grade point average.<sup>55</sup>

***Providence Practice:***

The Providence Public School District runs a Credit Recovery Program that offers students enrolled in a Providence high school a two credit recovery opportunity. However, the student must earn his/her one or two credits prior to their school's graduation. The program requires that a student: be enrolled in a Providence high school as a 12th grader, need only one or two credits to graduate, and be granted permission from school personnel to attend the credit recovery program.<sup>56</sup>

***Problem: Many youth graduate from high school lacking the basic skills necessary for work and college, particularly in low-performing school systems.*** The recently-released national *Are They Really Ready to Work?* report documents employer dissatisfaction with the readiness of the newly graduated about to enter the workforce. Forty-two percent of employer respondents said that high school graduates were “deficient” in skills necessary for entry level positions. Virtually none of the employers surveyed described high school graduates as “excellent.” In terms of specific skills, high school graduates also fare poorly. In both English writing skills and mathematics, a majority of employers rated high school graduates as “deficient.”<sup>57</sup>

Indicators related to college readiness are also not promising. The most recent data suggests that just over one-third of high school seniors are ready for college and that racial disparities in college readiness exist as well.<sup>58</sup>

- ❖ *Possible Providence Action Steps to Improve Basic Skills Attainment in Public Schools:*
  - Institute programs to ensure that struggling students receive immediate and intensive interventions.
  - Expand Career and Technical Education to engage and train students through career-focused education and work-based learning.

***Rhode Island Context:***

The Rhode Island Board of Regents is currently changing the high school regulations to improve graduation rates and engagement in learning up to and through senior year in high school. The regulations are also intended to match the high school standards to the skills and knowledge students need when they enter higher education and the workforce through literacy interventions and proficiency-based minimum coursework standards.<sup>59</sup>

**Problem: Many youth face multiple barriers to attending and succeeding in college.** Many young people are not academically prepared to succeed in two-year post-secondary education programs (much less four-year programs), lack either motivation or support, have inadequate information, or do not have the financial ability to pay for school or for related costs such as child care. They may also be unaware of available supports and services. In addition, Pell Grants, which provide many low-income youth with the means to attend college, are restricted to students with no history of incarceration or drug-related convictions, presenting a barrier for otherwise potentially successful students.<sup>60</sup>

There is a gap in college access between higher- and lower-income students and minority and White students. Twenty percent of students from families with incomes below \$25,000 ever complete an associate's degree or higher, compared to 45% of those whose families earn between \$25,000 and \$75,000, and 76% of those with incomes above \$75,000.<sup>61</sup> Minority youth are more likely to be low-income than their White peers, and they are also less likely to graduate from high school and go on to college. Eighteen percent of African Americans and 9% of Hispanics between the ages of 25 and 29 years old in the U.S. have earned a Bachelor's degree.<sup>62</sup>

- ❖ **Promising Strategy—Youth programs that do explicit college access and retention work.** Youth that participate in programs explicitly focused on college access and retention are more likely to attend college and succeed than their peers who do not, particularly those that participate in programs of substantial duration that focus on college readiness rather than remediation. Effective programs use a wide variety of teaching strategies to offer students different types of relevant experiences and to ensure learning, including: direct teaching in a variety of content areas, summer enrichment programs, individual and group counseling, tutoring, college visits and courses, peer and adult mentoring, and motivational speakers.<sup>63</sup>

***Providence/Rhode Island Resources:***

While there are other organizations that work with youth and assist with college access and educational success, this list focuses on some of the ones targeting Providence youth that have college access or retention as a primary focus.

***College Access Programs:***

College Planning Center of RI at the Warwick Mall  
College Guide Program at the Swearer Center, Brown University  
College Vision  
Educational Opportunity Center at CCRI  
Educational Talent Search (ETS)  
RI Children's Crusade  
Upward Bound at RIC  
Project Open Door at Hope Arts High School with RISD

***College Retention Programs:***

Access to Opportunity at CCRI  
College Readiness Program at CCRI  
Preparatory Enrollment Program (PEP) at RIC  
Talent Development (TD) at URI

- ❖ ***Promising Strategy—Dual enrollment and early college high school programs.*** Programs and alternative schools that enable students to work towards both their high school degree and an associates degree (or to earn college credits) at the same time can be effective in motivating students to work hard and in removing barriers many students face to attending and succeeding in college. These programs “have the potential to improve graduation rates and better prepare students for entry into high-skill careers by engaging all students in a rigorous, college preparatory curriculum, removing financial and other barriers to college, and compressing the number of years to a college degree.”<sup>64</sup> For example, the national Early College High School Initiative funds small schools designed so that students can earn both a high school diploma and an Associate’s degree or up to two years of credit toward a Bachelor’s degree [www.earlycolleges.org]. The Excel Program in New York, NY is an early college high school that targets immigrants, their children and students at-risk of dropping out. A similar program that targets high school dropouts is the Portland Community College (Oregon) College Bound Program that allows students to work towards their GED while earning college credits.<sup>65</sup>
  
- ❖ ***Possible Providence Action Steps to Improve College Access and Retention:***
  - Increase post-secondary education scholarship funding for Providence residents.
  - Increase opportunities for Providence youth to connect with and enroll in local colleges and universities.
  - Explicitly focus outreach and target assistance to low-income minority residents and to youth who would be “first generation” college students.
  - Promote the early college and dual enrollment models in Providence public schools.
  - Support the expansion of programs that help Providence students access higher education.

***Rhode Island Resource:***

For more information about financial aid for Rhode Island students, contact the Rhode Island Higher Education Assistance Authority (www.riheaa.org).

**Preventing Teen Pregnancy/Services for Teen Parents and Their Children**

Over the past decade, teen pregnancy rates and birth rates have been declining both nationally and in Rhode Island.<sup>66 67</sup> This significant decline has been recognized as an important public health success that has improved the life chances of both teenage girls and babies and reduced the number of families living in poverty.<sup>68 69</sup>

Due to the high economic and social costs of teen childbearing, continuing to reduce the number of births to teens remains a critical goal. Teen pregnancy and parenting threatens the development of teen parents as well as their children. Nationally only one-third of teen mothers go on to receive a high school diploma.<sup>70</sup> Teen parents are less likely to have the financial resources, social supports and parenting skills needed for healthy child development.<sup>71</sup> Children born to teens are more likely to suffer poor health, experience learning and behavior problems, live in poverty, go to prison, or become teen parents themselves.<sup>7273</sup>

In 2004, the Rhode Island teen birth rate was 32.9 per 1,000 girls ages 15-19, lower than the national rate of 41.1 per thousand. Rhode Island ranked 15th in the nation, behind all 5 other

New England states.<sup>74</sup> Teen birth rates in the United States are among the highest in the industrialized world.<sup>75</sup>

In Providence, the teen birth rate was higher than in Rhode Island as a whole at 48.4 per 1000 girls ages 15-19.

### **Birth to Teens, Ages 15-19, Rhode Island, 2001-2005**

City/Town	Number of Births to Girls Ages 15-17	Birth Rate per 1,000 Girls Ages 15-17	Number of Births to Girls Ages 18-19	Birth Rate per 1,000 Girls Ages 18-19	Number of Births to Girls Ages 15-19	Birth Rate per 1,000 Girls Ages 15-19
<b>Providence</b>	820	48.1	1,434	48.7	2,254	<b>48.4</b>
<b>Rhode Island</b>	1,922	19.5	3,857	44.0	5,779	<b>31.0</b>

Source: Rhode Island Department of Health, Division of Family Health, Maternal and Child Health Database, 2001-2005. Data for 2004-2005 are provisional.

Young teen girls (ages 15-17) in Providence are becoming mothers at a much higher rate than in the state as a whole. The Providence birth rate for younger teen girls ages 15-17 (48.1 per 1,000 teen girls ages 15-17) is more than twice the comparable Rhode Island rate (19.5 per 1,000 teen girls ages 15-17). The Providence teen birth rate among younger teen girls ages 15-17 is also almost identical to that of older teen girls ages 18-19 in Providence (48.7 per 1,000 teen girls ages 18-19). In comparison, the overall Rhode Island birth rate for older teens (44.0) is much higher than its rate for younger teens (19.5).<sup>76</sup>

Providence's overall birth statistics also illustrate that Providence has a much higher concentration of teen births than Rhode Island as a whole. *In Providence, 15% of all births are to teen mothers while just 9% of all Rhode Island births are to teens.*<sup>77</sup>

While preventing teen pregnancy remains an important part of any long-term poverty alleviation strategy, ensuring that teen parents and their children still have opportunities for success is also an important goal.

**Problem: Teen pregnancy is a major driver of intergenerational poverty.** The daughters of teen mothers are 22% more likely than girls born to adult mothers to become teen mothers themselves.<sup>78</sup> Researchers also recognize the repetition of teen births from generation to generation as a major driver of poverty. Compared to women of similar socio-economic status who postpone childbearing, teen mothers are more likely to receive public assistance.<sup>79</sup> Almost half of all teen mothers and over three-quarters of all unmarried teen mothers begin receiving cash assistance within 5 years of delivering their first baby.<sup>80</sup> Nationally, 52% of all mothers receiving cash assistance had their first child when they were teens.<sup>81</sup>

- ❖ **Proven Strategy—Teen pregnancy prevention is best addressed by using a multi-strategy approach that meets the developmental needs of teens, provides opportunities to build career and leadership skills, offers accurate information about sex and sexuality, and increases access to reproductive health care services.**
  - *Intensive, long-term youth development programs for adolescents* that also provide accurate information about sex and sexuality can delay initiation of sexual activity,

reduce the frequency of sexual activity and reduce pregnancies and births (Best-practice example: the Children's Aid Society Carrera Program in New York City).

- *Comprehensive sex education programs* delivered by well-trained teachers or peer leaders that deliver clear, accurate messages and provide opportunities for participants to practice communication and refusal skills can have a positive influence on teens' sexual behavior.
- *Clinic-based programs that feature one-on-one counseling* with clear messages about abstinence and contraceptive use can delay the initiation of sexual activity and increase appropriate and effective use of contraceptives among youth who are sexually active.
- *Intensive, long-term nurse home visiting programs* for young teenage mothers can reduce the likelihood of repeat births during the teen years and improve outcomes for their children.
- *High-quality, intensive early childhood programs* that improve school readiness and education outcomes among disadvantaged young children can have long-term positive impacts on pregnancies and births in adolescence.<sup>82</sup>

***Rhode Island Practice:***

RlTe Care/RlTe Share is Rhode Island's Medicaid managed health insurance program for low-income children and families. Children are eligible until they turn 19. As of December 2005, 79,964 children under age 19 were enrolled in RlTe Care.<sup>83</sup> Recent three year averages from the U.S. Census Bureau show that only 6.6% of Rhode Island's children under age 18 are uninsured, compared to 11.1% of children nationally.<sup>84</sup>

RlTe Care/RlTe Share is an important tool to reach teenagers in lower income families with pregnancy prevention tools and information. In 2006, all three RlTe Care plans in Rhode Island scored above the 90th percentile compared to other Medicaid plans in the United States for the number of annual adolescent preventive health care visits per enrolled teen.<sup>85</sup>

***Problem: Many teens who become parents require intensive interventions to improve outcomes for themselves and their children.***

- ❖ **Proven Strategy—High quality early care and education programs**, such as Early Head Start, Head Start & quality pre-school (detailed in the first section of this paper) can help to improve outcomes for teen parents and their children.
- ❖ **Proven Strategy—Parenting support, mentoring and education programs** can help teen parents to understand the appropriate developmental stages of their children, can offer advise and strategies for coping with stressful situations, and can help teen parents to develop and achieve goals for their future. These programs can also help to reduce repeat births.

***National Best Practice:*** The Nurse-Family Partnership Model is an intensive, long-term program for low-income pregnant and parenting first-time mothers. These programs help to improve pregnancy outcomes, child health and development, and family economic self-sufficiency. They have been shown to improve prenatal health, reduce the incidence of child abuse and neglect, reduce subsequent pregnancies, increase intervals between births, increase

maternal employment, and improve school readiness. The program also produces long-term benefits to children including fewer behavior problems and less delinquency in adolescence. For more information see their website at [www.nursefamilypartnership.org](http://www.nursefamilypartnership.org).<sup>86</sup>

***Rhode Island Resource:***

The New Opportunity Homes program is run by the Urban League and others and was established by the Rhode Island Department of Human Services to provide eligible pregnant and parenting minor teen girls with a positive family environment that is supervised, safe, nurturing and offers opportunities to develop life skills and parenting competencies. Participants must be Family Independence Program-eligible, which means they must be either in their sixth month of pregnancy or have a child living with them and must meet certain income guidelines.

<b>Career Pathways for Parents Enrolled in the Family Independence Program</b>
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**Problem: State welfare policies (TANF) that fail to integrate the population into workforce development efforts neglect an important segment of the low-skilled workforce.** In Rhode Island in 2006, over 10,000 families relied on a Family Independence Program (FIP) cash grant and the employment services offered. In Providence in 2006, 4,640 families, with 8,821 children, utilize FIP.<sup>87</sup> A recent testing of a cohort of FIP parents showed that 32% read below the 6<sup>th</sup> grade level and an additional 43% read below a 12<sup>th</sup> grade level.<sup>88</sup> In 2005, 57% of all families living in poverty in Providence were female-headed households with children.<sup>89</sup>

- ❖ ***Possible Strategy:* TANF policy changes can be implemented on the state level that can improve the lives of children and families who are enrolled.** Policy changes could include:
  - Disregarding greater levels of earned income, while supplementing earnings.
  - Ensuring that educational and vocational training are available to meet the needs of clients and extend training beyond the limited months to ensure clients can secure a job that pays enough to allow financial independence (even to those not “countable” by federal regulations).<sup>90</sup>
  
- ❖ ***Possible Strategy:* Family Independence Program (FIP) policies should be aligned to allow parents to complete a 2-year college program and should allow parents with very low levels of literacy to continue with their education as necessary.**

***National Promising Practice:***

Seattle Jobs Initiative’s “men of action” support group is a job retention initiative that recognizes that it can take a long time for people “to stick” in the labor market and progress is not linear. The program includes: basic knowledge and skill development, career management, family-friendly workplace options, financial support for education and training, place-based strategies for harder-to-employ, retention services, and special services for those with substance abuse, experiencing domestic violence, previously incarcerated, and depression.<sup>91</sup>

***Rhode Island Practice:***

In the 2006 legislative session, the Family Independence Program (FIP) was amended to allow participants to combine 10 hours of education or training with 20 hours of work to reach the 30 hour work requirement beginning in the 25<sup>th</sup> month of their employment plan.

Rhode Island also developed two programs to serve the needs of those unable to meaningfully connect to the workforce after 24 months of enrolled in FIP:

- *Transitional Jobs Program* – is a subsidized period of work within the community to help participants develop skills. This is generally a 3-5 month learning experience.
- *Supportive Employment Program* – offers a job coach/counselor to the participant. This is not subsidized.<sup>92</sup>

### **Upcoming Rhode Island Innovations:**

As of July 1, 2007, the Office of Adult Basic Education will fund several innovative models that will support current and former FIP clients. These models combine education, training, wrap around supports and quality job matching (based on the Portland, OR experience).<sup>93</sup>

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