



**Embargoed for Release**

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

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**Rhode Island KIDS COUNT**

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**Cranston, RI** – Rhode Island KIDS COUNT Research Analyst, Elaine Farber, presented data from the *2007 Rhode Island Kids Count Factbook* to an audience of community leaders and child advocates at the first *Cranston Data in Your Backyard*. The event was sponsored by Rhode Island Kids Count in partnership with The Cranston Herald. Indicators of child well-being in Cranston in several issue areas including family and community, health, economic well-being, education and safety were presented. The presentation was followed by a community discussion about the data's implications for the welfare of Cranston's children. The presentation was held on **Thursday, May 24<sup>th</sup> from 3:30 p.m. to 5:00 p.m. at the Park View Middle School, 25 Park View Boulevard, Cranston, RI.**

**Health**

Data show that Cranston is doing well on some indicators of children's health. Between 2001 and 2005, the percentage of women receiving delayed prenatal care in Cranston was 6.6%, lower than the state rate of 9.4%. 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.

Cranston has continued to see improvement in child lead poisoning rates. Of Cranston children who will enter kindergarten in the fall of 2008, 3.6% screened positive for elevated blood lead levels, down from 14.1% of Cranston children who entered kindergarten in 1999.

Six percent of children in the state who will enter kindergarten in the fall of 2008 screened positive for elevated blood lead levels. Lead exposure can cause irreversible damage including loss of intelligence, impaired cognitive performance and behavioral problems, such as aggression and short attention span.

The birth rate to teenage girls ages 15 to 19 in Cranston was 25.1 per 1,000 live births, which was the 9th highest in the state. The Cranston teen birth rate is lower than the state rate of 31.0 per 1,000 live births, though higher than the state rate excluding the core cities of 16.2 per 1,000 births. The core cities are the six cities in Rhode Island in which more than 15% of the children live in poverty. Teen pregnancy and parenting threaten the development of teen parents as well as their children.

*Infants born at highest risk* is a composite measure in the Factbook of three important social and economic risk factors that are present at birth – infants born to a mother who is younger than 20, unmarried and without a high school degree. In 2006, there were 28 Cranston infants with these three risk factors which greatly increase the likelihood that a child will live in poverty and are strongly related to healthy cognitive development and school success. Studies show that effective interventions targeting this population can improve child and family outcomes and yield a high return on investment. Overall, 3% of infants in Cranston were born at highest risk in 2006 compared with the state average of 5%.

## **Education**

Rhode Island KIDS COUNT also presented data on educational outcomes for Cranston. Cranston 4<sup>th</sup> grade and 8<sup>th</sup> grade students exceed the state average on reading proficiency scores and scored at around the same level as the state average for math proficiency.

In 2006, 13 Cranston public schools were classified as *high performing*. Both high schools in Cranston were classified as *making insufficient progress*. School performance classifications are based on student test scores, attendance and graduation rates.

Research shows that children in full-day kindergarten benefit academically and are more likely to be ready for first grade than children in half-day kindergarten. Only 1% of kindergartners in Cranston attended a full-day program in the 2005-2006 school year, compared to 50% for the state and 82% for the core cities.

## **Economic Well-Being**

Poverty affects every aspect of child well-being monitored by Rhode Island KIDS COUNT. The data show that 8.5% of all children in Cranston under age 18 live below 100% of the federal poverty threshold (\$16,090 for a family of three). During the first few years of life, children develop the linguistic, cognitive, social and behavioral capabilities that are the foundation for subsequent development. Research shows that increased exposure to risk factors associated with poverty can be particularly detrimental to this development in young children. Just over half of poor children in Cranston in 2005 were under age 6, compared with one-third of Rhode Island children.

In Cranston, only 27% of the 2,938 low-income students eligible for School Breakfast actually participated in the program. This participation rate is slightly lower than the state rate of 30%. Eighty-three percent of Cranston children under age 18 who are potentially eligible for Food Stamps are enrolled, significantly higher than the state participation rate of 69%. Low-income children who have access to food programs – such as School Breakfast and Food Stamps – are less likely to experience hunger and are more likely to have better nutrition essential to their healthy development and educational performance.

The high cost of housing continues to be a problem across the state, with the average rent for a two-bedroom apartment in Rhode Island reaching \$1,172 per month. The average rent for a two-bedroom apartment in Cranston increased from \$702 in 2000 to \$1,184 in 2006 (an increase of 67%). Inadequate, costly or crowded housing has a negative impact on children's health, safety, emotional well-being and education.

Elaine Farber noted, "The city of Cranston has seen progress on child well-being issues and the trends are encouraging, but there is still work to do. We need to continue to invest in the creation and rehabilitation of affordable housing in Cranston and across the state. More can be done to ensure that young children and their families have access to programs that can support health and educational success. We must continue to push all schools in Cranston to perform at a higher level so that all children have the knowledge and skills to lead healthy and productive adult lives."

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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.