



**Embargoed for Release**

Until 12:01 a.m., Thursday, November 15, 2007

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**Rhode Island KIDS COUNT Presents:**

***West Warwick Data in Your Backyard***

**Rhode Island KIDS COUNT**

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**West Warwick, 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 elected officials. As part of the *Data in Your Backyard Series* that is offered in communities throughout the state, the presentation highlighted indicators of child well-being in West Warwick and included a community discussion about the implications of the data. The presentation was held on **Thursday, November 15, 2007 from 9:00 a.m. to 10:30 a.m. at the West Warwick Youth Center, 40 Factory Street, West Warwick, RI.**

**Family and Community**

Approximately 6,600 children under the age of 18 live in West Warwick. According to *Census 2000*, 87% of children in West Warwick are White non-Hispanic, 1% are Black, 6% are Hispanic, and 6% belonged to other racial groups.

In 2000, 33% of West Warwick's children lived in single parent households. In Rhode Island, 30% of children live in single parent households. Children living in single parent families are at increased risk of living in poverty, low academic achievement, low levels of social and emotional well-being and increased levels of depression and stress. From 2001-2005 in West Warwick, 14% of births were to mothers with less than a high school education, similar to the state rate of 15%. Almost half (49%) of West Warwick births during this time period were to mothers with some college or a bachelor's degree, compared with 54% of births in Rhode Island. Research shows strong links between parental education levels and a child's school readiness, health and the level of education the child will ultimately achieve.

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## **Economic-Well Being**

West Warwick, with a child poverty rate of 18%, is one of the six core cities in Rhode Island (defined as communities with child poverty rates above 15% according to *Census 2000*). Of the 1,186 West Warwick children living below the federal poverty threshold (\$16,242 for a family of three), 462 (7%) live in extreme poverty, which is defined as income at or below half of the federal poverty line (\$8,121 for a family of three). Children in poverty are more likely to have health and behavioral problems, experience difficulty in school, become teen parents and earn less as adults.

The Census Bureau's *2006 American Community Survey* shows that child poverty in Rhode Island decreased from 19.5% in 2005 to 15.1% in 2006. Rhode Island now ranks 17<sup>th</sup> in the country for child poverty, an improvement from last year when Rhode Island ranked 35<sup>th</sup>. "This significant drop in Rhode Island's child poverty rate is good news for Rhode Island families," noted Elizabeth Burke Bryant, Executive Director of Rhode Island KIDS COUNT. "We are seeing the results of our state's investments in children." The *2006 American Community Survey* data, released by the U.S. Census Bureau in August 2007, indicate that the total number of Rhode Island children living in poverty decreased from 46,894 children under age 18 in 2005 to 35,456 children in 2006. Bryant noted, "We know that children living in families with incomes below the poverty threshold are at much higher risk for poor outcomes. Reducing child poverty rates directly influences a child's chance for success."

Low-income children who have access to food programs – such as Food Stamps and School Breakfast – are less likely to experience hunger and are more likely to have better nutrition, which is important to their healthy development and educational performance. West Warwick has relatively low rates of participation in programs such as Food Stamps and free or reduced price School Breakfast:

- In 2006, 23% of income-eligible children participated in free or reduced price School Breakfast, compared with 30% of children statewide.
- In West Warwick, 59% of income-eligible children participated in the Food Stamp Program, compared to 69% of income-eligible children statewide.

## **Health**

Data from the *2007 Rhode Island Kids Count Factbook* reveal that West Warwick is doing well in several areas of child health. In West Warwick 3.7% of kindergarteners has a history of screening positive for elevated blood lead levels, compared with 6.4% of all kindergarteners in Rhode Island. West Warwick has also made significant improvements in the percentage of pregnant women who received timely prenatal care. Between 2001-2005 in West Warwick, 8.3% of women received delayed prenatal care, down from 12.2% between 1987-1991. Women receiving late or no prenatal

care are at increased risk of poor birth outcomes, such as preterm births, low birthweight and infant mortality.

- Between 2001-2005, the infant mortality rate in West Warwick was 6.5 infant deaths per 1,000 live births, compared to 6.4 infant deaths per 1,000 live births in Rhode Island.
- A new indicator in this year's Factbook highlights the number of preterm births – that is, births occurring before the 37<sup>th</sup> week of pregnancy. In West Warwick between 2001-2005, 11% (227) of babies were born premature, compared with 12% in the state.

Between 2001-2005, West Warwick had a teen birth rate of 37.1 births per every 1,000 girls ages 15-19, compared to the state rate of 31.0 births per 1,000 girls ages 15-19. The teen birth rate for younger teens ages 15-17 during this period was 18.3 births per 1,000 girls, slightly less than the state rate of 19.5 births per 1,000 teen girls ages 15-17.

The teen birth rate for girls ages 18-19 in West Warwick was 64.9 births per 1,000 girls, higher than the state rate of 44.0 births per 1,000 girls ages 18-19. While teen pregnancy occurs in families of all income levels, teen pregnancy and childbearing are strongly associated with poverty. Poor academic achievement is a key predictor of teen pregnancy and childbearing. "Reduced educational attainment among teen parents puts them at increased risk of unemployment, low-wage jobs and poverty," stated Elaine Farber, Research Analyst at Rhode Island KIDS COUNT. "Research shows that babies born to older teens do not have much better outcomes than those born to teens in younger age groups. Families who delay childbearing until their mid-to-late 20s are more likely to have better education and economic status and have children who are healthier and more successful in school. Teen pregnancy prevention is best addressed by using multiple approaches that meet the developmental needs of teens, provide opportunities to build career and leadership skills and offer accurate information about and increased access to reproductive health care services."

## **Safety**

West Warwick's rate of indicated cases of child abuse and neglect had declined from 1999-2003, but has increased each year since 2004. In 2006, West Warwick's child abuse and neglect rate was 19.2 per 1,000 children, more than double the state rate of 9.3 and the third highest in the state. Elizabeth Burke Bryant noted, "Preventing child abuse and neglect requires family support systems such as access to high quality child care, parenting education, and job skills training. Treatment for substance abuse and mental health problems is sometimes needed. While child abuse affects families of all income levels, families that live in poverty struggle daily with multiple stresses that place them at risk for child abuse and neglect. Families benefit from access to community-based, comprehensive services that are able to respond flexibly to their needs."

## Education

Data from the *2007 Rhode Island Kids Count Factbook* were presented on several indicators that focused on school readiness and school success. West Warwick has seen some positive outcomes in education, but there continues to be a need for improvement.

Education highlights include:

- Of the core cities, West Warwick had the second-lowest rate of children enrolled in full-day kindergarten programs during the 2006-2007 school year at 34%, up from 15% in the 2004-2005 school year. 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.
- In West Warwick, the percentage of 4<sup>th</sup> grade students proficient in reading increased from 55% in 2005 to 59% in 2006. This is lower than the statewide 4<sup>th</sup> grade reading proficiency rate of 63% in 2006.
- During the 2005-2006 school year, 23% of West Warwick's children ages 3-21 were enrolled in special education, higher than the state rate of 21%.
- In West Warwick in 2006, 82% of students graduated from high school compared with the state rate of 85%. Young adults who drop out of high school are almost four times as likely to be unemployed as those with a bachelor's degree and are more likely to earn lower wages than those with a high school diploma.
- In 2006, West Warwick had one school making insufficient progress, three schools that were moderately performing, and two schools that were high performing.

Elizabeth Burke Bryant, Executive Director of Rhode Island KIDS COUNT, commented, "The city of West Warwick has a history of coming together on behalf of their community. We must all continue to work to ensure that families have access to high quality, affordable child care and health care, more of our youth graduate from high school and that all families have access to the jobs and resources they need to care for their 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.