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Rhode Island KIDS COUNT to release new publication: *School-Based Mental Health Services in Newport: Perspectives from Newport Youth, Parents, and the Community*

Providence, RI (November 7, 2022): Rhode Island KIDS COUNT will release its newest publication, ***School-Based Mental Health Services in Newport: Perspectives from Newport Youth, Parents, and the Community*** on Wednesday November 8, 2023, from 5:00 p.m. – 6:30 p.m. at Innovate Newport (513 Broadway, Newport, RI). Featured speakers will include **Paige Clausius-Parks**, Executive Director of Rhode Island KIDS COUNT and **Marykate Bergen**, Program Officer at van Beuren Charitable Foundation. Rhode Island KIDS COUNT Senior Policy Analyst **Jessica Vega** will share findings from the *Policy Brief*. Vega is also the author of the publication. Reflections will be shared from Newport youth, parents, and the community.

This publication was written in collaboration with the Newport community, through thoughtful focus groups and one-on-one conversations. We contacted trusted community-based organizations with strong ties to the community to help recruit parents and youth for participation. The purpose of these conversations was to gather input from students and parents about the resources needed to support and enhance their families' and communities' mental health and well-being. These students and parents were selected to highlight the needs of the growing population of Youth and Families of Color in the district. Community-based organization leaders, staff, and school administrators were also interviewed. Please see pages 4-6 of the publication for quotes from these sessions.

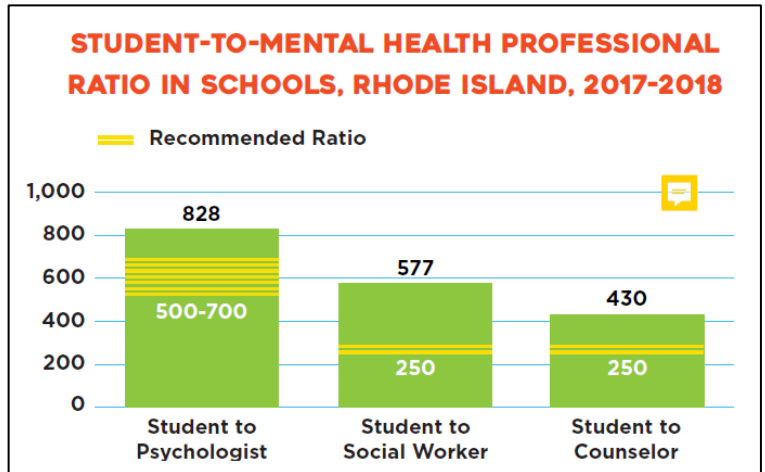
Jessica Vega, Senior Policy Analyst at Rhode Island KIDS COUNT and author of this report, thanked Conexión Latina Newport and the Boys & Girls Club of Newport for helping connect with youth and parents who could inform this report. She said, "Youth and parents really appreciated the opportunity to share their experiences. They understood that meeting the mental health needs of students will require cooperation among youth, parents, schools, and community agencies and shared concrete ideas about how to improve school- and community-based mental health services."

Meeting Kids Where They Are: School-Based Mental Health Support

Mental health in childhood and adolescence is defined as reaching expected developmental, cognitive, social, and emotional milestones and the ability to use effective coping skills. Children and youth were experiencing mental health challenges before the COVID-19 pandemic, but since then the number of children experiencing anxiety and depression has increased. In 2021, one in four Rhode Island children ages three to 17 had a mental, emotional, or behavioral health problem. **However, many children and youth have trouble getting the mental health treatment they need.**

Because children and youth spend a large part of their day in schools, their experiences during the school day can greatly impact their mental health. Beyond promoting mental wellness for all students, schools can also provide intervention and treatment for students with additional mental health needs.

School psychologists, school social workers, school counselors, and school nurses all have a role to play in supporting students' mental health. Providing mental health resources in schools can remove access barriers for students (e.g., transportation, scheduling conflicts), and schools can also refer youth to more intensive services in the community when needed.



As you can see in the graph to the right, Rhode Island is far above the recommended student-to-mental health professional staffing ratio in all categories.

The *American Rescue Plan Act of 2021* provided federal relief funds for schools and districts to use to reopen schools safely, maximize in-person instruction, and address the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on students, families, and educators. Many districts are using these funds to support their students' mental health and well-being by paying for new positions and programs. Newport received \$6.9M in ESSER III funds and is using \$1.3M of these funds to support students' socio-emotional needs.

According to Rhode Island KIDS COUNT Executive Director Paige Clausius-Parks, "School districts across Rhode Island and across the country are working to address the youth mental health crisis and experiencing many of the same challenges as Newport." She said, "We are grateful to the Newport Public Schools and community for opening up and sharing their experiences, challenges, and ideas. We hope that this report and recommendations help Newport and school districts across the state understand youth and parent experiences and continue working in partnership with their communities to meet students' mental health needs. It's clear that we need to intentionally invest in solutions to address the mental health crisis in communities of color. This includes diversifying the mental health workforce, addressing racism experienced in schools, and connecting with parents and families about mental health."

Students Recommended:

- Investing in more school-based mental health providers with a focus on Providers of Color and providers who represent or are experienced in working with the LGBTQ+ community.
- Putting the offices of school-based mental health providers in areas that are less conspicuous.
- Being clear with students, parents, mental health providers, and other school personnel about what information must be shared and what information will be kept confidential.
- Helping parents and families understand youth mental health and how they can best support it at home.
- Looking for ways to use peer educators to support students' mental health.

Parents Recommended:

- Better communication with parents about what school-based mental health services are available.
- Increasing collaboration between mental health providers and parents.
- Conducting mental health screening on all students.
- Investing in more bilingual mental health providers.

- Providing training for all teachers, staff, and students on mental well-being.
- Providing recreational time to all students during the day, regardless of their age, to give students a “mental break.”
- Providing more high-quality, organized afterschool, summer, and out-of-school time programs.
- Addressing racial bias and discrimination in schools.

Community Partners Recommended:

- Diversifying the mental health provider workforce in both schools and the community, in particular to better serve the growing Latino population.
- Addressing the racism in schools, including making training on implicit bias a priority.
- Working to strengthen relationships with students, their families, and community agencies.
- Entering into intentional partnerships with community-based agencies to increase their capacity to deliver mental health services to students and their families.

Overarching Rhode Island KIDS COUNT Recommendations

- *Improving School-Based Mental Health Services in Newport* includes comprehensive recommendations to address children, youth, and family mental health needs in Rhode Island. Please see page 7 of the publication for the full list of recommendations.

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