

#### **Rhode Island KIDS COUNT Presents:**

# Central Falls Data in Your Backyard Findings from the 2013 Rhode Island KIDS COUNT Factbook

High rates of poverty, extreme poverty, and infants born at highest risk

High rates of chronic absenteeism at all school levels

Largest improvement in high school graduation rate in the state since 2007

**Central Falls, RI (November 21, 2013) –** Rhode Island KIDS COUNT Policy Analyst Stephanie Geller, EdM, presented data from the **2013 Rhode Island Kids Count Factbook** to an audience of community leaders and policy makers. The *Central Falls Data in Your Backyard* presentation included highlights of improvements and declines in the well-being of children and youth in Central Falls. After the presentation, audience members discussed opportunities to improve outcomes for children and families. The presentation was brought to the community in partnership with the Central Falls School Department and was held on Thursday, November 21, 2013 from 3:30 pm – 5:00 pm at the Central Falls High School Library, 24 Summer Street, Central Falls.

Geller welcomed participants, saying, "Today's event highlights how the school system and community groups can come together to discuss the state of children and families in Central Falls; as well as strategies to improve child outcomes in health, family economic well-being, safety, and education."

#### Poverty and Extreme Poverty among Central Falls Children

Although childhood poverty exists in every Rhode Island community, it is particularly concentrated in the four core cities of Central Falls, Pawtucket, Providence, and Woonsocket. In 2012, the federal poverty level was \$18,498 for a family of three and \$23,283 for a family of four. A family is considered to be in extreme poverty if its income is less than half the poverty threshold (\$9,249 for a family of three). More than one in three (36.9% or 1,957) children in Central Falls lives in poverty. Of these, 831 children live in extreme poverty (15.6% of all children in Central Falls). Children in poverty are more likely to have health problems, experience difficulty in school, become teen parents, earn less and be unemployed as adults.

#### Highest Rate of Infants Born at Highest Risk in Rhode Island

Infants born at highest risk are those babies born to unmarried teenage mothers without a high school diploma. When a child is born to a teenage, unmarried mother who has not graduated from high school, he or she is nine times more likely to grow up in poverty than a child born to a married woman over age 20 with a high school diploma. In 2012, 10% of all babies born to mothers living in Central Falls were born at highest risk, which is the highest percentage in the state; however the percentage of infants born at risk has been decreasing over the past few years, both in Central Falls and statewide. Programs like the Nurse-Family Partnership and Early Head Start can help mitigate the risks faced by these children.

Central Falls also has the highest:

- Teen birth rate in the state for all age groups (79.7 births per 1,000 teen girls ages 15-19),
- Percentage of children living in single-parent families (49%), and
- Percentage of children born to a mother with less than a high school diploma (38%)

# **Successful School Breakfast Program**

Hunger and lack of regular access to sufficient food are linked to serious health, psychological, emotional and academic problems in children and can impede their healthy growth and development. The School Breakfast Program offers nutritious meals and can help support academic success and improved attendance, behavior, and health. Central Falls has implemented two proven strategies to increase school breakfast participation. They offer the Universal School Breakfast Program, which provides free breakfasts to all students, regardless of income, and also serve breakfast in the classroom. In 2012, an average of 1,016 (43%) of all low-income children in Central Falls participated in the Universal School Breakfast Program. This is the third-highest participation rate in the state.

## **High Rates of Chronic Absenteeism**

Students are defined as chronically absent if they miss 10% or more of the school year (18 days or more of school). Students who are frequently absent from school miss critical academic and social learning opportunities, and are at risk of failure and dropping out. In Central Falls, the following percentages of students missed 18 or more days of school:

- 18% of Central Falls students in Kindergarten through third grade,
- 19% of Central Falls middle school students, and
- 49% of Central Falls high school students

Chronic absence can be addressed by tracking student absenteeism and reasons for absenteeism, raising awareness about the importance of regular attendance, recognizing and rewarding good attendance, and developing partnerships among students, their families, schools, and community organizations to address obstacles to attendance.

### Mixed Trends in Reading and Math Achievement and the Graduation Rate

- Reading Skills: Early reading difficulties have an impact on academic achievement and future
  employment success. Students who do not read proficiently by fourth grade have a much more
  difficult time with literacy and language development than their peers. The percentage of
  fourth grade students in Central Falls public schools who were proficient in reading has
  declined in recent years from 58% in 2010 to 45% in 2011 to 42% in 2012.
- *Math Skills:* The ability to understand math is critical for performing many important daily activities of adulthood. Between 2010 and 2012, math proficiency rates for fourth graders have declined from 55% to 35%, with smaller declines among eighth graders where proficiency rates declined from 28% to 20%. Only eleventh grade math proficiency has been improving, increasing from 8% in 2010 to 13% in 2012.
- *Graduation Rate:* Since 2007, Central Falls has seen the largest improvements in graduation rates of any school district in Rhode Island, increasing from 46% in 2007 to 68% in 2012.

"While Central Falls continues to have among the lowest reading and math proficiency rates and graduation rate in the state, we are seeing strong efforts to support students at all grade levels. Innovative partnerships, such as one with the Learning Community focused on improving early literacy, and initiatives at the high school level to improve the graduation rate are helping Central Falls youth succeed," said Geller.