

Rhode Island



RHODE ISLAND KIDS COUNT

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**Rhode Island KIDS COUNT Presents:
*Central Falls Data in Your Backyard***

Central Falls has largest improvement in high school graduation rate in the state, improving from 46% in 2007 to 70% in 2011.

Reading and math proficiency among 4th and 8th graders in Central Falls has improved.

Improvements still needed in health – High rates of teen births, poor access to prenatal care, and negative birth outcomes continue.

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Central Falls, RI (December 17, 2012) – Community leaders, policy makers, parents, and youth learned about the well-being of children and families in Central Falls today. Stephanie Geller, Policy Analyst for Rhode Island KIDS COUNT, presented data from the *2012 Rhode Island Kids Count Factbook*. The *Data in Your Backyard* presentation, which took place in the library at Central Falls High School, included highlights of improvements and declines in the well-being of children and youth in the city. After the presentation, community members discussed opportunities to improve outcomes for the city's children. The presentation was brought to the community in partnership with the Central Falls School Department.

Central Falls has largest improvement in graduation rate in state

Geller presented data on the high school graduation rate, which is based on actual student counts using the unique student identifier system. Central Falls showed tremendous gains, boosting its four-year high school graduation rate from 46% in 2007 to 70% in 2011. This gain represents the largest improvement of any school district in Rhode Island since the new method of calculating high school graduation rates began. Central Falls now has the highest four-year high school graduation rate of the four core cities.

“Over the past few years, Central Falls has implemented a number of innovative approaches to improve the high school graduation rate, including establishing a rich program of expanded learning opportunities for credit, which are helping to boost the graduation rate and keep students interested and engaged,” stated Elizabeth Burke Bryant, Executive Director of Rhode Island KIDS COUNT.

Improvements seen in Reading Scores among 4th and 8th Graders, as well as English Language Learners

The percentage of fourth graders reading at or above proficiency level in Central Falls increased from 40% in 2005 to 45% in 2011, but continued to be lower than the rate for the state as a whole (71%). The percentage of eighth graders reading at or above proficiency level increased from 27% in 2005 to 51% in 2011, but continued to be lower than the rate for the state as a whole (77%). Despite these improvements, Central Falls has the lowest fourth and eighth grade reading proficiency levels in the state.

During the 2010-2011 school year, 633 (24%) of Central Falls' 2,610 students were English Language Learners (ELLs), the highest percentage in the state. In October 2011 in Rhode Island, 29% of eighth-grade ELL students scored at or above proficiency in reading, compared to 77% of all Rhode Island eighth-graders. This is an improvement from one year ago, when 19% of eighth-grade ELL students scored at or above proficiency in reading.

“Central Falls has received national attention for its innovative partnership with The Learning Community which has focused on improving early literacy and resulted in steady improvements in reading skills among students in the early grades in Central Falls,” noted Geller.

Gains in math proficiency among 4th and 8th graders

In addition to reading, students in Central Falls are making steady progress in math skills. The percentage of fourth graders scoring at or above proficiency in math increased from 28% in 2005 to 37% in 2011, but continues to be low compared to the state rate of 65%. The percentage of eighth graders scoring at or above proficiency in math increased from 16% in 2005 to 25% in 2011, but is still low compared to the state rate of 58%. Despite these gains, Central Falls' proficiency rates in math are still the lowest in the state. “Schools in Central Falls have been making progress, but more work needs to be done,” said Bryant. “School leaders can continue to improve student

performance by continuing to support a strong focus on student achievement, using data to improve instruction for every student, and nurturing positive relationships within the schools.”

Continued innovation and participation in the School Breakfast Program

In October 2011, an average of 1,141 (49%) low-income children in Central Falls participated in the Universal School Breakfast Program each day out of 2,333 who were eligible for free or reduced-price breakfast. Central Falls is one of five school districts in Rhode Island that offers Universal School Breakfast in all of its schools (along with Cranston, Pawtucket, Providence, and Woonsocket and some selected schools in East Providence, Newport, and South Kingstown). The Universal Breakfast Program provides free breakfasts to all children regardless of income and is beneficial because it increases participation and decreases administrative costs.

“Central Falls has been a leader in trying to increase access to school breakfasts and now offers breakfast right in the classroom in some schools. Students who eat breakfast have higher test scores, fewer absences, can pay attention in class better, and have fewer behavioral problems than those who go without breakfast,” stated Geller.

Despite improvements, teen birth rate in Central Falls remains highest in state

The teen birth rate per 1,000 teen girls ages 15-19 is higher in Central Falls than any other community in Rhode Island. Between 2006 and 2010, Central Falls had a teen birth rate for teen girls ages 15-19 of 85.5 per 1,000 teen girls, more than triple the state rate of 27.0 per 1,000 teen girls. During the same time period, 59 of the teen births in Central Falls were repeat teen births, making up 18.9% of the 312 teen births in the city during those years.

“Teen pregnancy and parenting threaten the development of teen parents, as well as their children,” noted Bryant. “Teen mothers, particularly younger teen mothers, often have trouble finishing high school and continuing on to college. Their children are more likely to experience child abuse and neglect, enter the foster care system, and live in poverty and are less likely to complete high school.”

Women in Central Falls continue to struggle with poor birth outcomes

Delayed prenatal care continues to be an area of concern in Central Falls. 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. In Central Falls, the delayed prenatal care rate was 21.2% between 2006 and 2010, the second highest rate in the state. Additionally, while the city's infant mortality rate has decreased, from 10.7 per 1,000 live births between 2005 and 2009 to 9.5 per 1,000 between 2006 and 2010, it remains the highest in the state.

Central Falls' rate of "infants born at highest risk" is twice that of the state

In 2011, 417 babies in Rhode Island (comprising 4% of all births) were born with the three risk factors that best predict childhood poverty and educational outcomes - having a mother under age 20 who is not married and does not have a high school diploma. Of these "infants born at highest risk," 28 (9% of all births in Central Falls) were born to mothers living in Central Falls. Evidence-based home visiting programs, like the Nurse-Family Partnership (NFP) and Early Head Start, can help mitigate the risks faced by these children. Central Falls is one of six communities in Rhode Island that are now offering evidence-based home visiting programs, which help to reduce the negative outcomes experienced by families with multiple risk factors.

Central Falls continues to have high rates of child abuse and neglect

Central Falls consistently has had one of the highest rates of child abuse and neglect in the state. In 2011 in Central Falls, there were 132 children who were victims of child abuse and neglect. Central Falls' rate of child abuse and neglect (23.4 victims per 1,000 children) is higher than the combined rate of the four core cities (20.7 victims per 1,000 children) and is considerably higher than the state rate of 14.0 child abuse and neglect victims per 1,000 children. The large majority of neglect cases are due to lack of supervision, but also may be due to inadequate clothing, food, shelter, or medical care, which can be connected to poverty. "Committing resources to evidence-based home visiting programs and other initiatives that serve young, first-time parents can help strengthen parent-child relationships and offer the kinds of supports needed to keep these children out of the child welfare system," noted Bryant.

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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.