



Contact: Katherine Linwood Chu, Communications Coordinator
401-351-9400, Ext. 22 / kchu@rikidscount.org

Rhode Island KIDS COUNT, The Providence Plan, and the Rhode Island Data Sharing Project Co-Host Special Attendance Awareness Month Event: *The Importance of Reducing Chronic Absence in the Early Grades*

New Materials Released include

Reducing Chronic Early Absence: A new Fact Sheet from Rhode Island KIDS COUNT, and Chronic Absenteeism Among Kindergarten Students: A new Data Story from the RI DataHUB



Providence, RI (September 29, 2014) – In celebration of Attendance Awareness Month, Rhode Island KIDS COUNT, The Providence Plan, and the Rhode Island Data Sharing Project held a special event for educators, policymakers, and community leaders: *The Importance of Reducing Chronic Absence in the Early Grades*. The event was held on Monday, September 29, 2014, from 12:00 p.m. – 2:00 p.m. at Rhode Island KIDS COUNT, One Union Station, in Providence.

The event included the presentation of:

- *Reducing Chronic Early Absence: A new Fact Sheet from Rhode Island KIDS COUNT, and*
- *Chronic Absenteeism Among Kindergarten Students: A new Data Story from the RI DataHUB.*

Elizabeth Burke Bryant, Executive Director of Rhode Island KIDS COUNT, and Patrick McGuigan, Executive Director of The Providence Plan, provided remarks. Rhode Island KIDS COUNT Policy Analyst Stephanie Geller, The Providence Plan's Information Group Director Rebecca Lee, and Julia Steiny, Consultant to The Providence Plan, presented the findings. Additional speakers included Deborah Gist, Rhode Island Commissioner of Education; Anna Cano-Morales, Director of the Latino Policy Institute; and Ailis Clyne, President of the Rhode Island Chapter of the Academy of Pediatrics and Medical Director of the Division of Community, Family Health, and Equity at the Rhode Island Department of Health.

Regular attendance at school is an essential step for children to succeed academically and do well in life. During the early elementary school years, children develop important skills and approaches to learning that are critical for success in the classroom. Students who are chronically absent from school during these early years miss opportunities to learn and develop positive relationships within the school community. Chronic absence is defined as missing 10% or more of the school year (18 or more days for a 180-day school year).

Findings on the Importance of Reducing Chronic Absence in the Early Grades

- During the 2013-2014 school year, 16% of Rhode Island kindergarten students, 12% of first graders, 10% of second graders, and 10% of third graders were chronically absent.
- During the 2013-2014 school year, 19% of low-income K-3 students in Rhode Island were chronically absent, compared to 5% of higher-income K-3 students.
- Seventy-four percent of 2004-2005 kindergartners who were chronically absent were chronically absent for additional years of school, compared to 20% of 2004-2005 kindergartners who were not chronically absent, suggesting that patterns established in kindergarten persist into future years.
- Children who were chronically absent in kindergarten have lower levels of achievement in math and reading as far out as the seventh grade and are twice as likely to be retained.
- Chronic illness, lack of access to health care, unreliable transportation, lack of clean or appropriate clothes, lack of affordable housing, bullying, or ambivalence or alienation from school can all lead to chronic absence.

“Chronic absence is a multi-faceted issue that affects children in every city and town in Rhode Island,” said Elizabeth Burke Bryant, Executive Director of Rhode Island KIDS COUNT. “Leaders and parents need to work together at the state and community level to address the root causes of chronic absenteeism, while paying particular attention to low-income children. We're excited to bring together educators, policy makers, and community leaders to discuss the problem of chronic absence, as well as how to implement policies and programs that will improve attendance – and outcomes – for young children.”

The Rhode Island Data Sharing Project and the RI DataHUB

The RI DataHUB is a safe and secure data warehouse and research and policy tool. It was started over five years ago as part of a federally funded project, and each year, more and more state agencies and non-government partners are using it to share data. The DataHUB is a key component of The Rhode Island Data Sharing Project. The Rhode Island Data Sharing Project links data and resources from state agencies and partner organizations to help policy makers and practitioners understand key issues and make informed decisions.

“The RI DataHUB is an important resource for researchers, policy makers, and the general public,” said Patrick McGuigan, Executive Director of the Providence Plan. “Data stories like this one on the negative effects of chronic absence in kindergarten on future educational success shine a light on a problem we all need to work to solve together. We hope that this event raises awareness about this problem.”

Reducing Chronic Early Absence Recommendations

Rhode Island KIDS COUNT’s *Reducing Chronic Early Absence* Fact Sheet offers specific priority areas and recommendations to reduce chronic absenteeism among students, including:

- Develop systems that provide frequent reports on student absenteeism at the state, district, and school levels. These reports should include breakdowns by subgroup (e.g., grade, income), analyze patterns of absenteeism (e.g., days of week, month of year), and identify individual students with troubling absenteeism patterns so appropriate strategies for intervention can be identified.

- Monitor attendance regularly and contact parents as soon as troubling absence patterns appear. Intervene early to get students back on track before absences build up and students fall behind.
- Nurture a *culture of attendance* by helping parents understand the importance of coming to school on time and every day in the early grades.

“Rhode Island has identified reducing early chronic absence as a key strategy for improving reading proficiency by the end of third grade,” said Bryant. “We know how important regular school attendance is to a child’s academic achievement and future success.”

###

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.

The Providence Plan works to improve the social and economic well-being of Providence, its neighborhoods, and its residents through direct work with local families, promotion of systems change at the state level, and development of data resources that empower all Rhode Islanders.

The Rhode Island Data Sharing Project is a comprehensive effort to share data and resources among state agencies and partner organizations so that policy makers and practitioners can improve the lives of all Rhode Islanders.