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Policy Roundtable to Focus on Physical Activity in Schools, and Child & Adolescent Obesity in Rhode Island

At this event, Rhode Island KIDS COUNT will:
- Release a new *Policy Brief: Promoting Physical Activity in Schools*- Provide updates on community progress toward recommendations in our *Issue Brief: Child and Adolescent Obesity in Rhode Island*

Providence, RI (January 20, 2016): Rhode Island KIDS COUNT will release a new *Policy Brief: Promoting Physical Activity in Schools* at a roundtable on Thursday, January 21, 2016, from 9:00 a.m. – 10:30 a.m. at Rhode Island KIDS COUNT, One Union Station, in Providence. Featured speakers will include Elizabeth Burke Bryant, Executive Director of Rhode Island KIDS COUNT and Peter Andruszkiewicz, President and CEO of Blue Cross & Blue Shield of Rhode Island (BCBSRI). Rhode Island KIDS COUNT Policy Analyst Jim Beasley will share the findings from the *Policy Brief* on physical activity in schools, including recess and physical education.

At the roundtable, educators, policy makers, and community members will discuss current practices and policies regarding physical activity in Rhode Island schools, as well as recommendations for improvement.

The Importance of Physical Activity for Children and Adolescents

Regular physical activity has been shown to improve strength and endurance, help control weight, and prevent chronic disease. It has also been shown to improve academic achievement, including grades and standardized test scores. Research also shows positive effects on the brain, including improved attention, processing, memory, and coping.

While no single factor is driving the increased prevalence of obesity, increasing physical activity is one strategy that can be taken along with others to help prevent and reduce the burden of child and adolescent obesity. However, too few children are physically active for at least 60 minutes per day, the recommended amount to achieve these positive outcomes.

"We know that physical activity promotes healthy growth for children across the spectrum of development," said Executive Director of Rhode Island KIDS COUNT. "Children benefit physically, socially, academically, mentally, and emotionally with regular physical activity. When children are given the opportunity to move more throughout the day, they are better able to fulfill their potential in and out of the classroom. At the roundtable we will discuss ways we can leverage this knowledge for improved outcomes."

Physical Activity in Rhode Island Schools: A Snapshot

Recess: Regularly scheduled recess provides students with an ongoing opportunity to get part of their recommended daily amount of vigorous to moderate physical fitness through self-directed play and/or participation in a supervised activity. Despite well-documented benefits of recess, the duration and timing of recess can vary greatly by age, grade, school, and district.

A recent *Recess for Rhode Island* survey of 90 Rhode Island elementary school principals (about one-third of all elementary school principals) found recess implementation varied across the state, despite 85% of the principals agreeing that recess is necessary for children's optimum learning and development. Of the surveyed principals:

- 70% withold recess for discipline
- 72% indicated that recess duration is 10-20 minutes
- 79% indicated that there is no indoor space for recess

National recommendations from the American Academy of Pediatrics and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention are that recess not be withheld for disciplinary reasons, recess duration should be at least 20 minutes, and that indoor recess should be offered when weather prohibits outdoor recess.

Physical education (PE): PE is another opportunity for all children to learn about and engage in developmentally appropriate vigorous or moderate physical activity safely under the direct supervision of a trained educator during the school day.

- Time spent in PE classes among Rhode Island high school students has decreased from 1997 to 2015, and racial and ethnic disparities exist in PE attendance.
 - o In Rhode Island in 1997, 91% of *all* high school students attended PE one or more days per week, compared to 73% of *all* Rhode Island high school students in 2015.
 - In Rhode Island in 2015, 79% of White students, 68% of Black students, and 61% of Hispanic students attended PE one or more days per week.

The *Policy Brief* provides recommendations for promoting increased physical acitvity in schools. Please see page 5 for the full set of recommendations.

At the policy roundtable, Elizabeth Burke Bryant will facilitate a discussion of updates on community progress toward recommendations included in Rhode Isand KIDS COUNT's *Issue Brief: Child and Adolescent Obesity in Rhode Island* (please click here to view the report, published in November 2014).

Brief updates from community partners on physical activity in schools will include:

- Alliance for Healthy Rhode Island Megan Tucker
- Rhode Island Healthy Schools Coalition Karin Wetherill
- Recess for Rhode Island Janice O'Donnell
- *Playworks* Bryan McCormick
- *Health Equity Zones* Eliza Lawson (Rhode Island Department of Health) and Susan Orban (Washington County Coalition for Children)
- Rhode Island Department of Education Becky Bessette