



RHODE ISLAND KIDS COUNT

ONE UNION STATION
PROVIDENCE, RHODE ISLAND 02903
401/351-9400 • 401/351-1758 (FAX)

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Contact:

Amy Lanctot, Communications Coordinator
401-351-9400, Ext. 22 / alanctot@rikidscount.org

Rhode Island KIDS COUNT Presents: *Providence Data in Your Backyard*

867 Providence children were victims of child abuse and neglect in 2010, a rate of 19.1 per 1,000 children, up from 14.1 per 1,000 children in 2009 and much higher than the state rate of 13.3 per 1,000 children.

Despite challenges, including high rates of chronic early absence and a high mobility rate among students, in recent years Providence has made steady progress on education indicators, with improvements in reading and math proficiency and graduation rates. However, Providence still lags behind other communities.

~~~

**Providence, RI (June 10, 2011)** – An audience of community leaders, parents and policy makers gathered at Meeting Street to learn more about the well-being of children and families in Providence. Stephanie Geller, Policy Analyst for Rhode Island KIDS COUNT, presented data from the *2011 Rhode Island Kids Count Factbook*. The presentation included highlights of improvements and declines in the well-being of children and youth. After the presentation, community members discussed opportunities to improve outcomes for children in Providence. The presentation was brought to the community in partnership with Meeting Street and was held on **Friday, June 10, 2011 from 9:00 a.m. to 10:30 a.m. at Meeting Street, 1000 Eddy Street, Providence, RI.**

### **Education**

The *2011 Rhode Island Kids Count Factbook* showed that the city's students are making slow but steady progress on a number of education indicators. Between 2005 and 2010, the percentage of fourth grade students in Providence public schools who were proficient in reading increased from 31% to 47%, compared to a statewide increase from 60% to 69% over the same time period. Between 2005 and 2010, the percentage of fourth grade students in Providence public schools who were proficient in math increased from 25% to 42%. While fourth grade students in Providence continue to have the lowest reading and math proficiency rates in the state, the

district is making progress in both areas. Students with poor reading skills often experience difficulty completing academic coursework, struggle in middle school, fail to graduate from high school and have difficulty finding and maintaining employment later in life. Participation in high quality preschools can boost language and literacy skills by providing early literacy experiences including storybook reading, discussions about books, dramatic play, listening comprehension and writing activities. "Closing gaps in reading proficiency will require effective strategies that begin at birth and continue through the early school years," noted Elizabeth Burke Bryant, Executive Director of Rhode Island KIDS COUNT.

Another important area of improvement is the city's high school graduation rate. While still lower than the state's high school graduation rate, which was 76% in 2010, the city's graduation rate continued an upward trend from 58% in 2007 to 68% in 2010.

Providence students face a number of challenges, including a high rate of chronic early absence and a high student mobility rate. Twenty-two percent of Providence students in kindergarten through 3<sup>rd</sup> grade miss at least 10% of the school year (i.e., 18 days or more). This is almost twice the state rate (13%). Children who are chronically absent in kindergarten have lower levels of achievement in math, reading and general knowledge in first grade. Among poor children, chronic absence in kindergarten can predict low educational achievement at the end of fifth grade. "Decreasing the city's chronic early absence rate is key to further improving the district's test scores, and in turn, providing Providence children with the proper amount of instruction time needed for a quality education," noted Geller.

During the 2009-2010 school year, 1 in 4 Providence students either enrolled in or withdrew from their school during the school year. The Providence student mobility rate (25%) was the highest in the state, and substantially higher than the state rate (14%). Students who change schools in the middle of the year are more likely to be absent and are less likely to be academically successful than their peers. High student mobility rates in schools can negatively impact entire classrooms and schools because teachers must slow curriculum progress and repeat lessons to meet the changing needs of students.

## **Safety**

In 2010, 867 Providence children were victims of child abuse and neglect, a rate of 19.1 per 1,000 children, up from 640 child abuse victims and a rate of 14.1 per 1,000 children in 2009. Providence's child abuse and neglect victim rate remains lower than the core city rate of 21.0 victims per 1,000 children but is much higher than the state rate of 13.3 per 1,000 children. Preventing child abuse and neglect is critical to helping children grow into strong, healthy productive adults and good parents. Research shows that high-quality, intensive family support programs during the first few years of life can improve child outcomes and reduce the risk of neglect and abuse. "Local and state efforts must be implemented to help caregivers who may be overwhelmed by multiple stressors, including inadequate income to meet even basic needs and lack of strong social support networks. Providing a strong network of family support services, access

to health care and affordable child care can help keep families from ending up in the child welfare system,” noted Bryant.

In 2010, 435 adults who are incarcerated in Rhode Island and whose last known address was in Providence reported having 984 children. That’s a rate of 21.7 per 1,000 children, which is the highest in the state. When a parent is in prison, children often need help coping with their parent’s absence. Children with an incarcerated parent are at greater risk of poor academic achievement, housing instability, emotional problems, and child abuse and neglect.

## **Health**

Providence has the highest delayed prenatal care rate in the state and this rate has been increasing steadily. Between 2005 and 2009, 22.1% of Providence women received delayed prenatal care or no prenatal care at all, up from 12.0% between 2001 and 2005. Early prenatal care is critical to identifying and treating health problems and influencing health behaviors that can compromise fetal development, infant health and maternal health. Providence’s infant mortality rate is 9.5 per 1,000 births, which is second only to Central Falls (10.7 per 1,000 births).

Despite declines in lead poisoning rates, kindergarten children living in Rhode Island’s core cities are more likely to have a history of elevated blood lead levels (4.2%) than children in the remainder of the state (1.8%). Of the 3,011 Providence children who will enter kindergarten in the fall of 2012 who were screened for elevated blood lead levels, 161 (5.3%) screened positive via a finger prick test and 136 (4.5%) children were confirmed positive for elevated blood lead levels with a secondary blood test. That is the highest rate in Rhode Island.

## **Economic Well-Being**

As families struggle to make ends meet due to job loss or underemployment, many have lost their homes and been forced to turn to shelters. In 2010, 1,150 children under the age of 18 received emergency housing in a homeless shelter or a domestic violence shelter in Rhode Island. Providence was the last permanent residence for 1 in 3 (415) of these children. During the 2009-2010 school year, Rhode Island public school personnel identified 996 children as homeless; 203 of those children were from Providence.

There is help available to families who are struggling financially. Work supports, such as subsidized child care, health care (RIte Care), food assistance and tax credits, can help poor and low-income families meet their basic needs. Programs like the Neighborhood Opportunities Program (NOP) that subsidize rents for the lowest income families can help families afford the high cost of rent and prevent homelessness. In December 2010, 4,262 (9%) children living in Providence were receiving cash assistance, while in October 2010, 22,933 children living in Providence were receiving Supplementary Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) benefits. Income support programs can help prevent serious health and psychological problems in children and help foster healthy growth and development.

###

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