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# Rhode Island KIDS COUNT Makes Data Local at 'Woonsocket Data in Your Backyard' Event

Full-Day Kindergarten Restored in Woonsocket

Increased Rates of School Breakfast Participation

Highest Rate of Child Abuse & Neglect in the State

Woonsocket, RI, (September 12, 2014) – At the *Woonsocket Data in Your Backyard* presentation, Rhode Island KIDS COUNT Policy Analyst John Neubauer presented data on the well-being of Woonsocket children and youth to an audience of community leaders and policy makers. The presentation's data comes from the *2014 Rhode Island Kids Count Factbook*, and includes improvements and declines in economic well-being, education, health, and safety. The presentation was held on **Friday, September 12, 2014 from 9:00am – 10:30am** at **Connecting for Children and Families at The Chaplin-Perez Center,** 37 Center Street, Woonsocket, RI.

Elizabeth Burke Bryant, Executive Director of Rhode Island KIDS COUNT opened the meeting saying, "We're proud to partner with Connecting for Children and Families on the *Woonsocket Data in Your Backyard* presentation. The event is a great way to examine trends in child and family outcomes, identify successes and challenges, and develop strategies to support Woonsocket children and families."

Improvements and declines discussed at the *Data in Your Backyard* presentation include:

Woonsocket has high rates of poverty and extreme poverty among children Although childhood poverty exists in every Rhode Island community, it is particularly concentrated in the core cities of Providence, Central Falls, Pawtucket, and Woonsocket. Children in poverty, especially those who experience poverty in early childhood and for extended periods, are more likely to have physical and behavioral health problems, experience difficulty in school, become teen parents, and earn less or be unemployed as adults. In 2013, the federal poverty threshold was \$18,769 for a family of three with two children and \$23,624 for a family of four with two children. A family is in extreme poverty if their income is less than half the poverty threshold (\$9,385 for a family of three). In Woonsocket, 39% of children live in poverty, and 19% live in extreme poverty.

# Restored full-day kindergarten

Children in full-day kindergarten make significant gains in early reading, math, and social skills as compared with children in half-day kindergarten. Due to budgetary cuts, Woonsocket's full-day kindergarten program was reduced to just one classroom in the 2010-2011 school year. In 2013, only 3% of Woonsocket children were enrolled in full-day kindergarten, compared to 70% of children statewide.

This fall, Woonsocket restored full-day kindergarten for all children.

"The restoration of full-day kindergarten is great news for Woonsocket," said Bryant. "All children deserve a strong start in the classroom, and full-day kindergarten helps achieve that goal."

### **Increased participation in the School Breakfast Program**

Students who eat breakfast have higher math and reading scores, fewer absences, improved attentiveness, and lower incidences of social and emotional problems. The School Breakfast Program helps ensure that children start their day off with a healthy meal. Woonsocket offers Universal School Breakfast, which provides free breakfast to all students regardless of income. In many Woonsocket schools, breakfast is offered in the classroom. These key strategies to increase school breakfast participation are paying off. In 2013, 43% of low-income Woonsocket students received School Breakfast, up from 35% the year prior.

"We know children need healthy meals to learn and grow," said Neubauer. "Through the Universal School Breakfast Program, Woonsocket prioritizes the health and education of their most vulnerable children."

## Highest rate of child abuse and neglect in the state

Children need love, affection, and nurturing from their parents or caregivers for healthy physical and emotional development. Experiencing child abuse or neglect can have lifelong consequences for a child's health, well-being, and relationships with others. In 2013, there were 349 Woonsocket children who were victims of child abuse and neglect, an increase from 272 Woonsocket victims of child abuse and neglect in 2012. Woonsocket's child abuse and neglect rate is the highest in Rhode Island, and at a rate of rate of 35.3 victims per 1,000 children, it is more than double the state rate of 14.0 victims per 1,000 children.

"Having the highest child abuse and neglect rate in the state is a strong call to action for Woonsocket to focus on prevention and early intervention strategies to improve child well-being", said Bryant.

#### Infant outcomes continue to need improvement

- Low Maternal Education Levels: Children of parents with lower levels of education are less likely to succeed in school, more likely to be poor for at least of half of their lives from birth through age 17, and are more likely to be in poor health. At 23%, the percentage of babies born to mothers without a high school diploma in Woonsocket is the third highest in the state.
- *High Teen Birth Rate*: Babies born to teen mothers are at an increased risk for low birthweight, prematurity, and death in infancy. Woonsocket's teen birth rate for girls ages 15-19 is the second highest in the state.
- Low Birthweight: An infant's birthweight is a key indicator of newborn health, and low birthweight infants are at greater risk for physical and developmental problems than infants of normal weight. At 10%, the percentage of infants born low birthweight in Woonsocket is the highest in the state.

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