

How Ready Is Providence?

Advancing a Community Conversation about School Readiness in Providence

December 2004

An analysis conducted by Ready to Learn Providence on the readiness for school of the city's young children

Executive Summary

We have known for some time that among cities with a population of 100,000 or more, Providence has the third highest rate of child poverty in the nation.¹ But because Providence is a city of such vastly different neighborhoods, that statistic tells just part of the story. Providence has the largest concentration of both low-income and high-income families in Rhode Island, a state where the gap between rich and poor has grown dramatically in the past two decades and is among the widest in the country.²

To fully understand the specific challenges facing a young child who is growing up in Providence, one has to know the neighborhoods. The four-year-old in the city's affluent East Side is living a markedly different life than that of the youngster in Olneyville. Even among the city's most distressed neighborhoods, the challenges – and support systems – often differ.

In early 2003, Ready to Learn Providence, a program of The Providence Plan, set out to examine and document the well-being of Providence's young children (under the age of 6), and their readiness for school. It asked a 15-member group, comprising residents and representatives of state and community agencies, to identify and develop indicators that figure prominently in a child's readiness for school.

This committee identified the pertinent issues that affect a child's readiness for school, and then developed 24 indica-

The Data Analysis

Staff at The Providence Plan acquired and analyzed all of the data included in the report. Data were obtained from a variety of sources, including state, federal and local agencies. Given the wide range of indicators and data sources, sample populations vary from one indicator to the next. When examining child poverty, for example, the authors included all children in the city, as reported by the Census Bureau, while in the discussion of childhood injuries, they included only those children who had been admitted to the hospital.

Twenty-four indicators were examined. Of these, nine were analyzed at the neighborhood level and the remaining indicators were examined at the citywide level. (See table on page 5.) In cases where no data were available, an argument was made for the significance of the indicator and for the collection of data in the future.

While the report contains much valuable data and information, it was not the intention of R2LP to put together a research paper. As much as possible, the authors incorporated voices from the community, sometimes highlighting a debate on how to achieve a particular goal. It is hoped that the report will trigger future conversations on these critical issues among parents, child-care providers, policymakers, educators, health professionals and community leaders.



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tors to help measure those issues. These indicators were grouped into three categories: Readiness of Parents, Caregivers and Teachers; Child Development and Well-Being; and The Child's Environment. (For a full list of indicators, see table on page 5.) While it was the hope of R2LP to track most indicators on a neighborhood level, committee members were instructed to consider issues on the basis of their importance to the group and independent of whether or not data were readily available. R2LP decided that if an issue merited inclusion in the report, it would work in the coming years to identify opportunities for gathering data and measuring progress.

Many of the indicators in the report are heavily linked to the issue of poverty. Children living in poverty, especially those living in poverty for extended periods of time, are more likely to have health and behavioral problems – and experience difficulty in school – than those who do not. With the high cost of housing, child care, medical care, food and utilities, even families whose income is considerably higher than 100 percent of the federally poverty level find it difficult to meet all of their basic living expenses.

Findings at the neighborhood level

The analysis presented in the report reveals that there are, indeed, real differences across the city's neighborhoods. But while the data point to significant challenges for the children of certain neighborhoods, some of the findings were, in fact, encouraging.

- Providence has a sufficient supply of child-care slots to meet the needs of the city's children and their families, at least in terms of overall number of slots.³ The city is home to 20 percent of the state's children age 5 and under, but it has 27 percent of all regulated child-care slots in the state, including 17 percent of all slots in the state's licensed center-based child-care facilities and 53 percent of all slots provided in family-care settings.⁴ Providers are generally concentrated in areas where population densities are highest.⁵ (See map on page 4.)

What Are Indicators?

An indicator is a small but telling piece of a bigger picture. Library use, for example, gives us an indication of the importance of literacy in a community, and can be tracked with measurable data, such as the number of books checked out or library cards issued.

Indicators help us measure change in social, economic or environmental systems over a period of time. For this report, 24 indicators were grouped into three categories: Readiness of Parents, Caregivers and Teachers; Child Development and Well-Being; and The Child's Environment. Some of the indicators included in this report do not meet the classic definition of a good indicator in that data were not readily available. It was felt, however, that the indicators were important enough to merit inclusion. R2LP will identify opportunities for tracking these indicators in the coming years.

- Neighborhood resources are available and being used by families with young children. More than 95,000 picture books are circulated each year through the ten branches of the Providence Public Library and hundreds of story hours are offered at neighborhood branches throughout the city.⁶ (See map on page 4.)
- Lead poisoning among children has dropped dramatically throughout Providence.⁷ The rate of elevated blood lead levels dropped in all but one neighborhood between 2000 and 2003, with one-third of all neighborhoods experiencing a decline of 50 percent or more.⁸ The highest concentrations of affected children remain in the neighborhoods

with the lowest incomes, where children are more likely to live in poorly maintained rental housing.

Still, many of the findings are disturbing and present real barriers to the successful start of school.

- Fewer than two-thirds of mothers in 10 of the city's 25 neighborhoods had at least 12 years of education. In Olneyville, just 50 percent of all mothers who gave birth from 1999 to 2002 had completed 12 or more years of school.⁹ In three neighborhoods (Olneyville, Upper South Providence, and the West End), fewer than half of all adults have completed high school.¹⁰
- Median family incomes are as low as \$11,000 in pockets of some neighborhoods.¹¹ Nearly one in four families living in the city of Providence lives in poverty.¹² More than 40 percent of the families in Hartford and Olneyville live below the poverty line.¹³
- In five of the city's 25 neighborhoods, 20 percent of households are linguistically isolated, which is defined as a household where no one above age 13 believes he or she speaks English well.¹⁴ In parts of some neighborhoods within the South Side and West End, the rate exceeds 40 percent.
- On average, two of every three children enrolled in pre-K to grade two in the Providence Public School system (65 percent) are getting their immunizations (fourth dose of DTP) on time. Twelve neighborhoods, including the South Side, West End, Olneyville, Mount Pleasant and Smith Hill, fall below the city average. Even during the first year of life, one in five children is not immunized on time, and presumably not receiving proper medical care.¹⁵
- Adults from Providence who were in the custody of the Rhode Island Department of Corrections as of September 2003 reported that they were the parents of 1,590 children.¹⁶ More than 36 percent of these adults come from the four neighborhoods that comprise the South Side and West

Target Neighborhoods and Ready to Learn Providence

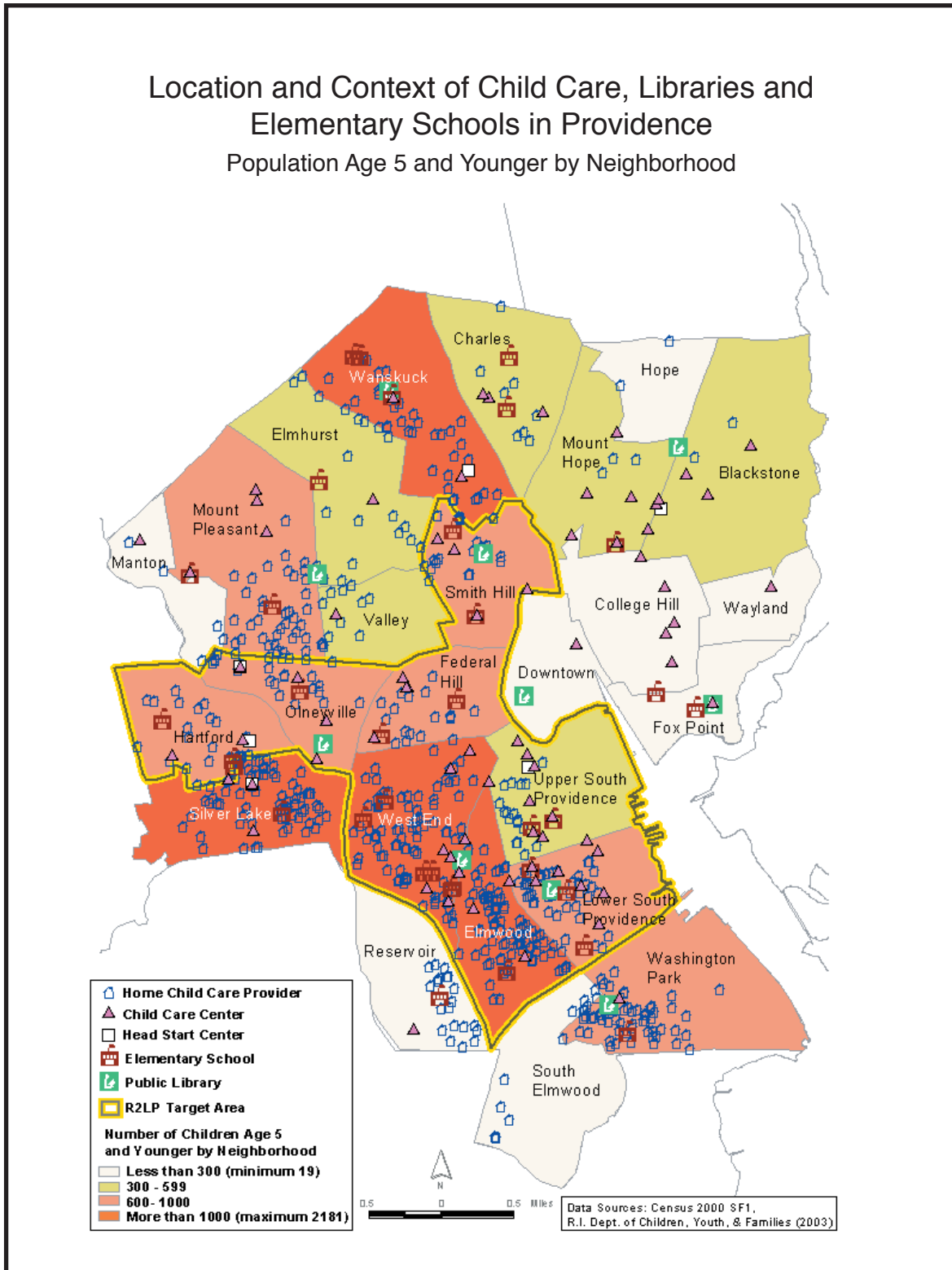
There are approximately 15,200 children age 5 and under living in Providence, a figure that accounts for 20 percent of the state's population of children within this age group. Half of these children live in the eight neighborhoods that Ready to Learn Providence has designated as "target neighborhoods." They include Elmwood, Federal Hill, Hartford, Olneyville, Smith Hill, Lower South Providence, Upper South Providence, and the West End. (See map on page 4.) While R2LP is a citywide initiative that supports programs in and distributes resources to all of the city's 25 neighborhoods, research indicated that the designated target neighborhoods were the most in need of R2LP's investments.

The analysis in this report confirmed that the eight target neighborhoods were, indeed, in the most distress. Where neighborhood-level data were available, those neighborhoods consistently scored more poorly than the citywide average. This report is a tool R2LP will use to determine where additional attention and resources should be directed.

The report also lays the groundwork for the future work of the community, whether that be policy changes, new programs for children and families, or additional analysis of critical data. R2LP intends to track and document progress on the indicators with a follow-up report in the future.

End.¹⁷ More than one in ten adult males in half of the city's neighborhoods are currently on probation or parole, and that figure is as high as one in

four adult males in Upper and Lower South Providence.¹⁸



Indicator	Level of Analysis		
	Neighborhood	City	Very limited or no data
Education levels of parents	●		
Earning levels of families	●		
Percentage of linguistically isolated households	●		
Educational attainment of caregivers in center-based and family-care settings			●
Percentage of early-care teachers taking professional development courses in child development			●
Percentage of kindergarten and first grade teachers who are certified in early childhood education		●	
Average wages of caregivers compared to elementary school teachers		●	
Percentage of early-care and education staff trained in cultural competence			●
Percentage of teaching staff at the primary school level trained in cultural competence			●
Percentage of children in regulated, licensed settings (centers and family child care), and percentage of children in legal, non-certified settings (kith and kin)		●	
Number and types of curricula now being used in regulated preschool settings			●
Number of literacy requirements written into DCYF licensing regulations for child-care providers			●
Percentage of children who are receiving academic and literacy assessments through their early-care providers			●
Percentage of children who receive screenings of speech, language, hearing, vision and early childhood development through their early-care providers		●	
Percentage of children referred for early intervention services or special education	●		
Percentage of children who have current immunizations	●		
Percentage of children receiving dental care by age 5			●
Social connectedness of parents/guardians to their community			●
Library usage by families with young children	●		
Percentage of children with incarcerated parents	●		
Number of indicated cases of child abuse and neglect	●		
Number of children age 5 and under requiring hospitalization as a result of unintentional injuries		●	
Percentage of children under 6 with elevated blood lead levels	●		
Percentage of families receiving home visits through the RI Department of Health		●	

Footnotes for Executive Summary

¹2000 U.S. Census Brief: Kids Count. ²Analysis of median family income data from 2000 U.S. Census, Summary File 3, and R.I. Kids Count Factbook 2003, p. 20. ³Analysis of data provided by the Rhode Island Department of Children, Youth and Families, November 2003. Slot capacity is in terms of the overall number of slots only, not the availability, compatibility or affordability of the slots. Existing data do not allow us to determine who fills all of these slots, so it is important to note that some of these slots are filled by children living outside of Providence. Conversely, some Providence children and their families use providers outside of the city. ⁴Population data from U.S. Census 2000, Summary File 1; the statistics for the number of child-care slots are from the 2004 Rhode Island Kids Count Factbook, p. 136, based on data provided by Options for Working Parents, December 2003. ⁵Analysis of data provided by the Rhode Island Department of Children, Youth and Families, November 2003; population data from U.S. Census 2000, Summary File 1. ⁶Analysis of Providence Public Library circulation and program data for July 2000 through June 2002. ⁷From The Providence Plan's analysis of 2000 and 2003 lead screening data provided by the Rhode Island Department of Health. ⁸The Providence Plan matched address data to neighborhoods. Fox Point was the only neighborhood that did not show a decline. Ten percent of children tested in that neighborhood in 2000 (6 out of 61) had elevated blood levels, while 11 percent (8 out of 73) had elevated levels in 2003. ⁹Analysis of Rhode Island Department of Health, KidsNet/Newborn Developmental Risk Screening Program data, 1999-2002. ¹⁰Neighborhood level educational attainment statistics for Providence residents age 25 years and older were derived from block group level data from U.S. Census 2000, Summary File 3. ¹¹Block group level analysis of median family income data from U.S. Census 2000, Summary File 3. ¹²Analysis of family poverty data from U.S. Census 2000, Summary File 3. ¹³Neighborhood level statistics for families living in poverty were derived from block group level data from U.S. Census 2000, Summary File 3. ¹⁴Analysis of block group data from U.S. Census 2000, Summary File 3. ¹⁵Analysis of Providence Public School immunization database, October 2003. ¹⁶From The Providence Plan's analysis of the Rhode Island Department of Corrections stock file data for the sentenced and awaiting trial populations, September 30, 2003. ¹⁷General population statistics are from U.S. Census 2000, Summary File 1. Statistics for individuals in the custody of the RIDOC are from The Providence Plan's analysis of DOC stock file data for the sentenced and awaiting trial populations, September 30, 2003. ¹⁸From The Providence Plan's analysis of RIDOC stock file data for the probation and parole population, September 30, 2003.



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