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**The Future of Children
School Readiness: Closing Racial and Ethnic Gaps
*Policymakers and Practitioners Conference***

New report indicates that much of the gap in school readiness skills of kindergartners can be eliminated through early childhood programs that address health, early learning and parenting.

Providence, RI, March 8, 2006 – Rhode Island KIDS COUNT is co-sponsoring a one day conference entitled *School Readiness: Closing Racial and Ethnic Gaps* to share findings of the Princeton University / Brookings Institution *Future of Children* journal. Over 100 early childhood and K-12 policymakers and practitioners from Rhode Island, Connecticut and Massachusetts will gather to discuss and act upon the findings of the recent *Future of Children* journal, entitled *School Readiness: Closing Racial and Ethnic Gaps*. The conference will be on **Wednesday, March 8, 2006** from **8:30 a.m. to 4:00 p.m.** at the **Brown University Faculty Club**, One Magee Street, Providence, RI.

During the morning session, Dr. Jeanne Brooks-Gunn, one of the contributing authors of one of the papers and co-editor of the volume, will provide a keynote address to highlight the impact of family, community and early childhood programs and strategies that can dramatically impact the readiness skills of children when they enter kindergarten. The journal focuses on children's lives before they get to kindergarten in an effort to understand how to best close the racial and ethnic gaps in school achievement. The volume's eight chapters address the size of the gap, examine possible explanation for differences in school readiness and identify policies that hold promise for closing the gap and improving outcomes for children. The presentation will focus on approaches that directly address the child, parental and community factors – such as health, early learning, and parenting – that contribute to school readiness.

Dr. Jeanne Brooks-Gunn emphasized, “To have the greatest impact, high-quality early childhood programs must aim to change multiple aspects of the child’s environment. We know that children are more likely to enter school ready to succeed when communities provide access to high-quality early education programs, when health risks are minimized, and when parents have the support they need to engage in the early learning and nurturing of their young children. We must work more intentionally to apply that knowledge so that we reduce the achievement gaps that currently exist between minority children and white children and between lower income children and higher income children.” Dr. Jeanne Brooks-Gunn is Virginia and Leonard Marx Professor of Child Development and Education at Teachers College and the College of Physicians and Surgeons, Columbia University. Dr. Brooks-Gunn’s specialty is policy-oriented research focusing on family and community influences upon the development of children, youth and families.

The keynote will be followed by a discussion featuring Dr. Cynthia Garcia Coll, Robinson and Barstow Professor of Education, Psychology and Pediatrics, Brown University and Dr. Rosa Smith, President, the Schott Foundation for Public Education and former Superintendent of Schools in Columbus, Ohio. Dr. Donnie W. Evans, Superintendent of Schools in Providence will provide closing remarks.

Dr. Cynthia Garcia Coll said, “We have plenty of research to show what is necessary to insure that all children are ready to learn. The question is: do we have the will as a society to create the supports necessary to guarantee what is needed for all children and families? This will necessitate more integrated practices and policies that take into consideration the racial and ethnic inequities in our society and the need to eradicate them. These inequities include, amongst others, segregation into poverty stricken areas, housing and employment discrimination and the lack of good quality preschool programs.”

Workshops at the conference explored concrete strategies that communities and states can use to take strategic action to improve outcomes for children and families. Topics of discussion included meeting the needs of immigrant children, making sure that programs are relevant to the culture and language of parents, recognizing the need to work intensively in low-income neighborhoods, and state and federal policy investments that make a difference in the lives of young children.

Elizabeth Burke Bryant remarked, “The vision that all children enter school with the confidence, curiosity and skills to succeed is within our reach. We must start at birth and shift our investments from programs that do not work to programs with proven outcomes for young children, especially minority and low-income children. There is no more important task to undertake than to ensure that all of our young children, in all of our communities, have safe and nurturing learning environments in the early years.”

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The **Future of Children** seeks to promote effective policies and programs for children by providing policymakers, service providers, and the media with timely, objective information based on the best available research. *The Future of Children* is a new semiannual publication that provides research and analysis to promote effective policies and programs for children. The *Future of Children* is a publication of The Woodrow Wilson School of Public and International Affairs at Princeton University and The Brookings Institution.

The meeting is sponsored by the Princeton University / Brookings Institution Future of Children, the Center for Human Development at Brown University, Rhode Island KIDS COUNT, the Annie E. Casey Foundation, Grantmakers for Children, Youth and Families, the Education Research Section and the Woodrow Wilson School at Princeton University and the Kauffman Foundation.