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## **R.I. bleak for Latino children; [All Edition]**

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### **Abstract** (Document Summary)

\* As of 1999, Rhode Island had the largest percentage of Latino children living in poverty, 47 percent, compared with the national rate of 28 percent. Nine percent of non-Hispanic white children in Rhode Island live in poverty, one-fifth the rate of Latino children in the state.

\* 63 percent of female-headed Latino families in Rhode Island live in poverty, the highest rate in the United States. In contrast, 28 percent of female-headed non-Hispanic white families in Rhode Island live in poverty.

\* More than one in five (22 percent) of Rhode Island's Latino youth age 16 to 19 are high school dropouts, almost four times the rate of non-Hispanic white Rhode Island teens. The national Latino dropout rate is 21 percent.

**Full Text** (1536 words)

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\* A higher percentage of Latino children live in poverty in Rhode Island than anywhere else in the country.

\* \* \*

PROVIDENCE - Rhode Island's Latino children are growing up with so many strikes against them high rates of poverty, unemployment and single-parent families that it will take more than the public schools to save them from a life of hopelessness.

Rhode Island has the largest percentage of Latino children living in poverty in the United States. It also has the highest rate of female-headed Latino families and the lowest median income of all Latinos living in the country.

So why is the state doing so poorly when compared to states with much larger Latino populations, such as California and New York? Because Rhode Island's Latino community is much newer, and, according to one expert, the state doesn't have the capacity to meet the population's multitude of needs.

Compounding the problem, these immigrants are arriving in Rhode Island at a time when it takes more than a high school education to land a decent-paying job and the cost of housing far exceeds the salaries of most low-wage workers.

In fact, first-generation children are twice as likely to be poor as later ones, according to a study done by the National Center for Children in Poverty.

Twenty-five community leaders gathered yesterday at the Rhode Island Foundation to discuss the latest poverty figures compiled by the Annie E. Casey Foundation. The roundtable was sponsored by Rhode Island Kids Count, the Urban League of Rhode Island and the Center for Hispanic Policy and Advocacy.

The data didn't seem to shock anyone. In fact, Cynthia Garcia Coll, director of Brown University's Center for the Study of Human Development, said she is tired of receiving these reports:

"We keep doing the same thing and it's not working," she said. "We're all compartmentalized. How do we cut across foundations, agencies, governments?"

Whether it's high-school dropout rates or unemployment rates, the common denominator poverty is always the same. Coll said once community leaders figure out how to get rid of poverty, the other issues will fall into place.

While everyone at the table agreed that education is the answer, there wasn't a clear consensus why more than one in five Latino teenagers drops out of high school, almost four times the rate of white teens.

Dennis Langley, executive director of the Urban League, launched into a scathing critique of urban schools, arguing that teachers in those systems do not expect that immigrant children will perform as well as their white peers.

"I don't think the kids in Barrington or East Greenwich have a better mental acumen," he said. "The difference is they have been exposed to a quality education. The teachers in these affluent communities know they better produce or else they are gone."

Langley said youngsters are dropping out because the schools have failed to engage them. Urban schools, he said, should demand that their teachers produce or else they should be shown the door.

That drew a pointed response from Education Commissioner Peter McWalters, who said it's unrealistic to expect that public schools should be the rising tide that raises all ships.

"I'm not apologizing for a failing system," he said. "The answer is building community capacity and a sense of responsibility."

Shifting gears, McWalters wound up affirming Langley's point of view:

"During the civil-rights movement, no one doubted that these kids were ours. Now we have immigrants who speak a different language. We have to acknowledge that these kids are ours."

Everyone agreed that in order to save the children, you have to reach the parents first. Studies have shown that one of the biggest predictors of a child's future academic success is the mother's education. Children with college-educated parents typically do much better in school and go further than those whose parents have not earned a bachelor's degree.

The neighborhood where a child lives also plays a huge role in his or her future. It influences the choice of peers and playmates, shapes the quality of schools and determines the availability of parks, playgrounds and libraries. Neighborhood values can, according to the Casey Foundation, guide a child toward college or increase the likelihood that he will commit a crime or become a teenage parent.

Given the following statistics, it's no wonder that Latino children have tough odds to overcome:

\* At 79 percent, Rhode Island has the highest percentage of Latino children in the United States who are living in neighborhoods where more than 18 percent of the people live in poverty.

\* More than half of Latino children here live in neighborhoods where more than 15 percent of teenagers are high school dropouts.

\* At 40 percent, Rhode Island has the highest percentage of Latino children living in neighborhoods where more than a third of all men of working age are unemployed.

Community leaders said that schools must get away from the us- versus-them mentality and make parents feel welcome. They said the legislature must be willing to spend more on adult literacy and job training and that employers must find ways to offer skills training and literacy classes in the workplace.

The Casey Foundation also looked at income, education and poverty data on black children and found that in Rhode Island, blacks have the lowest median family income of all African-Americans in New England and the highest percentage of black children living in poverty in the region.

Community leaders agreed to meet again and take a closer look at the data (which wasn't available yesterday) on first-generation immigrants versus second- and third-generation immigrants. They agreed to involve more members of the community in discussions like this. And they acknowledged that agencies need to stop protecting their turf and start talking and sharing with one another.

\* \* \*

#### Latinos in Rhode Island

\* In total, there are 90,820 Latinos in Rhode Island, of whom 35,002 are children under 18. The number of Latino children has more than doubled since 1990.

\* The state has the highest percentage of Latino children living in single-parent families, 47 percent, nearly double the national rate of 24 percent. In comparison, 21 percent of Rhode Island's non- Hispanic white children live in single-parent families. The national percentage is 18 percent.

\* At \$22,325, Rhode Island Latinos have the lowest median family income of all Latinos in the United States. Non-Hispanic white families in Rhode Island have a median family income of \$57,200.

\* As of 1999, Rhode Island had the largest percentage of Latino children living in poverty, 47 percent, compared with the national rate of 28 percent. Nine percent of non-Hispanic white children in Rhode Island live in poverty, one-fifth the rate of Latino children in the state.

\* 63 percent of female-headed Latino families in Rhode Island live in poverty, the highest rate in the United States. In contrast, 28 percent of female-headed non-Hispanic white families in Rhode Island live in poverty.

\* More than one in five (22 percent) of Rhode Island's Latino youth age 16 to 19 are high school dropouts, almost four times the rate of non-Hispanic white Rhode Island teens. The national Latino dropout rate is 21 percent.

\* At 36 percent, Rhode Island has the highest percentage of Latino children with no parent in the labor force, compared to the national rate of 20 percent. Seven percent of Rhode Island's non- Hispanic white children have no parent in the labor force.

\* At 40 percent, Rhode Island has the highest percentage of Latino children living in neighborhoods in which more than 38 percent of working-age men are unemployed or not in the labor force. The national rate is 25 percent. Three percent of non-Hispanic white children in Rhode Island live in such neighborhoods.

#### African-Americans in Rhode Island

\* In total, there are 46,908 African-Americans in Rhode Island, of whom 15,569 are children under the age of 18.

\* At \$28,171, African-Americans in Rhode Island have the lowest median family income of all African-Americans in New England. Non- Hispanic white families in Rhode Island have a median family income of \$57,200.

\* As of 1999, Rhode Island had the highest percentage of African- American children living in poverty (38 percent) in New England. Nationally, 33 percent of African-American children live in poverty. The poverty rate for non-Hispanic white children in Rhode Island is one-fifth the rate for black children.

\* 52 percent of Rhode Island's African-American female-headed families live in poverty, the eighth-highest rate in the United

States. In contrast, 28 percent of Rhode Island's non-Hispanic white female-headed families live in poverty.

\* 10 percent of African-Americans age 16 to 19 in Rhode Island are high-school dropouts, nearly twice the rate of non-Hispanic white Rhode Islanders of the same age (6 percent).

\* At 25 percent, Rhode Island has the second-largest percentage of African-American children with no parent in the labor force, compared with the national rate of 20 percent. In comparison, 7 percent of Rhode Island's non-Hispanic white children have no parent in the labor force.

Source: "The Pocket Guide, Latino Children: State-Level Measures of Child Well-Being from the 2000 Census" was produced for the Annie E. Casey Foundation by the Population Reference Bureau

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