

Rhode Island Early Learning Council Meeting

Thursday, December 15, 2011 3:00-5:00 p.m.

Community College of Rhode Island – Knight Campus, Room 4090

400 East Ave., Warwick, RI

Agenda

3:00-3:15 (15 mins)	Welcome /Meeting Overview	Deborah Gist/ Elizabeth Burke Bryant
3:15-3:40 (25 mins)	RTT-ELC Challenge Results and Next Steps	Deborah Gist/ Elizabeth Burke Bryant
3:40-4:00 (20 mins)	Report from Access Team	Larry Pucciarelli/ Elizabeth Burke Bryant
4:00-4:15 (15 mins)	DHS Child Care Goals for the Next Biennium	
4:15-4:25 (10 mins)	January ELC/ELCWG Retreat	Kristin Lehoullier
4:25-4:45 (20 mins)	Updates <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Fiscal Management• R2LP partnership with Making Learning Visible• RI Child Welfare – Head Start Partnership	Michele Palermo Leslie Gell Dana Mullen
4:45-4:55 (10 mins)	Public Comment	Public Participants
4:55-5:00 (5 mins)	Next Steps ELC/ELCWG Retreat: January 25, 2012 12:00-3:00 p.m. Next ELCWG Meeting: February 16, 2012 9:30-11:30 a.m. ELC Meeting: March 28, 2012 12:00-2:00 p.m.	Elizabeth Burke Bryant/Deborah Gist

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Meeting Summary

Council Members In Attendance: co-chairs Elizabeth Burke Bryant and Deborah Gist
Leanne Barrett, Karen Beese, Blythe Berger, Tammy Camillo, Colleen Dorian, Maryann Finamore-Allmark,
Ruth Gullucci, Leslie Gell, Kristen Greene, Pamela High, , Aimee Mitchell, Larry Pucciarelli, and Susan
Warford

Additional Attendees: Mindy Mertz, Joseph Morra, Brenda Almeida, Lisa Hildebrand, Sue Libutti, Dana
Mullen, Sharon Friedman, Mary Kackman, Rachel Flum, Diane Cook, Joyce Ruppell, Lori Cruise, Colleen
Jermain and Brenda Duhamel

Facilitator: Kristin Lehoullier

**NOTE: This meeting was held the day before the state was informed that we received the Race to the
Top – Early Learning Challenge grant.**

Welcome/Meeting Overview

The Rhode Island Early Learning Council meeting was called to order at 3:15 p.m. by Co-chairs Deborah
Gist and Elizabeth Burke Bryant. Elizabeth reviewed the agenda and let the Early Learning Council know
that the Race to the Top Early Learning Challenge Initiative funding decisions would be announced on
Friday, December 16th.

RTT-ELC Challenge Results and Next Steps:

Elizabeth and Deborah reviewed the initiatives that were proposed as a part of Rhode Island's Race to the
Top - Early Learning Challenge Proposal and identified areas where the work would still move forward in
the event that Rhode Island did not receive RTT-ELC funding (see meeting slides for more detail). She
noted that while receiving \$50 million dollars would certainly accelerate the work, there are also some
important policy decisions that the Council could make that would move the work forward regardless of
the grant outcome. Elizabeth also said that the upcoming January 25th retreat would provide an
opportunity for the Council to look at the work plan and readjust its priorities and plans based on the
funding decision. Elizabeth asked if anyone had questions or comments.

Several discussion points and questions were raised on the presentation:

- Our RTT-ELC proposal includes funding to hire a consultant to analyze the real cost of various quality levels. We will need to do this regardless of the RTT-ELC decision.
- If we do not get the RTT-ELC funding we could use other strategies such as tax credits to bring in new resources for tiered quality payments.
- The RTT-ELC proposal includes a significant amount of money to expand T.E.A.C.H. but we also have \$150K of ELC ARRA funding that we plan to use to expand T.E.A.C.H. The outcome of the RTT-ELC decision will just affect the scope and reach of our work in this area.

- How are children with high needs defined and how will they be identified?
- Is the ELC ARRA money attached to the Council? Will we shift that funding to support the priorities outlined in our RTT-ELC proposal?
- If we do not get the RTT-ELC funding, we can still move forward but it will just be at a slower pace. For example, DOH is already planning some data enhancements to KIDSNET and it looks like it will be possible to create a SASID ID for every child on their third birthday. We still would be missing links to new data like Head Start data, etc. But there are other Federal grants that could come up that we could apply for that could help us with that.
- We received a lot of feedback during the public forums that we need to have a plan for engaging families in our work. We need to work on that as a Council.
- How does this work support early intervention providers?
- This discussion will be perfect for the retreat. There are a lot of decisions to make depending on whether or not RI is selected for the funding. If we get the resources we still need to figure out how to quickly mobilize.
- Do we need legislation to require people to participate in BrightStars?

Elizabeth explained that the Early Learning Challenge application had a very specific definition of children with high needs that includes: children from birth through kindergarten entry who are from low-income families or otherwise in need of special assistance and support, including children who have disabilities or developmental delays; who are English learners; who reside on “Indian lands” as that term is defined by section 8013(6) of the ESEA; who are migrant, homeless, or in foster care; and other children as identified by the State.

She also noted that the Early Learning Challenge proposal included funding for tiered quality payments. She reminded Council members that the challenge included strict requirements that reform strategies proposed in the application be sustainable. Because of that, Rhode Island did not propose a tiered rate system. Instead, it proposed tiered quality payments as a way of recognizing the investments programs are making to improve their quality.

Michele explained that we were already awarded ELC ARRA funding to support the specific plan that was outlined in the ELC ARRA application. However, that ELC ARRA plan aligns completely with our RTT-ELC application so ELC ARRA funding is already aligned with our priorities and we can use that funding to continue to move pieces of the work forward.

Michele also noted that she has been working with Ruth to think about how the Pre-K special education classrooms can start moving ahead with quality improvement regardless of the outcome of the funding decision.

Elizabeth noted that one of our proposed retreat goals is to identify strategies for generating buy-in for the plan from a wider audience including parents.

Michele explained that early intervention providers are very much included in this work. For example, the planning that the work team has been doing around professional development is based on a vision

that we have a professional development system that serves the entire workforce including early intervention providers.

Leanne explained that programs will have two years to come into BrightStars voluntarily and will not be required to participate until December 2013. The application proposes to move people into the BrightStars database as a 1 star program as a part of being licensed. Leanne also noted that currently 23% of programs in BrightStars are in the top tiers of quality. The application proposes that we increase that to 30%. This does not seem like a lot unless you consider that because BrightStars has been voluntary to date, it has been skewed to programs that are already high quality. When we require programs to participate in Bright Stars as a licensing requirement, we will be adding a large number of programs and our denominator will get a lot bigger. The number of programs that will be actively engaged in BrightStars will increase sevenfold. Our estimate is that 700 of the 1079 programs will be actively engaged (working to improve program quality) by December 2013.

Tammy noted that this will necessitate changes in BrightStars and that the process to align licensing, RIDE preschool approval and BrightStars that is being proposed would need to address the changes needed to make this work.

Representative Eileen Naughton joined the meeting and Elizabeth asked her to say a few words.

Rep. Naughton shared that she serves on the National Institute of Health Advisory Council and has been aware for quite some time of the new evidence of the benefit of early learning. She said that Leanne's presentation to the General Assembly's Task Force on the Education of Children in DCYF care included a review of the state's early learning system that was very revealing.

Elizabeth Burke Bryant noted that the country is moving in the direction of requiring participation in QRIS and this is really pushing states forward. The Race to the Top - Early Learning Challenge Initiative amounts to \$12.5 million a year for 4 years which is a significant amount of money that will make a big difference for Rhode Island, but it will not fundamentally change the way programs are funded.

Deborah stated that while we recognize the lift that it will take to get everyone enrolled and engaged in BrightStars in two years, any timeline beyond 2 years starts to feel to people like it doesn't matter. We need to put a bold marker out there otherwise we will be less competitive and our state it is less likely to move forward.

Report from Access Team

Elizabeth and Larry went over the update Access recommendations from the Access Team (see meeting slides for more detail) and asked if anyone had questions or comments.

Several discussion points and questions were raised on the presentation:

- Once we get the study that tells us what the real costs of quality are, we will be better informed about the resources needed to achieve these quality standards

- The first year of the Pre-K expansion plan is included as a part of the funding formula in RIDE's budget. This budget will be going to Governor and once his budget is released in January we will know if the full amount needed will be included in the Governor's proposed budget.
- Recruiting professionals (such as speech and occupational therapists) for Early Intervention continues to be a challenge, particularly for home visiting.
- Another issue is that the Early Intervention system does not have enough capacity to quickly process the number of referrals it receives.

Michele said that she thought that several school districts were moving towards full day Kindergarten. She also thinks that most districts understand value of full day kindergarten especially now that they are working towards helping children achieve the common core standards and that the barrier is funding related.

Larry asked if there was a motion to endorse the Access Recommendations. The motion was seconded. All were in favor; none opposed. The Access Recommendations were endorsed by the Council.

DHS Child Care Goals for the Next Biennium

Diane Cook deferred this presentation until the next meeting. She said that the goals outlined in DHS's plan were very ambitious and noted that TANF funds half of the child care subsidies in RI so the Department of Human Services is doubly invested in making sure that it achieves the efficiencies and quality goals that outlined in this plan.

January ELC/ELCWG Retreat

This topic was covered in first agenda item. The Early Learning Council and Work Group Retreat will be held on January 25 from 12 pm to 3 pm. Please see meeting slides for background and proposed retreat goals.

Updates

Michele Palermo gave a short update on how the ELC ARRA funds were being fiscally managed:

- The fiscal management contract was awarded to the Northern Rhode Island Education Collaborative. RIDE is waiting for approval of the purchase order from the RI Office of Recovery and Reinvestment (OERR) and the Department of Administration (DOA). Once those approvals are received (expected by first week in Jan), the Council can start drawing down those funds.
- There will be two processes to use to draw down the funds: 1) we will use a sole source sub-contract in situations where only one contractor is qualified for the job or 2) we will have a mini-competition among multiple vendors to make sure that we are selecting vendors appropriately.

Leslie Gell gave a short overview of the R2LP partnership with Making Learning Visible (see slides)

- Council members should send in their "How To" books to R2LP by Jan 10th. Leslie will send out an email with specific guidelines.

Public Comment

- Sharon Friedman shared a quick reflection: “You have talked today about how you [as a Council] have taken some great steps to improve the funding formula and promote the importance of full-day Kindergarten, and full year participation for all children and I want to tell you that I think what you are doing is marvelous and so important.”
- Deborah announced that the Rhode Island Foundation is looking for educators to apply for an innovation fellowships up to \$100K for three years. The cover letter application is due a week from tomorrow. Information is on the RI Foundation website. So if you or anyone you know might be interested in this, please apply.

Next Steps

Elizabeth reminded everyone of the following dates:

- ELC/ELCWG Retreat: January 25, 2012 12:00-3:00 p.m.
- Next ELCWG Meeting: February 16, 2012 9:30-11:30 p.m.
- Next ELC Meeting: ~~March 28, 2012 12:00-2:00 p.m.~~ (NOTE: this meeting has been changed to March 22, 2012 from 1:00-3:00 p.m.)