

# **Highlights from Table Discussions**

## **Governor's Summit on Early Learning (Birth through 8)**

### **May 16, 2016**

#### **Current Strengths of Rhode Island's Early Learning System:**

##### **1) Unified Vision**

- This small state has so many advocates prioritizing early learning.
- There is momentum and attention focused on early learning.
- Everyone has a common vision of the importance of early childhood in the state of RI.
- There is agreement on the present issues.
- Leadership at the highest levels all agree on importance of early childhood education.
- There is attention and focus on early learning.
- All perspectives are finally being heard at the same tables.
- So many different "experts" are involved throughout the state.
- There is commitment in the room— it feels like something real important is going to happen.
- Early learning has support from elected officials and communities.
- We have the ability to convene all stakeholders to drive commitment, coordination, and policy.
- There is increased awareness of and interest in early learning.
- There is statewide acknowledgement and interest in promoting early childhood education.
- State agencies collaborate and are committed to enhancing systems to support young children and families (ex: re-instatement of children's cabinet).
- Early learning has support of state leadership: CCAP entitlement, this summit!, full-day Kindergarten, children's cabinet
- We have the support of state leadership
- The Early Learning Council is a strength.
- There seems to be long term commitment to early education goals.
- There is greater commitment to collaboration in concept; we need more plans to implement.

##### **2) Increased access to high-quality early learning programs**

- All students have access to full-day Kindergarten.
- Access to Pre-K is increasing.
- State Pre-K has expanded.
- We have full-day kindergarten!
- There is increased capacity in home visiting programs.
- We have full-day kindergarten.
- Pre-K is expanding.
- There is commitment to maintain entitlement for the Child Care Assistance Program.

##### **3) State focus on quality improvement**

- Race to the Top gave the state kick start, opened eyes to the importance of the early years, and provides us with foundation for measuring and improving quality.
- Quality Improvement Grant and TA were great.
- BrightStars encourages a focus on quality.
- The number of high quality early learning programs is increasing.

- There is more universal commitment to quality investments in programming and staffing, but we need more investment to retain quality staff.
- BrightStars measures quality and provides a clear pathway for quality improvement.
- We have new professional developmental opportunities for early childhood educators.

#### 4) Stronger Infrastructure/Systems:

- Much of the infrastructure to support quality Early Care and Education in place.
- There are clear and well rounded standards for birth through five (social/emotional, physical etc).
- The state has strong data capacity and connectivity.
- BrightStars is a strength.

## **Areas for Action to Improve Rhode Island’s Early Learning System**

### **1) Workforce**

- We must figure out compensation to retain quality teachers in ECE.
- Spanish-speaking college credits are needed.
- Access to trainings (time, schedule, location) must be improved.
- Improved wages for early childhood teachers are needed.
- We cannot have access to high quality early learning programs without a qualified and adequately compensated workforce. We need to sustain the progress our workforce has made and pay our teachers better.
- Workforce investments are needed.
- There should be focus on “putting a face” to early childhood workforce and understanding how and why the workforce impacts quality.
- We should work on compensation [for the early childhood workforce].
- We must expand professional learning for grade prek-3 teachers.
- A strong early learning system has to be built on a strong educational workforce—particularly 0 to 5 teachers.
- We must address compensation through state support. Compensation needs to be competitive, otherwise 0 to 5 becomes a training ground for better paying jobs in public schools and generates gaping holes at expense of younger children.
- Professional education for early childhood education professionals should include strategies to foster optimal social-emotional development (hands on skills).
- We should evaluate the benefits of professional credentials as well as 2 & 4 year college degrees.
- The conversation should focus on the ECE workforce and compensation (tie to quality), and “put a face” to who is caring for our kids.

### **2) Quality of Programs**

- We must learn how to sustain quality improvement. The quality rating system is terrific but there is a lot to do moving the needle upward.
- We need to improve the quality of programs.
- Physical plant/facility issues are a barrier to increased stars.

- Educational level of teachers are a barrier to increased stars.
- Rates of reimbursement are low and do not keep up with cost.
- We need quality facilities in which to expand.
- We need more qualified staff and the wages to sustain this staff.

### **3) Need to serve more children**

- Child care assistance eligibility is 180% FPL which is the lowest in northeast; the cliff effect is a concern.
- Increased funding for Head Start would expand capacity for Rhode Island's most at risk population.

### **4) Governance & Management**

- We should have a Director of Early Learning.
- There is disagreement on implementation and how to reach our goals.
- We need to all step up a level—is it going to be a table discussion or a reality?
- No person or entity is charged with overall responsibility, and so siloed activities remain.
- We should take advantage of the opportunity for horizontal coordination and continuity of service.
- We should take advantage of the opportunity to improve local connectivity below state level (schools, childcare centers, home visitors, etc).
- We need to figure out how to sustain this focused momentum.
- We need an aligned plan for early childhood as a whole.
- Although working together is improving, silos continue and children's voice is lost.
- We must figure out how to move away from "top-down" state-led conversations to more collaborative, inclusive conversations and engagement.
- We need to make an even playing field by looking that the system of early childhood education in the state.
- What are the lessons learned from RTT-ECE that can be brought forward in a non RTT landscape (with an integrated approach)?
- We must develop a system for 0-5 that does not compete against each other (Pre-K, Head Start, Family CC, childcare).
- What is the bigger picture and how do we get there?
- We have conceptual commitment to collaboration but how do we bring commitment to fruition—integrate practitioner knowledge with policy decision making?
- We must continue collaboration across different systems that touch young children (early learning council and children's cabinet).
- We must enact the lessons learned from RTT including how to be less "top down".

### **5) More attention to all parts of Birth through Grade 3 continuum**

- We must start at prenatal or birth and continue through grade 3.
- We need developmentally appropriate standards and expectations in elementary grades, Kindergarten through Grade 3.
- There should be more discussion regarding a birth through 16 public school education.
- The birth-to-3 system is problematic. We know a great deal about importance of 0-3 but have not kept up with needs of the birth-to-3 workforce.

### **6) More support for children and families who are struggling**

- We need support in addition to early learning (eg. developmental screening & intervention).
- There should be more supports for children struggling with mental health and behavior challenges.
- Reading intervention specialists should cover more; specialists should be required at every elementary school; there should be multi-tiered levels of support.
- Comprehensive services are not part of pre-K programs, but should be.
- There is currently limited capacity of the wraparound services needed for young children to thrive in early education.

### **7) More family support & engagement**

- We need more parent education, classes, and curricula.
- There should be parent support groups to eliminate isolation.
- There is a lack of family awareness/confidence/skills in activities to foster literacy and learning, and an opportunity to help families build these skills.
- We should have books for all newborns.
- Chronic absence involves many family issues.
- We must expand comprehensive services to support family engagement.
- There should be parenting classes in hospitals.
- Reaching parents is a doable thing and would be great all through school. We should reach kids where they are when they are not in school.
- More family engagement is important.

### **8) Additional important issues for young children Birth through 8**

- There must be more access to affordable housing.
- We need more focus on homes.
- There should be fewer unintended pregnancies.
- We have made progress on lead in housing, but need more.
- Families need their needs met: Housing—affordable/stable; Basic needs—food/safety
- We need to figure out how to connect the basic human needs piece to the early learning piece.
- We should use Baby Court model to improve child welfare practices for young children.

### **9) Data/Research**

- We need integrated longitudinal data system (cross sectors) and data sharing.
- We need better data/research and access to it.
- We should increase the capacity for research partnerships among state and private higher education institutions in RI, while continuing to leverage the national partnerships with research organizations to sustain quality programs in early childhood and track quality of programs.

### **10) More funding**

- Funding sustainability is important.
- We should make opportunities to engage corporate community to co-invest.
- How will we continue without funding? We must supplement what parents can pay; legislators are showing support at the federal level.
- We need realistic levels of funding to promote quality. Our ECE teachers live at poverty level.
- We need more funding and resources (STATE INVESTMENTS) devoted to early childhood education.