

Rhode Island Early Learning Council Meeting

Tuesday, April 3, 2018 9:00 a.m.-12:00 p.m.

Ray Conference Center
Butler Hospital Campus
345 Blackstone Blvd
Providence, RI

Meeting Summary

AGENDA SUMMARY

The Early Learning Council's agenda addressed the following topics:

- Welcome, Opening Remarks, and Meeting Overview
- Policy and Program Updates
- Overview and Discussion: Rhode Island Kindergarten Curriculum Report
- Overview and Discussion: Think Babies Campaign
- Policy and Program Updates
- Public comment
- Upcoming events and meetings

KEY POINTS

Key discussion points from the meeting are summarized below:

WELCOME, OPENING REMARKS, AND MEETING OVERVIEW

Commissioner Ken Wagner and Elizabeth Burke Bryant welcomed the Council and presented updates related to public education in Rhode Island and federal funding for key early childhood programs included in the recently enacted federal omnibus budget. (See slides). The following key comments were made:

- A series of exciting events related to public education occurred over the last few weeks, starting with Commissioner Wagner's state address on March 19th.
 - The Commissioner's state address took place at the Potter Burns Elementary School in Pawtucket and included a student showcase of work in addition to a question and answer session with questions submitted by students. The Commissioner's talk discussed creating opportunities for children, families and communities to close the equity achievement gap with a focus on developing learning pathways that reflect the passions of both students and teachers.
 - The second event was the PrepareRI Summit held at CCRI where Commissioner Wagner presented to 300 education and industry leaders on career readiness and experiential learning tied to the types of jobs that are expected to grow the Rhode Island economy.
 - The third event was the Junior Achievement Inspire Career Exploration Fair where one quarter of the state's 8th graders explored various career opportunities in a hands-on manner. After meeting directly with employers from around the state and realizing what was needed to achieve their career goals, many students modified their educational goals to include higher education.
 - The fourth and final culminating event was Commissioner Wagner's presentation to the Council on Elementary and Secondary Education on a range of new proposals, including the following:
 - 1) A proposal for teacher preparation suggesting a yearlong residency as a replacement for the current semester of student teaching in order to provide teachers with more training for the classroom

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- 2) A proposal offering school districts more flexibility around hiring and matching decisions
 - Reciprocity with Massachusetts and Connecticut was also discussed.
 - 3) A proposal introducing the idea of an endorsement on teachers' certificates similar to the endorsement that will be on students' diplomas
 - The teacher endorsements will start with one in reading and literacy and one for English Language Learners. These endorsements will allow educators to increase competencies without pursuing additional certification.
 - 4) A proposal to reintroduce an annual professional learning requirement for teachers
 - To support this requirement, Rhode Island would create an educator course network, permitting teachers to choose from meaningfully differentiated classes offered by various districts and through community partners.
 - 5) A proposal permitting districts to invest in the development of teachers, particularly those teaching in shortage areas
 - A teacher in these shortage areas, such as math and science, would have 7 years to achieve certification, during which time the school would mentor the teacher and, at the three year mark, would examine whether the teacher has made sufficient progress towards certification. An additional shortage area could include cultural competence because the data is clear that students do better with more teachers of color in schools. Before cultural competence can qualify as a shortage area, however, RIDE must first determine if it can be validated and reliably measured.
- Exciting updates in the recently enacted 2018 Federal Omnibus budget include:
 - A \$2.37 billion increase in CCDBG funding (largest increase in history for child care)
 - A \$610 million increase in Head Start funding, \$150 million of which is for Early Head Start expansion or the Early Head Start-child care partnership
 - A \$11.4 million increase in funding for IDEA Part C for infants and toddlers with developmental delays
 - A \$12.8 million increase in funding for IDEA Part B Section 619 for preschoolers
 - A \$250 million flat rate for preschool grants
 - \$20 million for community learning centers offering after school programs
 - The April 9th breakfast for the KIDS COUNT Factbook is sold out. During the breakfast, KIDS COUNT will present Mary Varr with a Factbook to recognize her incredible advocacy.
 - Thank you to Director Courtney Hawkins for her unbelievable leadership in advocating for the inclusion of tiered reimbursement in the Governor's 2019 state budget.

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Governor's FY19 Budget and Pending Legislation re B-8

Leanne Barrett reviewed the Governor's FY19 proposed budget and pending legislation related to early learning. (See slides.) Key comments and questions included:

- We have tried to establish tiered reimbursement in Rhode Island since 2011 so it is exciting to see it in the Governor's FY19 budget.
- New federal regulations improve the consistency of eligibility for the CCAP program, which means the program will require more money to operate this year because temporary changes in eligibility will no longer cause children to cycle in and out of care. Keeping children in programs provides consistency for families, children and programs, but costs more money.
- Supporting Kindergarten teachers in implementing a high quality curriculum will eventually help us introduce a statewide Kindergarten Entrance Assessment.
- Rhode Island is a leader in offering paid family leave, but the four weeks the state currently offers is the shortest of all the states offering leave so the proposed extension to eight weeks would significantly help families.
- The achievement gap between high and low income children widens over the summer, which highlights the need for a permanent legislative commission on out-of-school learning.
- Chronic absences in Kindergarten establish a pattern throughout the school years.
- Q: Could you explain the proposed legislation to extend the Temporary Caregivers Insurance program?
A: Currently, workers pay into the system and when they take their leave they are paid at 65% of their salaries. The proposed bill would increase the cap for withholding from \$68,000 to \$100,000, which would bring more money into the system from higher wage earners and permit lower wage workers (earning up to twice the minimum wage) to receive 75% of their salaries. If the payment for TCI is too low, even if we offer eight weeks of leave, low-wage parents may not take leave when wage replacement is too low because they need 100% of their salaries to survive. This increase in payments will permit more low-wage families to take advantage of the state's paid family leave.
- Q: Will the money in the Governor's budget for State Pre-K be used for expansion or to sustain what we have?
A: The \$1.1 million is needed to sustain the 60 classrooms RIDE is currently operating. Federal funding was time limited and as it ends RIDE will need the state to match the federal funding in order to maintain and grow classrooms.

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- COMMENT: There is an epic crisis with early childhood staffing. Additional funding to expand programs is great, but if we do not have people to put in classrooms we cannot open any additional ones. We need to start encouraging people to go into the early childhood field. For example, Providence has a shortage of teachers, teaching assistants and early childhood speech therapists. Massachusetts is experiencing the same thing.
- Director Courtney Hawkins will follow-up on the shortage of early childhood educators and coordinate a cross-agency conversation. The focus up to now has been primarily on tiered rates for child care and it is imperative that we shift our focus to staffing concerns in child care and system wide.
- COMMENT: It is difficult to get high school students interested in the early childhood field because the regulations require them to be 16 before they can intern. If they could intern earlier, we could develop their interest in early childhood education sooner.
- COMMENT: Many programs would like to expand, but high construction and real estate costs and stagnant wages, even with tiered reimbursement, prevents programs from growing. Community programs have many of the same facility needs as the public school system.
- Commissioner Wagner explained that the state's facilities proposal for public schools allows for reimbursement for shared locations when public schools have extra space. This provision would permit community programs to partner with districts to use the extra space at public schools. Community programs should contact districts while they are still planning the design of their updated facilities so the districts can take the need for additional space into account.
- COMMENT: The pathways work for teachers in addition to increased compensation will help ease staffing issues.

Early Care and Education Data System (ECEDS)

Commissioner Ken Wagner updated the Council on ECEDS. (See slides.) The following comments were made:

- Work on the data system started with the Race to the Top – Early Learning Challenge grant, but it was paused after the funds stopped. RIDE is trying to restart the work by examining what parts are important to agencies and where the system should go from here.
- RIDE secured approximately \$300,000 to support this work. RIDE intends to make the best use of this money by discussing the potential and best uses of the system with EOHHS agencies.
- COMMENT: Data systems are essential for early childhood work and they should be automatically funded and not cut from budgets. Data should be treated as an overhead cost, , much like the treatment of utilities and leases in budgets.

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- The plan was for users to input information into ECEDS once and that information will be used for licensing, BrightStars and RIDE, thereby eliminating multiple touchpoints. The parent facing page is still automatically populated. Some components of the data system are already coded and just need to be turned on.

BrightStars Think Tank

Director Courtney Hawkins presented on the BrightStars Think Tank. (See slides.) Comments included:

- It is important for the state to focus not just on tiered rates, but also on a strong investment in quality improvement infrastructure and professional development. Rhode Island especially needs to help support the rating and improvement system if reimbursement is tied to it.
- With the help of a consultant, Harriet Dichtor, the BrightStars Think Tank examined Rhode Island's QRIS in comparison to other states, with particular attention to the guiding principles and core components used by all states. The Think Tank evaluated how BrightStars is doing on those principles and components and where the QRIS needs to improve. Concrete recommendations stemming from that analysis are due on April 30th. Those recommendations will be vetted both through the Children's Cabinet and through a wider engagement group.

DHS updates and the CCDBG Planning Process

Director Courtney Hawkins updated the Council on recent DHS activities and the CCDBG planning process. (See slides.) Comments and questions included the following:

- Karen Beese is on unexpected medical leave, so if you have any concerns, contact Director Hawkins directly.
- The 1199 contract for state early childhood workers was ratified last night and included an increase for child care providers and language about tiered reimbursement.
- A UHIP release is coming out this weekend that will make it easier to enroll and disenroll children during summer breaks and school vacations. The goal is to get it in before April break so providers can use it.
- Before 2014, the federal regulations required a new state CCDF plan every 2 years, but now it is every 3 years. Our current one is due to expire on September 30, 2018, which is why the state is drafting a new one now. The new state CCDF plan reflects everything the Council is talking about this morning.
- Previously, DHS had asked for waivers to some federal CCDBG regulations so it would not be required to implement all of the policy changes, but DHS will no longer be seeking those waivers, resulting in an increased caseload for the state this year. The additional funding in the federal

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budget for CCDBG anticipates the increased need caused by the implementation of previously waived policies.

- Q: What is the timing for implementation of the previously waived CCDBG policies?
A: The funding starts July 1st so DHS will have money to fully implement the policies thereafter.
- Throughout the state's CCDF plan, DHS paid particular attention to quality.
- COMMENT: The state does not currently have capacity for all children to have access to high quality childcare. Rhode Island needs to improve facilities, increase the number of high-quality providers, and improve the workforce pipeline in order to ensure full access.
- Q: Where are the needs of children with disabilities and social emotional concerns addressed? Programs are seeing more of these children and they are falling through the cracks because of waitlists for support services.
A: School districts should recognize that children are eligible for special education services for social emotional needs without the presence of other eligible needs. RIDE knows children with social emotional issues should be supported in high quality programs, but school departments do not currently have enough staff to serve all the eligible children. KIDS CONNECT is a program run through Medicaid that works with child care providers that serve children with special needs. Also Early Intervention serves infants and toddlers with social-emotional needs and
- COMMENT: The behavioral health system for children is broken and we need to ensure our child care and early learning providers acquire the necessary skills to identify problems early and respond appropriately.
- COMMENT: We need to support school districts so they can provide services in the classroom and train program educators to teach children with social emotional needs. We need more people.
- COMMENT: An investment in families is an investment in children.

CCRI Early Childhood and Child Development Program

- Carol Patnaude explained that NAEYC has fully accredited the CCRI Early Childhood and Child Development program. There is still ongoing work to do on the its rubrics, but the program now has a dedicated classroom containing early childhood and human service related materials.

OVERVIEW AND DISCUSSION: RI KINDERGARTEN CURRICULUM REPORT

Lisa Nugent and Roxanne Gustafson presented an overview and discussion of developments in Rhode Island's Kindergarten classrooms. (See slides). Comments included:

- When Kindergarten went full time, many classrooms did not know how to create a developmentally appropriate full day Kindergarten classroom. The Boston public school

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curriculum is a free resource for teachers to use in their classrooms so they are able to spend less time planning activities and more time intentionally teaching.

- The first conference on the Boston curriculum maxed out at 120 participants.
- The 2016-17 pilot on the Boston curriculum included 4 days of training followed by coaching. Classrooms also received materials related to the curriculum, such as dramatic play areas, sensory tables, science centers and books.
- For Cohort 3, 46 classrooms are receiving funds through federal preschool development grants. Those 46 classrooms are in public school districts.
- The Boston curriculum is planned and structured, but it incorporates centers with intentional play activities for small groups.
- Through intentional play, teachers are able to identify children who need more help closing the achievement gap. Once identified, teachers can modify activities for those children. Teachers are also able to provide additional activities for children who excel so they are not bored.
- Planning for activities is purposeful and based on children's interests and strengths. It is an integrated learning approach with authentic experiences.
- Cranston started the program 2 years ago in 2 classrooms. Once implemented, teachers found a decrease in challenging behaviors and an increase in a sense of community. Children began owning their learning and were more motivated and engaged. Children in these classrooms participated naturally in 21st Century Skills such as communication, collaboration, and problem solving. This year there are 5 more classrooms in Cranston using the Boston curriculum, with a focus on ESL, Title I and inclusion classrooms. Initial indicators suggests a continued decrease in challenging behaviors and increase in the children's motivation to learn. The district provides a lot of support for teachers in these classrooms. Coaches provide feedback and teachers are able to visit other classrooms to see different approaches. In the ESL population, translators call home to tell families about classroom activities and schools are opening at night to ensure families are engaged. The content is rigorous and interdisciplinary. Cranston will implement the Boston curriculum in 6 more classrooms next year.
- The plan is to use the Boston public school curriculum for 1st and 2nd grades too.
- The 1st 2-3 weeks of the Boston curriculum sets the stage for success by building a strong sense of community so children are then able to receive feedback from their peers without creating social emotional issues.

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- The Boston curriculum is aligned with RIELDS.
- To ensure that public school teachers have the right credentials for teaching in State Pre-K classrooms, those positions have a more specific job description including RIELDS requirements and a required 20 hours of professional development.

OVERVIEW AND DISCUSSION: THINK BABIES CAMPAIGN

Elizabeth Burke Bryant and Leanne Barrett presented an overview and discussion of the Think Babies campaign. (See slides.) The following key comments were made:

- In 2014, Rhode Island developed and prioritized recommendations for infants and toddlers 0 to 3 with the help of a technical assistance grant. The Think Babies campaign will build on that work. Rhode Island is one of 6 states in the first cohort of the national Think Babies campaign. Most of the work in early childhood involves federal-state collaboration so it is important for us to all work on a similar set of priorities.
- The priorities Rhode Island previously worked on fit in well with the national Think Babies priorities.
- With the adoption of TCI in 2013, otherwise known as paid family leave, Rhode Island moved ahead of many other states in establishing this policy that helps families with very young children and we continue to make improvements, such as with the adoption of earned sick leave in 2017.
- In 2014, 200 early childhood experts responded to a survey about what they felt were the most important infant toddler priorities for the state.
- The younger you are in Rhode Island, the more likely you are to live in poverty, with approximately $\frac{1}{4}$ of the state's babies living in poverty and $\frac{1}{2}$ living under 200% of the poverty level. Those families struggle daily to survive economically, which is why economic security is a top priority.
- One of the top priorities for Rhode Island in 2014 was finding a way to leverage Medicaid to better screen for maternal depression. Early identification or prevention is key to repairing or establishing a nurturing relationship between mother and baby.
- Housing is not a core part of the national Think Babies agenda, but it is a key area that we, as a state, want to continue to work on to ensure economic security for young children.
- On the 2015 Infant/Toddler Policy Priorities slide, the following areas fit into the national agenda:
 - Economic Security: Child Care Assistance, Paid Family Leave

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- Mental Health & Well-Being: Maternal Depression, Mental Health Consultation, Routine Mental Health Screenings & Treatment, Infant & Early Childhood Mental Health Endorsement
 - Family Support & Parenting: Evidence-based home Visiting, Paid Family Leave
 - High-Quality Early Learning & Development Programs: High-Quality Child Care, Infant/Toddler Educator-Caregiver Wages & Training, Routine Developmental Screenings with Intervention
-
- Think Babies is a multi-year campaign.
 - Rhode Island's goal for this year is to develop our Think Babies campaign strategies for 2019 and to determine what we want to accomplish as a state. One strategy is to reconvene the infant toddler group that worked on the 2014 priorities. This group will meet 2-3 times a year and will use the Early Learning Council to provide updates on the campaign. There will be additional meetings for strategic planning work. Let Leanne know if you are interested in joining this group.
 - Zero to Three hired a marketing firm to develop and implement an advocacy and communication campaign this year.
 - For the local Strolling Thunder, the focus will be on recruiting CCAP families with infants and toddlers. Ideally, one family from each city in Rhode Island will participate. It is happening on the 7th annual Child Care Day, May 16th. RIAEYC is having an advocacy day at the State House on that day as well. We will set up a baby-friendly play area at the State House and provide opportunities for representatives to connect with babies from their respective districts. Half of the families will visit the House and half will visit the Senate. It will follow the same format as in D.C. If you know of any families that would be interested, contact Leanne.
 - BrightStars and RI Reads partnered last year for an event where legislators read to children in child care programs and schools. This year the focus will be on child care centers and family child care homes caring for infants and toddlers participating in CCAP. The event will occur on April 24th, 25th, and 26th. Last year over 40 guest readers participated and everyone received a book to read in the classroom, which the programs were then able to keep. This year, legislators will receive a set of board books so they can read more than one book to infants and toddlers and the programs will, again, keep the books. Some books are bilingual.
 - In January 2019, we will release the Rhode Island Think Babies infant toddler policy agenda at an event similar to the luncheon for the Celebration of Children's Health. High profile people will be invited to learn about and discuss policies to support infants, toddlers, and young children and we will present awards. These awards could include, for example, an acknowledgement of programs, school districts, pediatric practices, and elected officials that have that are improving practices and helping to advance the policies needed to improve outcomes for young children..

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- Tiered rates for preschoolers will also have a positive impact on infant toddler care because they will subsidize infant toddler care while increasing the overall quality of programs for all enrolled children.
- Since most babies receive health care through Medicaid (about 60%) and the remainder have private insurance, we need to utilize the health care system to promote the development and learning of infants and toddlers and to connect families to needed services. The focus on the first 1,000 days of a child's life includes developing a package of services that is delivered and coordinated through the health care system and health insurance to children birth to age 3.
- COMMENT: Mind in the Making is a program that supports the executive function skills of parents. Through a grant, we have implemented this program with 1200 families in the Providence schools. Although not specifically for infants and toddlers, we know that families have younger siblings. This program could be included in an existing section of the Think Babies campaign or it could be added as an additional priority.
- COMMENT: Early Head Start-child care partnership money could be used to provide more comprehensive services to children affected by the opioid crisis. Community programs need support to provide the same level of comprehensive services that Early Head Start provides.
- COMMENT: We need to look across departments and not silo conversations.
- COMMENT: For additional resources, go to www.thinkbabies.org and www.joinvroom.org.

POLICY AND PROGRAM UPDATES

State Pre-K Update

Lisa Nugent presented updates on State Pre-K. (See slides.) Comments included:

- The RFP for 2 new classrooms for 2018-19 just closed and the lottery for available seats will begin in late June with the drawing in July.
- Once the federal funds end, RIDE will need \$4-6 million from the state to continue to support all 60 State Pre-K classrooms. Those funds will go towards paying teachers, buying materials, offering professional development and technical assistance throughout the school year, and monitoring the programs to ensure they maintain high quality. The State Pre-K classrooms offer comprehensive services like the Head Start model.
- As part of the comprehensive services offered by State Pre-K classrooms, a committee is trying to build an online referral system to help families connect with needed resources. Through the same online system, RIDE would be able to follow up to see if services were actually provided.

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Providence Talks

Missy Menders and Caitlin Molina discussed Providence Talks, an initiative funded with \$5 million from Bloomberg Philanthropies to prioritize language development with parents through the infant toddler years. (See slides.) Comments and questions included:

- Providence Talks is a high quality curriculum paired with innovative technology that tracks the language environment in classrooms. The technology counts the number of words spoken and the number of conversational turns. It is being used in both family child care homes and in child care centers. More than two thirds of the children participating in the initiative heard more words than before they entered the program and they are engaging in more meaningful conversations. Parents and caregivers feel significant connections to their children's day to day routines and are able to integrate simple strategies to build interactions.
- The original goal of Providence Talks was to reach 20% of the eligible population with direct services in homes, play groups and in professional development for early childhood education. It has achieved that goal, reaching 2500 families in Providence, but it needs to sustain the initiative.
- The next steps for Providence Talks include 3 delivery models because it cannot reach all families through just 1 delivery model:
 - Home visiting
 - Play groups
 - Professional development
- The results of the Brown University evaluation are available for public distribution.
- The Mayor of Providence has invested \$500,000 per year for ongoing sustainability of the program.
- Providence Talks and Ready to Learn Providence are now included in the Roger Williams University School of Continuing Studies program.
- Providence Talks is trying to understand funding streams with the goal of strengthening its model. Providence Talks is meeting with Bloomberg Philanthropies to develop a comprehensive plan of funding replication so it can support an additional 3-5 cities with technical assistance.
- With a \$60,000 grant from the Rhode Island Foundation, the Brown University's Longitudinal Analysis is extended to measure long term impacts.
- Providence Talks is working with DOH to potentially integrate its program into DOH's existing home visiting program.
- Q: Does Providence Talks have the ability to refer families to other programs?

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A: Yes, all families receive transition support to other resources. Providence Talks has established partnerships with evidence based programs to help and support families with transitions and referrals. Providence Talks has talked with DOH about the possibility of tracking referrals through KIDSNET to see if parents are actually enrolling in referred services.

- COMMENT: The more people wear the device, the more they love getting the data. It is concrete data and not self-reported so it is more accurate. The device is like a talking pedometer.
- The current model can be adapted to better integrate into existing systems to sustain the initiative.

PUBLIC COMMENT

Comments from the public included:

- Ray Neirinckx explained that evictions and foreclosures affect family stability and disrupt the care and learning of children. It would be helpful to have an update on the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act at a future Early Learning Council meeting.
- There is a family with 2 school age children and a full-time working mom who are living in a car because they cannot pay their rent. If anyone knows of a 2-3 bedroom apartment in Pawtucket, Central Falls, Lincoln or Cumberland for under \$700 a month, please contact Ray.
- Amos House uses a non-medical model for recovery so pregnant women who relapse can stay in their housing, which helps them give birth to healthy babies. Housing, child custody and addition/recovery are all related concepts and need to be examined together.

UPCOMING EVENTS AND MEETINGS

The next Early Learning Council meeting is on **Tuesday**, June 26, 2018 at Save the Bay.