

Rhode Island Early Learning Council Meeting

Wednesday, December 13, 2017 9:00 a.m.-12:00 p.m.

Save the Bay

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's Early Learning Workforce
- 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 reviewed the agenda. An award was presented to Maura Pearce for her outstanding efforts and advocacy as the first director of the T.E.A.C.H. early childhood workforce initiative originally housed at Ready to Learn Providence. Going forward, T.E.A.C.H. will be housed at RIAEYC. Ready to Learn Providence became part of Roger Williams University so it can no longer operate T.E.A.C.H. because RWU is building its own AA degree program in early childhood education, which would create a conflict with T.E.A.C.H. Maura said it was her great privilege to serve the early childhood workforce and she hopes that bringing joy into the lives of children and helping children reach their dreams will continue to guide the Early Learning Council.

POLICY & PROGRAM UPDATES

Rhode Island Reads Campaign

Diana Perdomo provided updates on the Rhode Island Reads Campaign. (See Slides). Key comments included:

- The United Way hosted a fantastic partner meeting with 125 attendees and 51 different organizations represented. At the meeting, Commissioner Wagner discussed how inequality of education is the civil rights issue of our time. Since the event, over 60 partners have joined the campaign. All information from the meeting, as well as a data dashboard, is on www.rireads.org.
- Next steps include mobilizing partners and sharing information so that the partners can inform parents, teachers and legislators about the importance of early literacy.
- Commissioner Wagner expressed how nice it is to see the initiative come together as a defined project so that all partner agencies within the state government are working together. He also stated that we must discuss actual professional teaching behaviors occurring in both early learning and K-12 environments. Superintendents need to be at both the Children's Cabinet and the Early Learning Council so we can have a coordinated approach in reaching the governor's third grade reading goals.

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- In the Annie E. Casey Foundation's Race to Results Report, the existence of a Latino achievement gap was not surprising, but it was a surprise that Rhode Island's Latino achievement gap is the largest in the nation. This report should give urgency to our work. Achievement gaps start with opportunity gaps in early learning.
- Organizations interested in becoming partners with United Way can print a form from the website. They can also sign up for the Rhode Island Reads eNews online at www.rireads.org.

State 3rd Grade Reading Action Plan

Cara Harrison from the Governor's Office presented updates on the state's 3rd Grade reading action plan. (See slides). Key comments included:

- COMMENT: Head Start, Early Head Start, State Pre-K and childcare partners are all using Teaching Strategies Gold. We should identify specific objectives within Teaching Strategies Gold to track as benchmarks to ensure that the providers' work is aligning with everything in the state's 3rd grade reading action plan. There are many Teaching Strategies Gold objectives, but selecting a few of them to report out on will show progress throughout the entire system.
- Articulation and coordination of high quality teaching and learning experiences is one of the most impactful strategies for improving reading, particularly across the early learning space into the K-12 space. A better understanding of specific targeted goals in early learning programs could be brought to K-12 to help establish a coordinated strategy.
- COMMENT: Because we do not have a common coherent literacy and reading curriculum in K-12 and no common literacy strategy it hurts instruction for children and also diminishes the impact of teacher preparation in higher education.
- Alignment among the state's early learning standards was mapped under the Race to the Top Early Learning Challenge so we just need to identify targets to track in order to monitor progress.
- Commissioner Wagner explained that, as a state, we need to improve our reading instruction, specifically in the areas of diagnosing, strategizing and differentiating specific reading instruction in a coherent way across a diverse range of readers. Teacher preparation programs cannot adequately prepare teachers to teach reading partly because we do not set the right pressure as a regulatory body. Early learning is the most articulated space because of BrightStars, but K-12 superintendents need to focus on coherence and coordination. The response to intervention process often makes reading problems worse because it forces families to wait two years to evaluate the problem, but the reality is that the initial interventions are not where they should be.
- Q: Where are the objectives of the state 3rd grade reading action plan?
A: It is on the website, www.kids.ri.gov, and it will be linked and promoted through the Early Learning Council. Cabinet meetings are open to the public and the reading plan is discussed at every meeting.

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- COMMENT: One of the biggest challenges for Rhode Island is alignment, collaboration and communication between the early learning community and the K-12 community and understanding what goals are being set. Principals and teachers need to know this, but both early childhood and K-3 teachers are often uninformed about what is going on. Parents also need to be involved from the beginning. We need to make people aware of the upcoming changes and the urgency of what is needed. Superintendents agree that 3rd grade reading is critical, but there must be outreach to principals and teachers to keep them in the loop.
- The Children's Cabinet can formally close the governance loop between early learning and K-12. It is a captive audience of leaders in government organizations. We can teach them the importance of investing in early learning so they can help advocate for it when budget discussions happen.
- COMMENT: In some districts there is a significant gap in expectations between what kindergarten teachers think is good teaching and what early childhood educators think is good, especially in the areas of curriculum, assessment and instructional strategies. RIDE is conducting pilot work on curricular approaches to reduce the gap (Boston Preschool Curriculum project), but we need to acknowledge that curricular and pedagogical gaps exist. Nationally, a number of states have begun initiatives to bring together kindergarten teachers and principals with early childhood directors and teachers to do a cross walk between standards and to look specifically at gaps.

RI Comprehensive Literacy Plan and PK-Grade 3 Resources

Diane Girard and Colleen O'Brien discussed the RI Comprehensive Literacy Plan and PK-Grade 3 resources. (See slides). Key comments and questions included:

- This document has been in place for some time, but it is still relevant now. It unifies all RIDE initiatives on literacy and is rooted in research. It provides practical implications and best practices for classrooms and offers connections to resources.
- There are 10 different chapters, including growing professionally in early care to K-12 leadership and the importance of reading intervention and assessment. Every chapter highlights relevant research.
- The document was revised in 2017 to address dyslexia, which now has its own section in the appendices.
- Q: Are there any references to best practices for dual language learners in the document?
A: Yes, dual language learner representatives helped construct the document.
- COMMENT: A quality document is just the beginning of the journey. A coherence of instructional approaches is the journey. This has to start with local leaders.

BrightStars Think Tank

Director Courtney Hawkins discussed the BrightStars Think Tank. Key comments included:

- DHS will push for improved funding for child care in the upcoming legislative session. Until the state increases the rates paid to childcare providers, we will continue to have problems with

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access to high-quality child care and filling jobs at child care centers, which has a tremendous economic impact on the state.

- To move the early childhood education system forward, DHS is weaving together the following three areas:
 - Increasing rates
 - This will be difficult this year because the budget is so tight, but DHS will still ask and advocate for higher reimbursement rates. Rates must increase to ensure quality. Tiered reimbursement is important because we should differentiate between the different levels of quality.
 - Ensuring that the quality rating system is meeting our needs
 - BrightStars needs to evolve in response to national and state experiences and research. The BrightStars Think Tank will bring stakeholders together to look at the BrightStars rating system and gather feedback on what is working, what needs to be improved and how do we make those improvements continuously going forward. This work will begin next month.
 - If BrightStars is being used as a basis for payment, it needs to be right.
 - Ensuring that programs have the supports they need to move up in the quality rating system
 - This includes providing the workforce with coursework in different languages and offering that coursework at convenient times.
- It is important to build a coalition so we are all moving in the same direction and use the same language. Director Hawkins intends to meet often with others so DHS can be clear and concrete in its advocacy efforts.
- We must be strategic about laying the groundwork for advocacy by determining what is most important for us now. Once we achieve that first step, we can prove how important early learning is to the state's economy and we can then go back to ask for what is needed next.

OVERVIEW AND DISCUSSION: RHODE ISLAND'S EARLY LEARNING WORKFORCE

Leanne Barrett, Karen Beese, Allison Comport, Aimee Mitchell, Jennifer Kaufman and Kristine Campagna discussed the workforce as it relates to different sectors, including CCAP, state pre-K, public schools, Head Start, EI and home visiting. (See slides) Comments and questions included:

- The University of California Berkeley releases an updated Early Childhood Workforce Index every two years. That index includes data on educators working in centers, Head Start programs and public school programs. We know that home visiting programs and EI are part of the workforce too, but they are not included in the national report right now.
- The early childhood workforce does a good job of matching the diversity of children served and we want to capitalize on that strength while supporting and growing the skills of the workforce.
- For the Early Educators in Rhode Island slide (#17), preschool teacher includes public school and Head Start programs.

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- The current system encourages more qualified members of the workforce to move into the public schools where they can receive better wages and benefits. We need to change that so quality is maintained in all parts of the early childhood education system.
- With lower unemployment rates, potential early child care workers have more options for better wages so many federally funded programs, such as Head Start, have eligible children and eligible funding to serve those children, but cannot open additional slots because they are unable to attract and retain qualified staff to fill open positions.
- COMMENT: Certified does not mean qualified. The systems in place now that require certifications for specific grade levels are not showing powerful impacts on grade level reading results. Just because one gets paid more does not guarantee better results. We should look at other models that are performance and outcome based and then determine an appropriate pay structure and raises.
- COMMENT: Certification differentiation ties up teacher placement, but does not necessarily improve quality. Instead, all teachers should be teachers of reading in all grades, PK-12.
- COMMENT: We should conduct a wages and benefits study on all providers to assess what programs are offering and what improvements are needed.
- COMMENT: To support advocacy, we need an impact study on how the lack of support for the early learning sector affects the state's economy.
- COMMENT: The workforce should utilize the state's early learning data system because it can track data across the entire sector. It was intended as a statewide platform to conduct deeper analysis.
- COMMENT: We should think about the early learning workforce as a 2-Gen strategy, i.e., in advocacy efforts we should talk about parents being unable to enter the workforce because they cannot access child care and emphasize the resulting loss of dollars to the state's economy.
- COMMENT: Staff turnover has a major impact on programs, both in terms of the HR costs involved in hiring and training new staff every few weeks and in terms of losing relationships with families and children through lack of staff continuity.

Child Care Assistance Program (DHS)

- Barriers the CCAP workforce encounters include:
 - Professional development that is offered at convenient times because they work full time
 - Professional development and college coursework that is free or low cost because of the low wages the workforce receives
 - Professional development offered in languages other than English for non-English speaking members of the early childhood workforce

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- DHS is working with DCYF to help provide opportunities for career growth to those providers who were grandfathered in under the GED/high school diploma DCYF licensing regulation and were not required to attain that certificate/degree.
- CCRI will offer its CDA credential in Spanish starting in January 2018.
- Rhode Island's State Pre-K program is one of only two states nationally recognized by NIEER as meeting all 10 of NIEER's benchmarks under its newly revised system.

State Pre-K and Public Schools (RIDE)

- In RI, lead teachers are required to have both a BA and a RI state teaching certificate, at a minimum. Teacher assistants need a minimum of 12 early childhood education concentration credits, but many in RI have an associate's degree as well.
- High-quality early childhood education practices are measured using different tools recognized by BrightStars, including CLASS, ECERS, etc.
- The new ECERS-3 might be piloted in state Pre-K programs.
- RIDE examines the compensation rates offered by state Pre-K programs and maps out salaries across the programs to ensure they are equitable both within the program and also nationally. There is also some coordination with unions around salary expectations.
- RIDE wants to increase recruitment of males and ethnically diverse individuals to the state Pre-K workforce.
- The PowerPoint from today will be posted online with hyperlinks to the items discussed by RIDE.
- Look for an upcoming comparison of data on the number of public school teachers across licensing categories that are active or inactive.
- State Pre-K classrooms are always just 4 year olds, but classrooms run by individual districts can include 3 years olds as well.
- Since state Pre-K classrooms are filled by a lottery system, the percentage of children with disabilities in the classroom more closely models the number in the community, 11-20%, whereas district run special education Pre-K classrooms are a 49-51% split, which is not a representative proportion of children with disabilities.
- To see all of RIDE's professional development offerings, google "eRide browse".

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- A district level professional development offering on Pre-K to K standards alignment started last month and focuses on alignment among RIELDS, the Common Core, NGSS, and the SEL standards.
- Boston public schools are nationally recognized for their locally developed curricula with strong practices around intentional teaching, so RI has partnered with them for 2 pilots with Kindergarten teachers. There is the possibility of a third pilot with state and district Pre-K teachers that will focus on greater continuity among instructions practices when children are transitioning.

Head Start (Federal)

- For the Head Start workforce:
 - 87% of Head Start teachers have a BA
 - 54% of Head Start teacher assistants have a CDA credential
 - 27% of Head Start teacher assistants have an AA
 - 74% of Head Start family development staff have a BA or higher
 - 21% of Early Head Start teachers have a BA
 - 66% of Early Head Start teachers have an AA
 - 81% of Early Head Start home visitors have a BA
 - 19% of Early Head Start home visitors have an AA
 - 79% of Early Head Start/Child Care Partnership classroom teachers have a CDA credential
- The Head Start staff that left for higher wages all went to Pre-K programs.
- There are Head Start slots that are not currently enrolled because there is not enough qualified staff willing to work at the wages offered to serve the eligible children for those federally funded slots.
- Early Head Start is offered either through a center or through the home based model of weekly 90 minute visits.
- There are 100 Early Head Start/Child Care Partnership slots across the state.
- The first course for the Roger Williams University certificate program in Infant Toddler Teaching and Learning starts in January. It will meet once a week for 2 hours with 1 hour of non-classroom time required for preparation. An online video coaching platform is available where students can upload videos for viewing by peers or teachers. After completion of the first 2 classes in the series, students are eligible for a CDA credential. Courses are offered bilingually.

Early Intervention (EOHHS)

- EI includes a variety of disciplines, not just education. The compensation for some of those disciplines, particularly SLPs, OTs, PTs, nurses and nutritionists, is more attractive at public schools and medical facilities, which affects the ability of EI to recruit and retain high quality staff.

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- Starting this year, Professional Development Grants have provided funding to programs based on their percentage of FTE. That funding helped people in certain disciplines continue their training in order to maintain certifications and/or licensures.
- Incentive funds are also available to EI programs to support the implementation of the Routines Based Interview to fidelity.
- EI and the DOH home visiting programs have a unique challenge of expecting clinically trained individuals to be home visitors. It is difficult to find individuals willing to pursue a career in home visiting programs.

Home Visiting (DOH)

- Home visiting is a new yet critical component to the early childhood workforce.
- RI has enough federal funding for 1400 home visiting slots. With those federal dollars comes a tremendous amount of federal oversight and accountability. DOH must look at enrollment to ensure it is at least at 85% of capacity and must present workforce retention data to the federal government both monthly and quarterly. DOH compares staff capacity to available funding for capacity to determine if there are unmet needs because of the inability to find qualified staff.
- The Nurse-Family Partnership requires staff members to have at least a BA in nursing and 3-5 years' experience. In RI, we require a minimum of a BA for family home visitors in both Parents as Teachers and Healthy Families Rhode Island, although nationally Healthy Families America only requires a high school diploma or equivalent and college coursework. Variances and support are available for members of the workforce trying to reach that goal. Supervisors in Healthy Families Rhode Island are required to have an MA.

SMALL GROUPS

Representatives from DLT and higher education listened to suggestions from the small groups, which included:

- Recognize and Reward
 - Update and expand the early learning workforce study on the benefits and wages in all areas
 - Offer a retention award annual bonus based on an individual's educational level and the years spent at the same program
 - Offer a college scholarship as a reward for teacher assistants who have completed a certain predefined number of years at the same program
 - Create a recognition award for early learning teachers, teacher assistants and directors similar to what is available statewide for the public schools. Can early childhood teachers in community-based settings receive a Golden Apple award?
 - Develop pre- and post-service opportunities that provide endorsements and competencies including those relating to infant mental health issues, lifelong outcomes and reading
 - Support individuals by providing discounted or free professional development
 - Establish more morale boosters

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- Recognize individuals at staff meetings
- Establish tiered reimbursement
- Offer state benefits and vacation time
- Offer tuition reimbursement
- Increase salaries
- Offer performance and outcome bonuses

- **Attract**
 - Offer universal preschool for 4 year olds, which will increase employment opportunities while also improving stability in the workforce
 - Forgive loans for those willing to work in child care after graduation for a certain predetermined amount of years
 - Broaden the idea and definition of early learning professionals to include other disciplines to help prepare people for the wider field, including home visiting
 - Increase wages
 - Offer professional development in other languages
 - Increase outreach through multiple platforms and languages, including through social media
 - Recruit at high schools through dual enrollment coursework and vocational education programs focusing on childhood and development and, also, include an apprenticeship/mentoring model in the instruction
 - Partner with local colleges and universities to provide internship and community service hours to students while introducing them to the field
 - Offer no cost education
 - Encourage the DLT to recognize early learning as an industry sector with real job possibilities and ask them to conduct a workforce study of the needs of families and the workforce
 - Create more career pathways because people want to be in a field where there are opportunities to grow and progress
 - Examine DCYF regulations to evaluate whether internship programs can start at 16 for high school students

- **Retain**
 - Increase pay and offer pay equity for teaching staff
 - Offer free high quality professional development
 - Conduct a study on the impact of poor early learning options on the state's economy
 - Create a refundable tax credit for early learning staff
 - Offer compensated training
 - Increase wages, benefits and vacation time and create clear career pathways while ensuring that teachers have the support and materials that they need
 - Improve environments
 - Offer college courses at the CELP because it is a safe space for teacher assistants who are used to going there
 - Offer reflective supervision

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- Establish retention bonuses
- Offer pre-service training to emphasize the impact of retention because younger teachers might not understand the importance of continuity of care on family relationships, language learning, and reading skills, particularly if we recruit more from high schools
- Tie tiered reimbursement increases to compensation in the regulations
- Plan a B-3 conference in RI

POLICY AND PROGRAM UPDATES

DOH: Home Visiting Strategic Planning

Kristine Campagna updated the Council on the DOH Home Visiting Strategic Plan. Key comments and questions included:

- This strategic planning initiative began with an influx of federal funding and includes input from EI.
- To collect feedback, DOH will hold focus groups and distribute surveys as well as return to the Early Learning Council in the spring for comments.
- There is a core strategic plan group meeting regularly.
- DOH is working with EOHHS to submit a waiver through the Office of Medicaid requesting that home visiting be included in the waiver.
- Staff working on the Safe Sleep Initiative can contact Kristine Campagna for training or support.
- Possible changes in the next reauthorization of CHIP funding include changing reauthorization from every 2 years to every 5 years and requiring a state matching requirement for home visiting funding.
- Q: If there is a state matching requirement, would the Medicaid waiver go towards that?
A: There needs to be money available to support the initiative once it is included in the waiver. We do not know yet what the match will look like.
- Write and call your legislators to tell them to support CHIP funding for healthcare for families. The senate number is 202-224-3121 and the house number is 202-225-3121.

EOHHS: Early Intervention ICC Retreat

Jennifer Kaufman updated the Council on the Early Intervention ICC Retreat. (See slides). Comments included:

- At the retreat, stakeholders began thinking about their efforts and the impact for each activity. The next step is to prepare an action plan to determine what can be completed over the next few years.

DHS: Child Care Development Block Grant Biennial Plan

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Karen Beese updated the Council on the Child Care Development Block Grant Biennial Plan. The following comments and questions were made:

- The plan is now every 3 years so it is now called a triennial plan.
- The state plan is the first one since the block grant reauthorization. This plan will reflect Rhode Island coming into compliance with all federal guidelines and regulations, including both what we are currently doing and what we are planning to do over the next 2-3 years.
- DHS will conduct outreach to gather feedback for the state plan, including surveys and focus groups, commencing in January and culminating in a June public hearing. DHS will submit the plan by the end of June 2018. Watch for the various opportunities to provide input.
- There is a new template that the federal government is calling a preprint. There is a 30 day public comment period on the preprint itself.
- Q: Does the market rate survey being conducted by DHS have a timeline?
A: The survey is expected to go out in January.

RIDE: Early Childhood Guidance for School Districts (ESSA)

Allison Comport updated the Council on the Early Childhood Guidance for School Districts. (See slides). Comments and questions included:

- There are 4 new guidance documents that are all posted on the RIDE website. The documents speak to the required elements aligned with ESSA and other optional opportunities.
- In order to use Title I funding, public schools must be able to demonstrate that the funds are being used for evidence based interventions and practices. The guidance documents contain a concise list of evidence based interventions offered in the state so districts can use that list to find ways to supplement public school programs.
- Districts operating ESSA-funded Pre-K or early learning programs must coordinate services with Head Start agencies and show that the services comply with Head Start performance standards. The guidance documents contain content aligning the standards to assist districts in providing evidence of that compliance.
- Q: Is home visiting included in the evidence based opportunities?
A: Yes, and the documents contain hyperlinks to help districts prove that the opportunities are evidence based. They also show the rating level for the evidence base. For home visiting, there is a link to a national report on evidence-based models and a suggestion to contact Kristine Campagna for more information on implementing home visiting.
- COMMENT: Head Start is required to have agreements with school districts and is required to align school readiness with districts so it is great to have this coming from both sides now.

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- The focus of the RIDE work is to help strengthen collaboration and communication across community based programs and districts to support all families. A potential award of funding from the US Department of Education will help RIDE expedite its work in 2018.

PUBLIC COMMENT AND NEXT STEPS

Comments from the public included:

- Housing is not at the table at either the Early Learning Council or the Children's Cabinet, yet everyone recognizes that stable housing is central to a child's development. Keeping children in schools after eviction is challenging. A housing community representative should be a member on the Early Learning Council.
- The Early Learning Council should also include representation from the Family Court, particularly the successful Safe and Secure Baby Court that has had four reunifications in its first nine months.
- Different sectors in early childhood education are experiencing the same workforce issues, specifically attracting and retaining quality people. The Early Learning Council should gather preliminary data on wages across the field to help with advocacy across the state.
- The Early Learning Council should write a letter to the DLT requesting a workforce study looking at an early learning sector pathway.
- In order to reach the governor's goals, we need to support the early learning workforce. That should be our advocacy position.
- What is going to happen to centers when the minimum wage is increased? That is why tiered reimbursement is so important.
- Because of workforce issues, programs are increasingly having difficulty meeting DCYF group size and ratio requirements.
- The hourly wage rates do not capture how many hours a week people are working. They could be working less than 40 hours a week because programs cannot afford to pay them for full time. That exaggerates the low income levels of the early childhood education workforce even more.
- There are a number of childcare workers receiving DHS benefits because the wages are so low.
- The Early Learning Council should say something about the Annie E. Casey Foundation's Race for Results Report.
- KIDS COUNT and the Latino Policy Institute are having a policy roundtable this Friday to hear the about the Annie E. Casey Foundation's Race for Results Report. It will be held from 10:30 am to 12:00 pm at the RI Foundation building. Send Elizabeth an email if you want to attend.

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- Local communities should hold mixers to help spread the importance of early learning.
- People should read the report, *Workforce of Today, Workforce of Tomorrow*, because it offers a different way of getting people to talk about these issues.
<https://www.uschamberfoundation.org/reports/workforce-today-workforce-tomorrow>