

# ***Rhode Island Early Learning Council Meeting***

Wednesday, June 30, 2020 9:00 a.m.-11:00 p.m.

Virtual Meeting

## **Meeting Summary**

### **AGENDA SUMMARY**

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

- Welcome, Opening Remarks, and Meeting Overview
- Updates/Discussion FY 22 State Budget and Legislation
- Presentation/Discussion: RI Triennial State Child Care & Development Fund Plan for 2022-2024
- Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) Educator Pathway Leading to Pre K – Grade 2 Certification
- Head Start in Rhode Island
- Providence Public Schools Pre-K Expansion Update
- Announcements: RI Pre-K Lottery and Others from Community
- Announcements and Public comment

### **KEY POINTS**

Key discussion points from the meeting are summarized below:

#### **WELCOME, OPENING REMARKS, AND MEETING OVERVIEW**

Deputy Commissioner Dr. Kelvin Rodán, Interim Director Celia Blue and Elizabeth Burke Bryant welcomed the Council. (See slides). The following comments were made:

- Over this past year, we vaccinated families, introduced a comprehensive testing system, placed proper safeguards in schools and built on lessons learned. We plan to return to in person instruction in the fall. Details can be found on the RIDE website and on [www.back2schoolri.com](http://www.back2schoolri.com).
- RIDE is working hard to ensure families are aware of the free high quality early learning opportunities available in the state.
- This year, the RI state Pre-K program added 27 classrooms and more than 500 seats across the state. There are now a total of 127 classrooms in 18 communities serving approximately 2300 four year olds. The deadline for state Pre-K registration for next year is extended to July 11<sup>th</sup> and the application can be found on the RIDE website.
- The state offered expanded summer learning opportunities for all grades, including Pre-K to grade 3. We are offering 64 courses for Pre-K to 3, totaling 1345 seats. Including school age children, the state is offering summer learning opportunities in a total of 114 courses with 2298 seats. Currently 1580 seats are filled from the initial registration, but registration has reopened for some courses with waitlists. Courses include topics such as STEM, science, eco warriors, and theater.
- DHS works as a team with its staff, community partners and other state agencies. Teamwork is the best way to realize change and achieve success.
- RIDE and DHS announced state approval for the extension of pandemic EBT for July and August for all school age children deemed eligible for free or reduced cost meals at school and, also, for

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children under the age of 6 that receive assistance from SNAP. The benefit is \$187.50 for each child each month.

### **UPDATES/DISCUSSION FY 22 STATE BUDGET AND LEGISLATION**

Kayla Rosen and Leanne Barrett updated the Council on the FY 22 State Budget and Legislation. (See slides.) The following comments and questions were made:

- The FY 22 budget begins July 1<sup>st</sup> once it passes the Senate. It is not passed as of this meeting.
- The budget includes many items that the early learning community had hoped to see. It reflects the importance of investing in early childhood education and speaks to the advocacy and efforts of the Early Learning Council.
- Head Start and the state Pre-K program were level funded and received \$14.9 million for RI Pre-K and \$1.2 million for Head Start. Pre-K expansion seats were funded through the PDG Birth – 5 grant, GEERS and other federal funds.
- We need to advocate at both the state and federal level for sustaining RI Pre-K funding once the current federal funding stream ends.
- The RI Works benefit increased 30%, which is the first increase in many years.
- The CCAP rates enhanced during the pandemic will continue through the end of the 2021 calendar year regardless of whether the Rhode Island state of emergency continues.
- Starting January 1, 2022, new CCAP rates will be implemented. These increased rates are higher than those included in the governor’s proposed budget, but some of the rates are lower than the current pandemic rates, which will expire on December 31.
- The pilot program extending CCAP benefits to college students is capped at \$200,000.
- The FY 22 budget appropriates funding from the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA). Additionally, many child care providers have applied for and received \$9 million in federal stimulus funds from the Coronavirus Response & Relief Stimulus Act (CRRSA) legislation passed at the end of 2020. Another \$9 million from that legislation will go out to child care providers in July.
- Q: Does the CCAP pilot program to help college students pay for child care include all state institutions of higher education?  
A: The legislation just says “state institutions,” but the state will further define the regulatory piece after it passes. Once the pilot program concludes, the data collected will help inform the need going forward.
- The Right from the Start campaign actively worked on many of the legislative proposals included in the FY 22 budget.

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- Advocacy helped ensure that the rates for school age children in CCAP will not be cut as significantly as originally planned in the Governor's budget. It is important that we advocate to improve rates for all ages of children in the Child Care Assistance Program to meet or exceed the federal equal access standards and promote access to affordable, quality care.
- Family co-pay amounts in CCAP will be capped in statute at no more than 7% of family income, which is a huge victory as it meets the federal affordability standard! This will mean that DHS will need to recalculate all the current CCAP co-pay amounts.
- Medicaid funding requires states to match at approximately 50%, so the Medicaid funding for family home visiting will require the state to contribute more state resources to that program than it did previously.
- The Equal Access standard is not the same as the actual cost of quality because it reflects the cost of accessing the existing market of care and does not cover the cost of quality, nor ensure higher wages for educators.
- For paid family leave, Rhode Island has the lowest wage replacement rates of all of the 9 states that offer wage replacement, including neighboring Massachusetts and Connecticut. It also offers the fewest weeks off. The proposed increase in the number of weeks covered to 5 weeks in 2022 and 6 weeks in 2023 will help, but we are still behind.
- Although the World Language and Dual Language Immersion Act will likely not be included in the FY 22 budget, RIDE has \$100,000 in its budget for a World Language Specialist to begin some of the work with a dedicated staff person.
- Establishing a class size maximum for K – 2 has not passed the General Assembly and would constitute a significant financial challenge for many schools although it is good for health, instruction and family engagement.
- Q: For the CCAP rates, will the new January 2022 rates meet the federal Equal Access standards and, if not, is there a chance of sanctions?  
A: Pre-COVID, our CCAP rates were out of compliance and sanctions were possible at that time. With the enhanced pandemic rates and the new rates coming into effect in January 2022, we are showing that we are moving towards compliance. Since we are moving in a direction towards compliance, sanctions are unlikely. Although federal sanctions are not likely, the only CCAP rate that will meet the federal equal access standard in January 2022 is the rate for infants/toddlers in 5-star-quality centers which will meet the 75<sup>th</sup> percentile of the 2021 RI Child Care Market Rate Survey.
- Q: Is the federal Equal Access standard applicable to programs at every star level or just to programs at the higher star levels?  
A: The requirement is a base rate so the state should be paying rates that meet the equal access standard for all levels of quality.

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### **PRESENTATION/DISCUSSION: RI TRIENNIAL STATE CHILD CARE & DEVELOPMENT FUND PLAN FOR 2022-2024**

Nicole Chiello and Hannah Hansen presented on the RI Triennial State Child Care & Development Fund Plan for 2022-2024. (See slides). Key comments included the following:

- During the first phase of the consumer website relaunch, DHS worked to develop and launch an updated searchable provider directory, as required for compliance with federal regulations.
- The 2021 Market Rate Survey collected data on the current tuition rates and fees that providers charge families for child care. The Cost of Care Survey addressed the cost to providers to offer child care services, e.g., operating budgets.
- The Market Rate Survey is required every 3 years and gathers information on how much providers charge families for child care services. It was last conducted in 2018. The Cost of Care Survey was new this year and is not required. The Market Rate Survey had a high response rate, as required by ACF for validity.
- More information will come regarding the mapping of CCAP rates to percentiles reflecting the market data collected in the 2021 Market Rate Survey. The current state CCDBG plan reports the current enhanced CCAP rates during the COVID-19 pandemic. Once the January 2022 rates go into effect, DHS will amend the plan.
- The improved DHS website is much easier for child care providers and families to navigate. A guidance document on the child care health and safety standards and monitoring process will be on the website soon.

### **EARLY CHILDHOOD CARE AND EDUCATION (ECCE) EDUCATOR PATHWAY LEADING TO PRE K – GRADE 2 CERTIFICATION**

Amanda Blazka explained the ECCE Pathway Leading to Pre K – Grade 2 Certification. (See slides). Comments included:

- As a program's quality rating increases, the education credentials required for teachers also increase. The Rhode Island Workforce Assessment indicated that assistant teachers in the state do not currently have the requisite higher education to advance to lead teachers in a 4 or 5 star center. Among assistant teachers, 36% do not have 12 ECE college credits, 60% do not have an Associate's Degree and 82% do not have a Bachelor's Degree. Among lead teachers, 34% do not have a Bachelor's Degree, which makes them ineligible to become a lead teacher at a state Pre-K program.
- Of the two-thirds of lead teachers that do have a Bachelor's Degree, less than half of them have Pre-K – Grade 2 certification, which is required within 7 years of becoming a lead teacher at a state Pre-K program.

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- Current teacher certification pathways are designed for recent high school graduates or typical full time undergraduates. They do not provide the supports needed for educators currently working in the field.
- To increase the number of Pre-K – 2 certified teachers in Rhode Island, RIDE will develop two new pathways to certification: a two-year Bachelor’s Degree certification pathway for teachers with an Associate’s Degree and a Post-Baccalaureate certification pathway for teachers with a Bachelor’s Degree. Both pathways will be built to be responsive to the incumbent workforce of lead and assistant teachers that must retain their employment while matriculating through higher education programs. RIDE is offering a \$5000 planning grant to help IHE’s develop these pathway programs.
- The IHE’s planning grant proposals will serve as applications for a larger \$125,000 “Design Grant” that RIDE will give to a single awardee to support the implementation, design, PREP-RI approval process, and recruitment for the proposed pathways, to be executable no later than the Fall of 2023.
- URI and RIC, in collaboration with CCRI, have received the \$5,000 planning grant.
- RIDE hopes to award the larger design grant soon to allow maximum time to develop the pathways.
- If an IHE can design and develop its program this fall, submit an application for RIDE program approval by the end of January 2022, and implement the program by fall 2022, there might be extra funding available to support the first cohort of students.
- Email any questions you have to RIDE.

## **HEAD START IN RHODE ISLAND**

Mary Varr and Catherine Green discussed Head Start in Rhode Island. (See slides). Key comments and questions included:

- All Head Start organizations in the state also operate RI Pre-K classrooms.
- By joining with the state Pre-K program, Head Start is able to offer increased hours and more comprehensive services to a broader range of children. Head Start programs include family workers, nurses, dietitians, and family engagement specialists.
- Head Start is not just for children living in poverty. It is also for children with increased needs, such as those with IEPs.
- The regional priorities for the Head Start Collaboration Office include a focus on providing health services to children experiencing homelessness (McKinney-Vento eligible children) and differently abled children, increasing parent and family engagement, and supporting military families.

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- Head Start programs try to work with other local child care programs. If your program has questions or needs support, reach out to your local Head Start because Head Start has access to a variety of additional supports, which they are happy to share. The goal is to increase access to high quality programs for every young child in the state. By creating a cohort of local and Head Start programs working together, we can offer all children a comprehensive six-hour early childhood education program.

## **PROVIDENCE PUBLIC SCHOOLS PRE-K EXPANSION UPDATE**

Susan Chin and DeAnna Cotoia updated the Council on the Providence Public School Pre-K Expansion. (See slides). The following comments and questions were made:

- It is the Providence Public School District's priority to support its youngest children and their families. The school district looks forward to collaborating with community agencies, higher education and governmental entities.
- The turnaround plan for Providence is a conscientious approach to change created with recommendations from the community and led by community design teams.
- Information on the city's turnaround plan can be found at [www.4pvdkids.com](http://www.4pvdkids.com)
- The programmatic areas of focus in the city's turnaround plan connect to the three pillars. Increasing the number of high quality preschool seats and increasing the number of general education Pre-K classrooms connect to the Excellence in Learning pillar. Increasing professional development opportunities with an early learning and Pre-K focus connects to the World Class Talent pillar. Increasing family and community engagement opportunities and partnerships and maintaining a whole child/whole family perspective to expansion connect with the Engaged Communities pillar.
- Long-term sustainable initiatives include shifting the majority of the Providence Public School Pre-K students to high quality general education classrooms and thinking about the Early Learning Center as a hub to ensure that every child is receiving their education in a least restrictive high quality environment.
- Q: With respect to the expansion goals of Providence preschool classrooms, are you considering collaborating with community partners?  
A: Yes, we are looking for stakeholder input on how to provide a high quality early childhood education for children in all settings in the city. RIDE is helping Providence to build out its preschool program through partnerships with community-based organizations.

## **ANNOUNCEMENTS**

### **RI Pre-K Lottery**

- In the upcoming school year, RIDE is piloting new models for state Pre-K classrooms.

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- RIDE loves to partner with LEAs and with Head Start to provide a better socio economic mix in the classrooms.
- RIDE's goal is to integrate and embed RI state Pre-K classrooms in other key systems, such as child care programs, Head Start organizations and public schools. By utilizing other sources of funding, e.g., money from CCAP, Head Start and the PDG Birth to 5 grant, RIDE is reducing the costs of running state Pre-K program, which will be important once the current federal funding stream ends.
- RIDE is using PDG funds to increase social media and broadcast marketing for the RI Pre-K lottery.
- Spread the word about the state Pre-K program so we can increase enrollment and make sure every seat is full.

## **Other from Community**

- Catherine Green will be on maternity leave starting in August. Nicole Chiello and Hannah Hansen can support anything related to the Head Start Collaboration Office.
- The T.E.A.C.H. Early Childhood program is now available for students pursuing early childhood degrees at URI.

## **PUBLIC COMMENT**

Comments and questions from the public included:

- COMMENT: Please help promote that Emergency Housing Assistance is available for families experiencing financial hardships. For tenants, RentReliefRI is available. Starting in August, the Homeowners Assistance Fund is available for mortgage help. Both programs are with RI Housing.
- Q: Is there a concern regarding family child care providers surrendering their licenses/reduced availability of family child care?  
A: We will research this question and provide an answer later.