

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

Tuesday, November 12, 2019 9:00 a.m.-11:00 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
- Overview of the Draft Plan Development Process
- Stakeholder Feedback to Date
- ELC Member Feedback on the Draft Goals and Strategy Areas
- Wrap-up and Next Steps

### **KEY POINTS**

Key discussion points from the meeting are summarized below:

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

Elizabeth Burke Bryant welcomed the Council. (See slides). The following comment was made:

- This meeting will provide Early Learning Council members with an opportunity to provide input on the draft of the Prenatal-5 System Action Plan that is being developed through the PDG B-5 grant. There will be other opportunities later.

#### **OVERVIEW OF THE DRAFT PLAN DEVELOPMENT PROCESS**

Caitlin Molina, Sam Saltz and Kathi Gillaspay presented an overview of the draft plan development process. (See slides.) The following comments were made:

- This development process prioritizes collaboration and coordination among ECE programs and agencies and the various strategic plans that already exist within the state. The Prenatal-5 System Action Plan will be a synthesis of the results of the needs assessments and all the other strategic plans in the state.
- Through the facilities, workforce and family needs assessments, DHS identified five key focal areas for the Prenatal-5 System Action Plan, which we will review at today's meeting.
- This is an iterative process with consensus as the goal.
- The Core Design Team included representatives from several state agencies as well as multiple subdivisions within those agencies, including representatives from Medicaid, Early Intervention, family home visiting, prenatal and early childhood health, preschool special education and curriculum and instruction.

#### **STAKEHOLDER FEEDBACK TO DATE**

Tara Adam explained stakeholder feedback to date on the draft focal areas and goals for the Prenatal-5. (See slides). Comments included the following:

- DHS distributed a stakeholder feedback form to collect feedback on the draft core components of the strategic plan. There were 26 responses to that form.
- There was strong alignment between the draft vision statement and stakeholder values.

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- By focal area, the proposed goals were rated in four areas:
  - Impact
    - How likely is it that achieving the goal will support improved outcomes for children?
  - Effort
    - How much time, energy, and resources will it take to implement the goals across multiple levels?
  - Urgency
    - How immediate is the need to address the various goals?
  - Importance
    - How critical are the goals to achieving the vision of the strategic plan?

## **ELC MEMBER FEEDBACK ON THE DRAFT GOALS & STRATEGY AREAS**

### **Focal Area 1: Prenatal – 5 System Governance Structure and Sustainability**

- At this point, it is hard to see how increased efficiency would look because the draft executive summary does not contain strategies or the current governance structure.
- In addition to state agencies involved with early childhood education, the governance structure must include representation from the whole early childhood system, including parents and health providers.
- We must align coordinating systems and share information between agencies and systems. If we better delineate the roles and responsibilities of each group, we can reduce the number of redundant meetings.
- The new governance structure must leverage existing councils, systems and structures, including the Child Care Commission, the Early Learning Council and the Children’s Cabinet.
- Everyone needs to know which agencies have decision-making power and which agencies are advisory. The governance structure should include clarified roles and decision-making powers so all agencies and community stakeholders understand their purpose.
- Providers must still be at the table.
- We must involve families and parents in a thoughtful way.
- We must define “equitable access” for diverse families.
- We must coordinate different types of data (child, workforce, program) across programs and agencies to make sure it is useful for everyone and informs decisions at both the state and program level. Additionally, programs should be able to input data once and have it apply across agencies.

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### **Focal Area 2: Prenatal – 5 System Workforce and Professional Development**

- We should offer loan forgiveness for people who stay in the early childhood field.
- We must create multiple pathways that lead to growth and increased compensation.
- Career pathways can include a hybrid of both the Workforce Knowledge and Competencies and higher education coursework.
- Professional development should coordinate with the career pathways so the WKC, higher education credits and professional development are all stackable.
- We should increase advocacy to create an awareness of the importance of the early childhood education field and the need to protect the mental health of providers.
- Change Goal 2.3 from “implement” to “build on and expand.” We must build on what we have and not start over and this new wording would reflect that.
- We should investigate options for awarding college credit for hours worked and coaching time so it is not just classroom based. Additionally, advanced coursework should have competencies interwoven into implementation of skills. This would make college more “real.”
- We must help families know what to ask for when researching early childhood programs. Higher education alone is not enough. Families need to look in the classroom to see what is actually happening.
- More money is needed for workforce compensation. Money from parents and DHS rates is not sufficient.
- We must ensure that teachers are coming out of higher education programs ready to work in the classroom. They must be trained to meet the needs of all children.

### **Focal Area 3: Prenatal – 5 Family-Centered Systems**

- We must make families aware of the importance of high-quality child care and we must build sufficient capacity so that every family has access to high quality child care. We cannot connect families to something that does not exist.
- We must support family advocacy to help establish more services and better access to high quality programs.
- Families must receive messaging about the BrightStars framework and licensing so they can truly understand the rating system and the difference between trivial and significant non-compliance issues.

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- We must engage more families prenatally.

### **Focal Area 4: Expansion and Sustainability of High-Quality Prenatal – 5 Programs**

- We must pay attention to and provide resources for all parts of the system Birth – 5. We might need more resources for the youngest children.
- Attention and resources are needed to maintain staffing for Birth to 3 programs and non-Pre-K preschools, particularly as Pre-K expands. Childcare needs more money to attract and retain qualified staff through rates and compensation strategies for the workforce.
- We need to have a community-wide conversation about the “math” and economics of early care and education so we can inform people of financial challenges facing programs that are working to achieve and maintain high-quality standards, but also identify and try out solutions. Programs need enough operating revenue to achieve high quality.
- We need more advocacy to harness the power of unions, collective bargaining, and the pressure felt by businesses to find quality care for employees. These groups could support more public funding for early childhood care and education.
- We must make the public aware of the need for high quality childcare and the positive impact higher quality has on children.
- We must determine how to measure progress across the strategic plan goals.

### **Focal Area 5: Coordination and Transitions Between Prenatal – 5 Programs and from Prenatal – 5 Programs into Kindergarten**

- The goals for the strategic plan are comprehensive, but we need to make sure all the right people are at the table, especially at coordination of care meetings.
- When financial supports, such as grants, end, we need a clear plan for how to sustain the improvements to the early childhood care and education system.
- The work to coordinate and collaborate during transitions falls primarily on the early childhood education workforce. We must distribute this responsibility for coordination of care more equitably.

## **WRAP-UP AND NEXT STEPS**

Leanne Barrett explained that the Rhode Island Early Learning Council Comprehensive Advisory Plan and Recommendations 2016-2020 contains many goals and strategies that can inform and be leveraged for the state’s Prenatal-5 System Action Plan. Sam Saltz explained the next steps in this process (See slides). Comments included:

- Please send additional written feedback to Sam at [Sam.Saltz@dhs.ri.gov](mailto:Sam.Saltz@dhs.ri.gov).

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- DHS will conduct similar feedback sessions with families, including in-person sessions and a survey. DHS and AnLar will integrate all feedback into the Prenatal-5 System Action Plan. There will be an update on the plan at the next Early Learning Council meeting and DHS will submit the final strategic plan at the end of February as a deliverable for the PDG B-5 grant.
- DHS is compiling a complete needs assessment report that synthesizes of all the individual needs assessments. That report will be released publically by the end of December.
- Rhode Island submitted a grant application for the next round of PDG B-5 funding. The next round of PDG B-5 grants will be announced by ACF before the end of 2019. If Rhode Island's grant is successful, initial funding will be announced by December 31<sup>st</sup>. It will take time to reach the state though.
- DHS continues to work with Professor Ken Wong at Brown University to analyze funding streams for Pre-K and B-5. The next iteration of the Funding Stream Analysis will include a deeper dive into cost modeling. That analysis will be complete by the end of December and will be shared with the community.
- COMMENT: We need to identify a tax revenue strategy that can be used specifically for Birth to 5 programs, including Pre-K. To identify the scope of that strategy we need to determine the cost to operate both 1 star programs and 5 star programs, including what amount of funding programs need to retain highly qualified staff.