

Rhode Island Early Learning Council Meeting

Wednesday, March 22, 2017 10:00 a.m.-1:00 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
- Child Care/Early Learning Program Licensing
- Improving Access to Early Learning Programs for Young Children Experiencing Homelessness
- Policy and Program Updates
- Infant and Early Childhood Mental Health
- 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 welcomed the committee and made the following opening remarks:

- In December 2015 the federal law around school district accountability was reauthorized in the Every Student Succeeds Act ("ESSA").
- The new administration has rescinded the federal regulations related to accountability that were intended to guide states in implementing ESSA. As a result, the law now stands on its own without being further guided by federal regulations, which allows states more flexibility in implementation.
- The metrics of Rhode Island's ESSA Plan will go beyond the traditional standardized tests and graduation rates. We will also track metrics such as chronic absenteeism, suspension rates, student participation in advanced coursework and student attainment of industry credentials.
- Only part of ESSA is related to metrics. ESSA also requires states to provide supports for high quality teaching and learning for teachers and students.
- In addition to the federal requirements, the RI ESSA Plan will include the Governor's challenge to increase the percentage of 3rd graders reading proficiently to 75% by 2025. The RI ESSA Plan will establish a progression starting from birth that will provide the structure, supports and processes needed to attain the Governor's 3rd grade reading goal. The plan will require collaboration and cooperation among families, communities, early learning services and grade level providers.
- State legislation was just passed for additional supports for the ESSA work specifically related to curriculum coherence, coherence of professional development and investment in leadership at the building, district and state levels.
- The first round of stakeholder feedback is complete. The March 28th K through 12 Council meeting will start drafting the RI ESSA plan. There will be another round of stakeholder feedback

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once there is more content and structure to the plan. The goal is to get a complete draft of the ESSA document by early June so it can be reviewed, revised and submitted by September.

- The Children's Cabinet will begin a very exhaustive focus on the 3rd grade reading plan. They will create and execute a project plan and will track milestones.

Elizabeth Burke Bryant commended the Council on its feedback for the RI ESSA Plan, which was summarized in the handout, Rhode Island Early Learning Council Recommendations Related to Early Learning for the State's Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) Plan. RIDE will conduct additional outreach efforts around the state for further input.

Trista Piccola, the new director of DCYF, introduced herself to the Council. The following comments were made:

- The challenges faced throughout in child welfare are the same in every jurisdiction, including economic instability, harmful parenting practices, substance abuse and cognitive issues. However, the cultural context, including the nature of relationships, resources and the political environment, changes according to region. Nevertheless, all of the challenges in RI are solvable.
- Director Piccola has conducted forums with DCYF staff to promote open and honest conversations.
- There are 3 pillars of success for the department:
 - Workforce
 - Having a strong, stable and competent workforce is important. To achieve this, DCYF must examine how it hires and selects people into the job, the types of career opportunities and retention activities it offers and its succession planning.
 - Data and Program integrity
 - DCYF needs to understand what it is doing both internally and in the community and if it is making a difference for the families and children it is serving.
 - Healthy Organization
 - This pillar involves discussions of how DCYF employees talk to each other and deal with the stresses of the job, as well as DCYF's communications with community and agency partners.
- The messaging from DCYF might look different going forward with a focus on ensuring that DCYF serves all the families and children that need to be served as opposed to focusing on specific numbers.
- Education for the children in DCYF care is particularly important, including access to high-quality early learning programs. DCYF needs to make sure these children are stabilized early and that they do not lose any academic progress as they move through the system.

CHILD CARE/EARLY LEARNING PROGRAM LICENSING

Laura Kiesler, Stefanie Spano and Veronica Davis spoke about DCYF licensing regulations. (See slides.) The following comments and questions were made:

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- There are three buckets for the Child Care Licensing process:
 - Licensing
 - This includes the issuing of the license and ongoing renewals.
 - DCYF has worked hard to streamline the process and to make it more customer focused and friendly.
 - The goal is to spend more time in programs instead of on paperwork.
 - Monitoring
 - Monitoring improves quality.
 - DCYF will employ differential monitoring, which will involve spending more time in programs that have challenges meeting the licensing requirements and less time in programs easily satisfying the licensing requirements.
 - Enforcement
 - DCYF is constantly looking at ways to better enforce regulations.
 - Licensing actions should be an appropriate response to the particular violation.
 - Federal requirements will make monitoring visits and actions more transparent for families who will be able to see information online.
 - DCYF is working with DHS to improve systems.
- DCYF collected feedback during the regulation revision process through several different means, including online surveys and listening tours.
- The revisions attempt to align the DCYF regulations with the BrightStars standards and CECE standards. Alignment means a progression and does not mean that all the requirements are the same.
- Programs have expressed significant challenges in meeting certain licensing requirements, even while they are still acting in the best interests of the children. In those circumstances, the revised regulations offer different options for achieving regulatory compliance. These options do not alter the alignment of the regulations to the BrightStars and CECE standards. Programs can still strive for the higher standards, but the revised DCYF regulations will allow them to work on quality improvements without risking licensing compliance. An example of this is in the Education Coordinator credential requirements, which only an extremely small pool of people have achieved. Programs are having trouble finding qualified people for those positions and, as a result, many risk their licensing status. While maintaining the same level of quality, DCYF will now look at the person performing the functions of an Education Coordinator and will consider the person's experience as well as the person's plan for eventually achieving the additional academic credentials. In this manner, in their effort to reach higher quality, programs will have more credential options for the Education Coordinator position, all of which are concrete and measurable. Programs still must have a qualified Education Coordinator, or they will be on probation, there are just more pathways to obtain that requirement.
- Under the Administrative Procedures Act, by the end of 2018, every regulation in Rhode Island must be updated to a new format that removes procedural language and improves clarity. By

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combining the Child Care and School Age regulations, DCYF has complied with these requirements by providing a single streamlined book of regulations.

- The revised DCYF regulations put more thought into best practices for programs and the needs of businesses, children, and families.
- Training will be required when the new regulations are rolled out. DCYF will ensure training and informational opportunities for providers.
- After final revisions are incorporated, DCYF will submit the regulations to the ORR, which will check compliance with the APA and will review the required cost-benefit analysis. Following that review, the 30 day formal public comment period will begin with a public hearing, followed by promulgation
- The process for the Family Child Care Home regulations will be quicker.
- Q: Where is the ORR located and who is the head of it?
A: The Office of Regulatory Reform is housed within the Department of Administration and Erik Godwin is the director. That office is leading the effort to update all of the state's regulations and policies to meet the requirements of the APA.
- Q: What are examples of the challenges DCYF encountered when aligning the regulations with BrightStars and CECE standards?
A: The education coordinator credentials mentioned earlier are one example as well as the ratio for the older toddler group. The revised regulations add age groups into the regulations to allow flexibility for transitions. Although these added age groups are different than in the BrightStars standards, it follows a progression because programs can be in compliance while working towards the BrightStars ratio requirements.
- COMMENT: The changes to the education coordinator requirements should be put in the guidance document.
- Q: Head Start regulations require Head Start programs to enroll eligible children regardless of immunization documentation, but DCYF licensing regulations require immunization prior to enrollment. In those cases, Head Start programs must make a choice whether to be in noncompliance with the state DCYF regulations or the federal Head Start regulations. What should Head Start programs do?
A: DCYF can address this on an individual basis because there are mechanisms built into the revised regulations to deal with these situations.
- For further questions, email: Laura.Kiesler@dcyf.ri.gov or Veronica.Davis@dcyf.ri.gov

QUESTIONS FROM THE PUBLIC

- Q: When will the guidance document be available for review?

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A: The guidance document will be available after the regulations are sent to the ORR. Because the guidance document will include the regulations it cannot be created until they are done. It will also include all additional information such as procedures and resources. That additional information was removed from the regulations themselves as part of the APA process. Since it does not need to be promulgated, the guidance document is a living document that can be revised as needed in response to requests for clarification.

- Q: Does removing the credential requirements for education coordinators diminish quality?
A: No. The credentials are not entirely removed. Instead, the regulations have created additional pathways for programs to qualified hire education coordinators. There are now 6 ways to satisfy the education coordinator requirement. Programs are still encouraged to strive towards the higher requirements in order to improve quality under the BrightStars standards.

IMPROVING ACCESS TO EARLY LEARNING PROGRAMS FOR YOUNG CHILDREN EXPERIENCING HOMELESSNESS

Leanne Barrett introduced the topic by explaining that young children experiencing homelessness has been a priority population for the Early Learning Council and that the federal government has released new reports and resources to help states improve access to early learning programs for young children who are homeless. (See slides.) The different departments spoke individually on their efforts to support homeless families.

RIDE

Eileen Botelho discussed RIDE's efforts. Comments and questions included:

- The McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act, as amended by ESSA, took effect on October 1, 2016.
- The McKinney-Vento Act defines homelessness as lacking a fixed, adequate and permanent nighttime location. This definition includes doubling up with another family, which is different than the HUD definition.
- The federal funding for these mandates is minimal with only 4 LEAs receiving grants for approximately \$40,000 each.
- There are local people in each district and charter school that act as homelessness liaisons. These are a dedicated group of people ensuring that homeless students are able to access their rights.
- The goal is to keep displaced students in their school of origin. A school of origin is the school a child was last enrolled in when they were permanently housed and that definition was amended to include public preschools. As long as it is in the best interests of the child, a child stays enrolled in his or her school of origin for the duration of the homelessness and until the end of academic year if permanent housing is found mid-year.

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- In order to ensure continued enrollment in a child's school of origin, transportation must be provided by the district of the school of origin or shared with the district in which the child is living. Transportation must be provided across district or state lines.
- Under ESSA, homeless children must be afforded access to public preschool programs operated by LEAs?
- Q: Does transportation have to be provided for children that would not otherwise receive transportation from the district?
A: Transportation must be provided to homeless public preschool children, even if the district does not typically provide transportation for preschoolers. Transportation does not mean a bus. It could mean that parents receive a gas card or high school students receive a RIPTA pass.
- Q: Are Head Start programs included under the McKinney-Vento Act?
A: Only Head Start programs that receive LEA funding or for which the LEA is the grant recipient. However, Title I districts can buy slots for students at a Head Start program and that program would then be included under the McKinney-Vento Act.
- Q: What do families need to provide to show that they are homeless?
A: They do not need to provide anything. Liaisons are trained to understand that they cannot ask for any documentation when a family comes to register.

DOH

Stacy Aguiar discussed DOH's efforts. Comments and questions included:

- Family Home Visiting matches parents with trained professionals. Homeless families are prioritized for family visiting services.
- DOH contracts with 12 local implementing agencies to provide services across the state.
- Families can be referred in multiple ways:
 - By providers
 - Self-referred
 - By the Health Department
 - By texting "baby" to 44999
- **First Connections** provides short term family home visiting consisting of 1-3 visits.
- **Nurse-Family Partnership** provides long term family home visiting that is more clinically based because the family visitors are all registered nurses.
- **Healthy Families Rhode Island** provides long term family home visiting that focuses on preventing child abuse.
- **Parents as Teachers** provides long term family home visiting that is focused on school readiness.

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- All of these family home visiting programs help families with any needs they have and can link families with the appropriate services.
- There are 7 teams across the state that are community focused and help with care coordination for families.
- These visits can occur anywhere and are not required to occur in the home.
- Q: How many families are using these services?
A: There are about 1000 participants each year, but there are still some open slots.
- Q: Is family home visiting funded through the Affordable Care Act?
A: Yes, and DOH will have to find an alternative funding stream if federal funding ends, but there is sufficient funding for the next 2 years.
- COMMENT: Head Start and Early Head Start have home visiting programs too.
- Q: Do children that move from a domestic violence shelter to transition housing still qualify?
A: The family home visiting program follows the family wherever they are located and the program itself is not limited to homeless families.
- Q: Are families involved in family home visiting prioritized for housing?
A: Not specifically, but their family home visitor can help link them with services.
- COMMENT: RIDE collaborated with DOH on the alignment of the Parent as Teachers curriculum to the RIELDS so it is contextualized for Rhode Island. The alignment document is on the RIDE website.

DHS

Karen Beese discussed DHS's efforts. Comments and questions included:

- The CCDBG reauthorization of 2014 has specific requirements for families experiencing homelessness, including a grace period for the enrollment of homeless children without immunization documentation.
- In September 2016, the CCDBG Final Rule was further clarified. The definition of "homeless" is now in alignment with the McKinney-Vento Act. This is important because 75% of the homeless students in schools are doubling up, which was not included in the previous HUD definition of "homeless." Additionally, homeless children will now receive priority for services, including, where appropriate, the waiving of copays or providing an uninterrupted 12 month eligibility period.
- Q: Is there a way to track how many homeless children are being served by DHS?

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A: Yes, we have to report that number to our federal partners. Although we already track those children, DHS will continue to work on improving collaboration both within the department and across the state in an effort to collect more consistent and accurate data points.

HEAD START

Aimee Mitchell discussed the RI Head Start Association's efforts. Comments and questions included:

- There are three different models of Head Start:
 - Home Visiting Head Start and Early Head Start
 - Center Based Head Start and Early Head Start
 - Child Care Partnership Head Start and Early Head Start
 - This is with community child care partner agencies where Head Start assists these providers in meeting the Head Start standards.
- Homelessness provides automatic eligibility for Head Start. Head Start maintains connections at all the homeless shelters to ensure that homeless children are enrolled.
- The Head Start definition of "homeless" includes doubling up.
- Some programs, like Children's Friend, have emergency assistance funds to help put families up in hotels temporarily.
- Through the Early Head Start-Child Care Partnership, Head Start has the ability to pay a family's subsidy when eligibility is disrupted by the loss of a job.
- Transportation to Head Start is provided within the urban core and requirements, such as 5 day attendance, can be changed if it is in the best interest of the homeless family.
- Q: On the slide, how did you calculate 100 kids?
A: It is the total number of children enrolled statewide. That number fluctuates and it is peaking now. Currently, Children's Friend enrolls 35 homeless children out of 980 total children.

POLICY AND PROGRAM UPDATES

The different state agencies spoke individually about their policy and program updates. (See slides.)

RIDE

Allison Comport discussed RIDE's policy and program updates. She also distributed a handout on the State Pre-K program that can be found at: <http://www.earlylearningri.org/sites/default/files/site-content/docs/3.22.17%20State%20Pre-K%20Update%202017.pdf>

- The lottery for the 2017-2018 school year will be opening at the end of April or beginning of May.
- Community demographics determine the make-up of State Pre-K classrooms, which mirror the communities in which they are located.

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- State Pre-K grantees are diverse, including public schools, Head Start agencies, and community based agencies. The RFP for potential grantees is a competitive process. It is currently open for the next school year and applications are due March 31st.
- There are high standards of quality required for grantees. They must meet the CECE standards by the end of the school year, which gives them time to receive intensive professional development and technical assistance. There are also additional expectations, such as attendance and comprehensive service requirements.
- There will be 4 additional classrooms next year for a total of 60. Those classrooms will serve 1080 children.
- The State Pre-K program can be used to pilot policies eventually intended for all community programs. For example, RIDE is leveraging federal State Pre-K dollars to create guidance and professional development around the implementation of comprehensive service systems. RIDE is working with DOH to build an electronic referral and tracking system that, ultimately, will allow all community based programs to see the outcome of their referrals.
- State Pre-K programs are coordinating efforts with Head Start programs to ensure that all eligible families are receiving services and all slots are filled.
- RIDE is implementing new professional development offerings including a Pre-K to K standards alignment course that covers RIELDS, Common Core and NGSS science standards. There is also an expedited pathway for RIELDS certification for people with a state teaching certificate.

RIC and CCRI

Leslie Sevey and Carol Patnaude discussed RIC's and CCRI's policy and program updates.

- The colleges are continuing to work to increase the number of courses articulated between RIC and CCRI.
- The transfer plan has been approved by the Board of Education.
- CCRI students are encouraged to take Math 143 at RIC.
- Every year, new agreements are signed between institutions at the annual Articulation Meeting.
- Once the new Birth-3 concentration is approved at RIC, CCRI and RIC will develop articulation for that coursework.

RI KIDS COUNT

Leanne Barrett discussed KIDS COUNT's policy and program updates.

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- The Governor's budget includes a \$390,000 increase in state funding for Head Start, which has been level funded for years. The state is adjusting its funding level so it is more in line with the federal funding for Head Start. 80% of Head Start teachers have a BA.
- On the FY18 Governor's Budget and Early Learning slide, interested parties can testify regarding the first 4 items at the DHS budget hearing and the last 2 items at the RIDE budget hearing.
- The Early Childhood Innovation Fund legislation would establish a new fund source to support programs that help increase school readiness. It would be a competitive grant. See Caitlin Molina for more information about the legislation.

DHS

Marti Rosenberg and Annette Duranso discussed DHS's policy and program updates.

- DHS is pursuing the UHIP work in tight, coordinated phases.
- Teams are working on both the customer and worker portals and are addressing the needs of all groups interacting with those portals, including but not limited to SNAP, RI Works, Medicare, and SSP. Each team has a directive to engage community members.
- There is a UHIP community partner workgroup that is identifying small workable issues to address incrementally.
- Please tell DHS what is wrong and put in the subject line "Early Learning Council":
Marti.Rosenberg@ohic.ri.gov
- Director Eric Beane has increased the size of the DHS team, including a new IT leader, Ken Brindamour, who is leading the work with Deloitte, Celia Blue, and Yvette Mendez with employee engagement. There are 25 new permanent slots, 19 temporary slots and 75 people hired short term at Healthsource RI to eliminate the health backlog.
- DHS is also improving state policies and procedures. Small work teams are working on the rules and regulations. For example, notices may take a new form going forward, by utilizing texts, emails and robocalls.
- The lack of communication with and training of community partners is a serious problem that DHS is working to address.
- There is a touchstone meeting every day to hold teams accountable for daily milestones. Weekly focus groups are testing the system. Monthly center based provider meetings offer additional communication and testing opportunities.
- Big changes and improvements will be implemented in April.

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- Updates and information on UHIP changes and improvements will be shared through the Early Learning Council's eNews.
- Direct inquiries to: Annette.Duranso@dhs.ri.gov.
- A PDF of Director Eric Beane's report can be found at: <http://www.transparency.ri.gov/uhip/documents/assessments/UHIP%2030-day%20assessment.pdf>

INFANT AND EARLY CHILDHOOD MENTAL HEALTH

Susan Dickstein discussed infant and early childhood mental health. (See slides.) The following comments and questions were made:

- The Governor's 3rd grade reading initiative starts with the babies of today and ties in with the homelessness discussion as well since ensuring that babies learn to regulate emotions even in stressful situations is critical to brain development and, ultimately, school readiness.
- We must help front line providers become confident and competent in supporting babies and their families. The Rhode Island Association for Infant Mental Health's competency guidelines and Endorsement system a) aligns infant/early childhood mental health workforce standards across programs, agencies, systems; b) offers a framework for continuous growth and development of professionals in the infant/toddler workforce; and c) serves to inform the development of high quality systemic training and reflective practice opportunities. You can get additional information on RIAIMH's website (www.riaimh.org).
- Incredible Years is an evidence based program for children and educators that is delivered in schools, mental health centers, pediatric practices, and other community settings serving high risk children and families. If you have questions about Incredible Years, contact [Stephanie Shepard@brown.edu](mailto:Stephanie.Shepard@brown.edu).
- The SUCCESS program is a free service that pairs early learning programs with Early Childhood Mental Health Consultants to support the social, emotional, and behavioral health needs of identified children. For more information, go to <https://exceed.ri.gov/success/default.aspx>
- Rhode Island has a new collaborative effort, the Safe and Secure Baby Court.
- Stable and consistent spaces and people help babies feel more secure in an unpredictable world.

PUBLIC COMMENT

There were no additional comments or questions from the public.

UPCOMING EVENTS AND MEETINGS

The next Early Learning Council meeting is June 28, 2017, 10:00 a.m. to 1:00 p.m. at Save the Bay.